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Dreams of Eco-Dictatorship: Senegalese Democracy in the Age of Environmental Crisis

Ashley M. Fent

Introduction

In academic literature and political thought, Senegal is often heralded as being “exceptional” in terms of its democratic style of governance.¹ Imagine the surprise, then, of encountering Senegalese environmentalists who, though often taking advantage of the democratic process to protest state infringements on land and forest resources, ironically praised the stricter codes and stronger regulations of forestry under the authoritarian government of The Gambia.² During one interview, an official in the Senegalese Ministry of the Environment referenced then-President of The Gambia Yahya Jammeh³ with a mixture of contempt and admiration, wistfully noting the dictator’s ability to enact stronger environmental protection there than is possible in Senegal.⁴ Meanwhile, he said, the forests of Casamance had been cut and the wood taken across the border to The Gambia, where it was then sold to the Chinese in exchange for motorcycles.⁵ According to the argument made by this official, other environmentalists, and many villagers in the Casamance region of Senegal, the differential political conditions in the two neighboring countries allowed The Gambia to continue earning revenues from the sale of timber—but from trees felled in Casamance’s forests.

These two related discourses—that dictatorship allows for greater environmental protection, and that more powerful countries can displace environmentally destructive activities to less powerful or less stable regions—circulate not only among discouraged environmentalists, however. In academic literature, they can be found in theorizations of eco-authoritarianism and the ecological shadow, respectively. Through an examination of these discourses in first the academic literature and then the popular discourse in Senegal, this article explores how dreams of an eco-dictatorship have arisen out of a context of declining faith in liberal democracy and liberal capitalism to cope with environmental crisis.

Eco-Authoritarianism

In the 1970s, observations of mounting environmental challenges led some to doubt the efficacy of Western liberal democracy in forcing individuals to sacrifice personal liberties to avoid over-consumption of scarce resources. This generated proposals for an eco-authoritarian alternative, in which individual protests and liberties could be sidestepped in favor of more aggressive action for environmental protection. The valorization of authoritarianism as a better alternative faded in the 1980s, even among the model's strongest proponents, with the collapse of Communist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe and the realization that these authoritarian regimes had atrocious environmental records.⁶ However, eco-authoritarianism has not entirely disappeared within the academic literature, and has gained new traction due to concerns about climate change.

Among those most strongly advocating for the eco-authoritarian solution to global climate challenges, David Shearman has suggested that the interlinked forces of the market economy and liberal democracy, both based on the cornerstone of individual freedom, have been environmentally destructive; they cannot, he argues, be capable of solving the problems they themselves have created.⁷ Similarly, in an interview with *The Guardian*, James Lovelock, the scientist known for his Gaia hypothesis⁸, called for more authoritarianism and less egalitarianism, suggesting that democracy be put on hold temporarily to deal with climate change.⁹

While not advocating the eco-authoritarian option, Wainwright and Mann explain that “if climate science is even half-right in its forecasts, the liberal model of democracy—even in its idealized Rawlsian or Habermasian formulations—is at best too slow, at worst a devastating distraction.”¹⁰ They identify four possible frameworks of climate change governance, including what they term “Climate Mao”—an anticapitalist hegemon that could effectively compete with the market-based model that currently dominated international climate change policy¹¹. They state that “even today, when the Chinese state invokes its full regulatory authority, it can achieve political feats unimaginable in liberal democracy,” including massive feats of re-engineering the environment, as occurred prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.¹² But, as

they suggest, this model can only emerge from Asia, because only there that it could become a hegemonic and planetary rival to current mitigation paradigms.

In particular, China's response to environmental degradation and climate change has compelled a reconsideration of the desirability and possibility of eco-authoritarianism.¹³ As Gilley states, "China's great advantage is its relatively strong institutions that could, if directed, manage the participatory process so as to ensure complementarities of top-down and bottom-up mechanisms, a widely-noted feature of successful democratic environmentalism. Thus China had a potential advantage over more democratic regimes with weak states, such as the Philippines or Thailand, as well as over more authoritarian regimes with weak states, such as Myanmar."¹⁴ This view of China as a potential model for an eco-authoritarian counterpoint to Western democracy is also informed by increasing recognition that forms of illiberal democracy and capitalism generated rapid economic growth in China and other countries in East and Southeast Asia.¹⁵ As Beeson suggests, "the prospects for an authoritarian response become more likely as the material base of existence becomes less capable of sustaining life, let alone the 'good life' upon which the legitimacy of democratic regimes hinges."¹⁶ Beeson and others thus take to an extreme conclusion the observation that Western liberal democracy and liberal capitalism have historically depended on a rampant exploitation of the earth's resources in a way that is unsustainable and unattainable for the rest of the world.¹⁷ Given that many countries no longer have the option of exploiting resources in such a way, suggests Beeson, "forms of 'good' authoritarianism, in which environmentally unsustainable behavior are simply forbidden, may become not only justifiable, but essential for the survival of humanity in anything approaching a civilised form."¹⁸ However, the use of strong states such as China as a basis for theorizations of the impending hegemony of the eco-authoritarian state leaves very little space for the theorization of what smaller and less powerful authoritarian governments would be able to accomplish.

While authoritarian regimes can be extremely detrimental to environmental protection, those that are committed to forest management or protection have often been able to effectively

mobilize military force against deforestation. One example of this is the marked distinction between the forested Dominican Republic and its heavily deforested neighbor, Haiti.¹⁹ Unlike the Duvalier regime in Haiti, the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo managed the country as his own private source of timber and revenues from the 1930s until his death in 1961; this led him to develop a certain degree of protection for forests, even as he ruthlessly and rapaciously exploited land, resources, and people.²⁰ Following Trujillo's assassination, and the marked decrease in forest cover between the beginning and end of his rule, the democratically-elected but eventually authoritarian-tending government of Joaquin Balaguer banned the cutting of trees, created forest reserves out of Trujillo's proto-reserves, and adopted aggressive forest protection measures that ultimately proved successful.²¹ Another example is Egyptian protected areas under the Mubarak regime, which were once heralded as successful models of environmental conservation but whose efficacy was eventually reversed due to intra-state conflicts among agencies and an inability to effectively establish relationships of trust and cooperation with Bedouin stakeholders.²²

Despite limited examples of successful environmental policy imposed by authoritarian regimes, empirical studies of environmental outcomes show that democracies are generally better than authoritarian regimes at coping with climate change and environmental crisis.²³ According to Fiorino, this is due to the political stability, institutions, and respect for law and participatory process in democratic governments.²⁴ Further, democratic societies benefit from the ability to generate environmental laws in a way that is participatory and effective.²⁵ Finally, studies have found a J-curve in administrative capacity, in which partially democratized societies are less effective than authoritarian regimes in developing institutions, while fully democratic societies are most effective; this argument could be extended to suggest similar results would hold for environmental protection capacity.²⁶ The inability for poor and partially democratized countries to resemble places like Finland overnight, however, lends credence to Beeson's claim that these countries may opt for authoritarianism, as it is a simple and more efficient mode of governing than managing the complex processes and institutions of democracy.²⁷

Eco-authoritarianism persists in spite of data to the contrary, largely because it is predicated not on the environmental records of actually existing authoritarian governments in the People's Republic of China or Singapore, but rather on a lack of faith in democracy and a belief that an idealized authoritarian government would be better suited to deal with environmental problems.²⁸ As Shahar argues, the effectiveness of the idealized authoritarian government would be blocked and constantly eroded by the need to employ repressive tactics against the populace. In other words, the environmental policy-making arm of the state would be consistently undermined by the "iron fist" of its repressive apparatus, and by its tendency to slip into despotism in order to maintain power.

Although empirical studies are important to analyze and, if necessary, debunk the perceived relationship between dictatorship and environmental protection, they do not engage with the ways this discourse persists in spite of the evidence and on the ground. In addition to occasional Western fantasies of authoritarian efficiency, based largely on the Chinese example, this discourse also circulates among some environmentalists in Senegal, responding to changing environmental conditions and constraints. Through this discourse, people in some circles lament the inefficiencies of Western democracy and liberal capitalism in coping with environmental crisis, in ways that parallel the fears among some scholars, environmentalists, and pundits that Western liberalism is in the process of unmaking itself through the resource consumption and individualism on which it has been based.

The Ecological Shadow Thesis

The "race to the bottom" model of environmental regulation suggests that as countries develop stricter environmental policies, environmentally destructive industries will relocate to areas with less stringent regulations and lower costs of production.²⁹ By Marxists, this is understood as extensification, in which capitalism requires geographical expansion in order to overcome its own limits and contradictions.³⁰ In less Marxian terms, this process has been conceptualized by Peter Dauvergne as an "ecological shadow," defined as the "environmental impact of one country's economy on resource management in another

country.³¹ A country's shadow ecology is the aggregate environmental impact on resources outside its territory of government practices." In the case described by Dauvergne, Japan has been able to successfully conserve its own resources by exploiting the resources of cash-poor Southeast Asian countries willing to allow extraction. Although the ecological shadow concept is in some ways too broad analytically, Dauvergne's study illustrates that in the process of developing national environmental regulations, states exert their authority not only over their own territories but also over the territories of other nation-states.³² By capitalizing on underdevelopment in some regions, and the lower price placed on environmental protection relative to the value of investments in these areas, wealthier states are able to conserve their national resources without sacrificing national economic activity.

In geographical terms, the ecological shadow is similar to the "ecological footprint" of an economy, or its "carrying capacity" appropriated from the global commons, is defined as "the aggregate area of land and water in various ecological categories that is claimed by participants in this economy to produce all the resources they consume, and to absorb all their wastes they generate on a continuous basis, using prevailing technology."³³ This formulation of appropriated carrying capacity encourages a view of natural resource consumption beyond the borders of the nation-state.

The ecological shadow thesis is a national-scale variation of spillover edge effect, which suggests that protection of certain environments has social and ecological ramifications on other places. Protection of certain areas, when effective in preventing exploitation, often requires the establishment of "sacrifice zones" elsewhere.³⁴ Sacrifice zones may occur via increased exploitation of buffer areas and edge effects, in which terrestrial reserves fail to protect wide-ranging species that can be exploited or hunted just outside the reserve boundaries; it may also occur in the form of pollution sinks and aggressive resource extraction in areas viewed as "disposable."³⁵

Beyond the explicit, intentional relocation of environmentally destructive practices to more impoverished areas, there are also cases in which different governmental styles and conservation frameworks create discrepancies in forest management

within transnational protected areas, suggesting that biodiversity conservation at the regional level may be thwarted by different national-level policies.³⁶ Carney et al. examines environmental change at the scale of a transnational region, in order to ascertain cross-border mangrove cover changes in Senegambia.³⁷ This encourages an examination of political ecology at a regional ecological scale rather than an adherence to the much-critiqued “territorial trap” that reifies the nation-state scale.³⁸

Background: Forest Conservation in Senegal and The Gambia

In their approaches to forestry, both Senegal and The Gambia followed moves toward decentralization in the 1990s, generally eschewing the “fortress conservation” model of biodiversity protection that has proliferated in East Africa and elsewhere.³⁹ In The Gambia, the focus in the 1990s was more on the *creation* of biodiversity via reforestation rather than its protection. Rather than expelling populations from their land, this model requires active participation and means of enticing people back to the land.⁴⁰ In 1991, the Gambian government adopted a natural resource management plan that formally instituted community forestry in place of the pre-existing “natural forest management” paradigm.⁴¹ Without directly changing extant laws, community forest management involved the signing of contracts called “community resource management agreements” between communities (defined variably as traditional groups, Village Development Committees, or organized groups of resource users) and the Gambian government.⁴²

As of 2005, and likely in responses to charges of masked coercion, the Community Forestry Implementing Guidelines published by the Gambian Forestry Department stressed that minimal external incentives will be employed, because “[e]xperience in The Gambia has shown that the heavy-handed use of incentives have caused more problems than they have solved by inducing paternalism, creating conflicts and devaluating resource management objectives.”⁴³ Nevertheless, the model of community forestry required that management plans developed by forest committees be approved by the Department of Forestry, and the Department of Forestry likewise monitors and oversees the community

forests.⁴⁴ These policies thus bore the legacy of British indirect rule and “decentralized despotism,” which, in relation to forest management, worked through local leaders to meet colonial conservation and extraction goals.⁴⁵

Senegal, drawing on French colonial models rather than British indirect rule, largely retained the nationalized forest model established by the French Civil Code in 1904, which divided forests into the classified domain, the protected domain, and the private domain, the latter of which were typically planted forests.⁴⁶ Until the 1990s, this model involved setting strict timber and charcoal quotas and issuing annual decrees that specified national production regions.⁴⁷ In 1993, Senegal passed a new forestry code to replace the 1974 forestry law, and in 1998, another new code transferred forest management and exploitation to rural councils (the elected local government in Rural Communities) in order to conform to the 1996 decentralization law that devolved authority to local communities.⁴⁸

Like historical formulations of indirect rule, attempts at participatory, decentralized management in the 1990s often did not lead to radical changes on the ground in either Senegal or The Gambia. In The Gambia, local customary officials—the Alkalo, or village founder/head, and the Seyfo, or District Chief—were elected by a minority of the population and remained in office for life, raising questions about accountability and representation of community interests.⁴⁹ Senegalese decentralization was also been accompanied by the recentralization of authority and the pressures on local leaders from outside the community, particularly outside of project areas that sought to demonstrate to donors the government’s commitment to participatory governance.⁵⁰

As existing studies have noted, forest products have contributed to the financing of the MFDC, through trade across the Gambian border as well as to Dakar.⁵¹ These trades have consisted primarily of hardwoods such as *ven* (*Pterocarpus erinaceus*), African mahogany or *cail-cédrat* (*Khaya senegalensis*), and teak (*Tectona grandis*), used in furniture production, but mangrove wood has also been involved in these trades as a source of charcoal and firewood.⁵² The more extremist faction of the MFDC, the *Front Sud*, split from the *Front Nord* following peace agreements in the 1990s; it has continued to engage in armed conflict, relying

on coordination from bases in Guinea-Bissau and, until recently, monetary and logistical support from Guinea-Bissau. This in part relied on cross-border kinship relations and illicit trades. The Gambia also supplied arms to the movement, but has in recent years come to distance itself and cooperate with the Senegalese government. The *Front Nord*, while not as active as the *Front Sud*, relies for financing on the trade of timber, charcoal, and fuelwood with The Gambia.⁵³

Discussion

Basic statistics on forest area, forest rents, and terrestrial protected areas in The Gambia and Senegal, between 1990 and 2012 (the available data range), are inconclusive in assessing the factual basis of claims that The Gambia has been more successful at forest conservation and has exploited Senegalese timber, specifically from the Casamance region, in order to continue earning revenues from forestry. Forest area statistics show that The Gambia experienced a 9.41 per cent increase in total forest area between 1990 and 2012; conversely, Senegal has experienced a 10.22 per cent decrease in forest area over the same period (see Figure 1). In terms of recorded forest rents, however, The Gambia experienced an 11.56 percent increase between 1990 and 2012, whereas Senegal experienced a decrease of 2.66 percent. These national level statistics are consistent with the claims made by those praising Gambian “iron fist” forestry and decrying the appropriation of Senegalese timber resources. However, there could be many additional natural and anthropogenic causes behind these results. Additionally, the reliability of the data is problematic, particularly in examining the statistics for The Gambia. For instance, according to these data, terrestrial protected areas jump from 1.53 per cent of Gambian land area in 1999 to 4.17 per cent the following year, with a drop back to 1.53 per cent by 2009.

Figure 1: Forest Rents, Terrestrial Protected Areas, and Forest Area, The Gambia and Senegal (1990-2012)

COUNTRY	VARIABLE	1990	1999	CHANGE 1990-1999	% CHANGE 1990-1999	2000	2009	CHANGE 2000-2009	% CHANGE 2000-2009	2012	CHANGE 1990-2012	% CHANGE 1990-2012
The Gambia	Forest rents (% of GDP)	4.67	1.63	-3.05	-65.31	1.75	4.53	2.79	159.43	5.21	0.54	11.56
Senegal	Forest rents (% of GDP)	2.63	2.29	-0.35	-13.31	2.31	2.45	0.14	6.06	2.56	-0.07	-2.66
The Gambia	Terrestrial protected areas (% of total land area)	1.68	1.53	-0.15	-8.93	4.17	1.53	-2.64	-63.31	4.83	3.15	1875
Senegal	Terrestrial protected areas (% of total land area)	25.18	24.07	-1.11	-4.41	25.19	24.09	-1.10	-4.37	24.76	-0.42	-1.67
The Gambia	Forest area (sq. km)	4420.00	4591.00	171.00	3.87	4610.00	4782.00	172.00	3.73	4836.00	416.00	9.41
Senegal	Forest area (sq. km)	93482.00	89432.00	-4050.00	-4.33	88982.00	85130.00	-3852.00	-4.33	83930.00	-9552.00	-10.22

Data retrieved from The World Bank DataBank: Forest rents (Estimates based on sources and methods described in “The Changing Wealth of Nations: Measuring Sustainable Development in the New Millennium,” World Bank, 2011), Forest area (Food and Agriculture Organization), Terrestrial protected areas (United Nations Environmental Program and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, as compiled by the World Resources Institute, based on data from national authorities, national legislation and international agreements).

Future research could utilize satellite images from different time periods to complement and clarify these data and the actual state of Gambian and Senegalese forests. This, however, is beyond the scope of the present article, which is more concerned with the way that discourses circulate even independent of conclusive empirical relationships between governmental style and forest conservation in the The Gambia and Senegal. Why does the idea commonly circulate in Senegal, a country respected and rewarded in the international community for its democratic governance, that dictatorship à la Jammeh would be better for Senegalese forests?

In addressing this question, I examine four considerations of the bigger environmental, political, and economic contexts in which the eco-authoritarian and ecological shadow discourses are

situated. These four considerations are as follows: the absent and Wolof state; the declining faith in democratic abstraction; livelihood degradation; and democratic inefficiency.

The absent state argument was used frequently in the Senegalese village along The Gambia's southern border where fieldwork was conducted from March 2015 to March 2016, and it was reiterated frequently in Casamance. People frequently complained that "the state has done nothing here," and about their marginalization or *enclavement*, being disconnected from the rest of the Senegalese economy and political system. As Jean-Claude Marut has suggested, however, this view of Casamance as chronically marginalized is misguided; in fact, Casamançais were perhaps the most deeply integrated participants in the Senegalese economy and workforce until economic restructuring in the 1980s reconfigured the region's relationship with the north.⁵⁴

Additionally, the absent state argument draws on the lack of strong Senegalese military presence north of Diouloulou to suggest that the buffer area between the Gambian border and the town of Diouloulou is frequently exploited by Gambian wood traffickers, often working with members of the MFDC.⁵⁵ A man who frequently passed through the villages selling clothes, to take advantage of price discrepancies between the Gambian dalasi and the West African CFA, confirmed this connection between the MFDC and Gambian wood traffickers; he said he was former Gambian police, loyal to Jammeh, but "didn't like the power," so he had done some wood trafficking before eventually moving to clothing. When he recounted what he did while working in the timber industry, he said that he had dealt frequently with "men in the bush." "Do you know what that means?" he asked me. I said I assumed it meant villagers out in remote areas. "No no no," he scoffed, "I mean the rebels."

The absent state argument is also connected to a linked perception of a Wolof state, as people in Jola-dominated areas and, to a lesser extent, in Mandinka-dominated areas, complained about the prioritization of northern resources and peoples, who were largely Wolofized. By contrast, Jolas in particular looked toward Jammeh, a Jola ruling over largely Mandinka populations since a 1994 coup that deposed the Mandinka president Dawda Jawara, as someone who looked out for their interests in a way the Senegalese state, Wolof-dominated and in Dakar, did not or could not. As

Thomson describes, Jammeh's politics were based on "a combination of strong-arm politics (limiting press freedom, prosecuting opposition politicians, etc.) and carefully cultivating an image as a 'man of action' in the realm of development and as a 'man of Islamic piety' in other areas."⁵⁶ Regarding his reputation as a "man of action," some Jola villagers have proudly defended Jammeh's record in education, environment, and more generally in providing for his people. Rumors commonly circulated that Jammeh hired Jolas from Casamance to work on his massive estate in The Gambia, and that during elections he encouraged Casamance Jolas to cross the border and illegally cast votes in his favor. Most notably, tens of thousands of Casamance Jolas registered to vote in the 2001 elections.⁵⁷ In the views of many Jolas in Casamance, then, Jammeh's patrimonial relationship with Jolas and his forceful presence in The Gambia were contrasted with perceptions of an absent, uncaring, and distant though ostensibly democratic Senegalese state.

The declining faith in democratic abstraction follows to some extent from the previous discussion in that it poses the question of what kinds of material, concrete offerings democracy makes. As James Ferguson has recently argued with reference to post-apartheid South Africa, abstract democratic notions of "freedom" or "human rights" are overly narrow given the actual material inequalities and circumstances experienced by ordinary people.⁵⁸ For this reason, he urges greater attention to a politics of distribution, which replaces considerations of abstract rights with specific claims to a rightful share of economic wealth.⁵⁹ In the context of comparisons between Senegalese and Gambian forests, dictatorship is sometimes seen as delivering more concrete benefits than the abstract freedoms and rights guaranteed by democracy, in the form of allowing for official (if unlawful) arrests or punishments, inspiring in people a fear to cut trees illegally, and distributing actual material resources via patron-client relationships, if one is strongly linked to power.

Additionally, this view reflects the critique of Senegalese democracy as being itself only partial, characterized by high levels of corruption and cronyism, as well as the connections between the secular government and the powerful Sufi brotherhoods. Penda Mbow suggests that Senegalese democracy has withered to "electoral authoritarianism" and is characterized by well-known

“administrative haplessness.”⁶⁰ Less harshly, others have also challenged ideas about Senegalese exceptionalism in democratic governance, based on this assumption being strategically manufactured rather than rooted in actual practice and on similar evolutions of political and religious debates in Mali and Niger, military governments notwithstanding.⁶¹ Particular to Casamance, even early discussion formulations of the Senegalese exceptionalism thesis acknowledged that events in that region reveal an undercurrent of “arbitrariness and terror” constitutive of more repressive regimes.⁶² Essentially, then, there may be some generalized fatigue about the platitudes and superficial evaluations of democracy, when actual observations of corruption, preferential decision-making, and inefficiency reveal the ways in which Senegalese democracy does not actually represent those whom it purports to represent.

In this case, I refer to livelihood degradation, which reflects that while environmental degradation may be occurring, individuals experience declining abilities to make a living off of the natural world. This is based loosely on Conchedda, Lambin, and Mayaux, who draw on the idea of “cryptic degradation” to explain qualitative perceptions of mangrove loss in the Casamance and Sine-Saloum estuaries in Senegal, in spite of quantitative evidence to the contrary.⁶³ They suggest that cryptic degradation refers to the declining of productivity of the ecosystem, even when actual cover has increased. This may be part of the eco-dictatorship fantasies, as individuals experience decreases in productivity and viability of the forests and resources upon which they have historically depended, and they regard The Gambia as an idyllic paradise where trees (and livelihoods) are being more effectively protected.

This may have less to do with quantitative successes of forestry policy in The Gambia, per se, and more with the use of The Gambia as an imagined foil to the discouraging decreases in the ability of people to make a living from Casamance’s forests and resources. To be clear, Gambian wood trafficking *did* occur—Senegalese former Minister of the Environment Haidar el Aly, a champion of Casamance environmental causes, built a reputation that rested in part on his aggressive approach to combatting illegal wood trafficking from Casamance across the porous Gambian border. According to field studies upon which he recently commented, estimates suggest that 25 percent of Casamance’s forests

have been depleted since 2010, and aerial footage showed thousands of rosewood logs being transported to depots just across the Gambian border.⁶⁴ However, there have been many other additional causes of logging in Casamance, including the interlinked processes of clearing agricultural land, producing charcoal, and transporting wood to major fish processing centers on the coast, that have not stemmed from The Gambia casting an ecological shadow onto the politically unstable Casamance region. Focusing on Gambian traders, though, allows for a particular framing of the degradation problem in a way that disregards the MFDC's role in illegal timber trafficking and assigns blame across the border rather than examining proximate causes such as clearing more and more land to try to combat low agricultural yields.

Finally, the democratic inefficiency context speaks to the frustrations and delays that naturally arise from dealing with dissent and negotiation. Particularly among bureaucrats and environmental officers, this concern was pre-eminent, as they fantasized about how much more efficiently they could enact environmental legislation without needing to go through the kinds of lengthy procedures required in Senegal. Numerous times, bureaucrats and state officials remarked wistfully, "If only this were The Gambia," they could enact much more restrictive environmental policies. One official once praised the application of penalties for infractions that occurs in The Gambia because, in his perception, "in The Gambia, they actually make you pay." This variation of the dream of eco-dictatorship is thus more about the possibilities of avoiding red tape and bypassing public debate, in a way that protects forest resources; this, in turn, stems from anxieties in Senegal but also more globally about the malfunctioning of liberal democracy, particularly as it relates to environmental protection.

Conclusion

In some cases, such as the discussions among many Jolas in Casamance, praise of Jammeh and The Gambia was sincere and based on actual support of his authoritarian government, viewing it as providing more for the people and for the environment than the distant, democratic government of Senegal. However, it should be noted that among many people who have expressed sentiments that fit with what I have in this paper called "dreams of

eco-dictatorship,” their admiration or envy of Gambian environmental policy was paralleled by a contempt of Jammeh and pride about Senegal’s peaceful, democratic political system. This is what makes these statements ever more perplexing—they represent a tempered nostalgia for an environmentalism not burdened by the exigencies of democratic process, rather than an all-out embrace of Jammeh’s government, *per se*.

Senegalese officials and ordinary people are not alone in their complaints about the environmental and economic shortcomings of democracy and the offsetting of authoritarian environmental governance across the border. In the contemporary United States as well, one frequently hears similar mixtures of condemnation and admiration toward China’s environmental record; and at an extreme, those aggressively defending liberal capitalism and democracy tend toward denial of climate change, as it indicates the environmental consequences of pure, capitalistic individual liberty and demands a change in how we envision politics, environment, and economy. This article thus attempts to explore some of these dynamics through the lens of comments that circulated within Senegal about the internal desirability and external spillover effects of Gambian forestry policy, and how these discourses reflect, to some degree, a global breakdown in normative developmental and democratic teleologies.

Notes

¹ Donal B. Cruise O’Brien, “The Senegalese Exception,” *Africa* 66, no. 3 (1996): 458-64; Mamadou Diouf, “Introduction: The Public Role of the ‘Good Islam’: Sufi Islam and the Administration of Pluralism,” in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, Mamadou Diouf ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 1-35; Al Stepan, “Stateness, Democracy, and Respect: Senegal in Comparative Perspective” in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, Mamadou Diouf ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 205-38; cf. Michael Ralph, *Forensics of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); L. A. Villalon, “Negotiating Islam in the Era of Democracy: Senegal in Comparative Regional Perspective” in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, Mamadou Diouf ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 239-66.

² According to Freedom House political rankings for 2015, The Gambia is classified as “not free,” with a score of 6, where 1 is the highest score and 7 the lowest. By contrast, Senegal is classified as “free,” with a score of 2.

³ In a stunning political reversal of two decades of increasingly hollow commitments to democracy, President Yahya Jammeh lost the 2016 election to Adama Barrow, who was inaugurated at the Gambian Embassy in Senegal. Jammeh stepped down from power in January 2017, when the Senegalese army and other national troops invaded The Gambia in line with ECOWAS’ commitment to enforcing the results of the election.

⁴ Interview, 6 August 2014.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Barry Holden, *Democracy and Global Warming* (London: A&C Black, 2002); Dan Coby Shahar, “Rejecting Eco-Authoritarianism, Again” *Environmental Values* 24, no. 3 (2015): 345-66.

⁷ David Shearman, “Democracy and Climate Change: A Story of Failure,” *openDemocracy*, November 7. https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/democracy_and_climate_change_a_story_of_failure.; See also David J. C. Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith, *The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2007).

⁸ Essentially this hypothesis is that the earth operates as a single organism.

⁹ Leo Hickman, “James Lovelock On the Value of Sceptics and Why Copenhagen Was Doomed,” *The Guardian*, March 29. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/blog/2010/mar/29/james-lovelock>.

¹⁰ Joel Wainwright and Geoff Mann, “Climate Leviathan” *Antipode* 45, no. 1 (2013): 1–22, p. 9

¹¹ The four frameworks are Climate Leviathan, Climate Behemoth, Climate Mao, and Climate X. Climate Leviathan refers to the market-based solution to climate change [see Diana M Liverman, “Conventions of Climate Change: Constructions of Danger and the Dispossession of the Atmosphere,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009): 279–96] writ large, on a planetary scale, governed by supranational institutions (Wainwright & Mann, “Climate Leviathan”). By contrast, Climate Behemoth is capitalist in its more libertarian formations, consisting of territorial governments vehemently opposed to curbing individual freedoms and often dominated by discourses of climate denial (Wainwright & Mann, “Climate Leviathan”). Finally, Climate X incorporates a plethora of diverse alternatives that are both non-capitalist and non-sovereign on a planetary scale, including grassroots movements and popular boycotts in the name of environmental protection.

¹² Wainwright and Mann, “Climate Leviathan,” 10.

¹³ Bruce Gilley, “Authoritarian Environmentalism and China’s Response to Climate Change,” *Environmental Politics* 21, no. 2 (2012): 287–307; Mark Beeson, “The Coming of Environmental Authoritarianism,” *Environmental Politics* 19, no. 2 (2010): 276–94.

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