

*Philanthrocapitalism and the Erosion of Democracy* takes an intersectional approach to examining the work of corporate philanthropy. It is a riveting read on why we should not trust billionaires to save vulnerable communities. Charitable giving shouldn't come with a catch."

— Leah Thomas

Author of *The Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People and Planet*

A detailed exposé of how false climate solutions imperil our agricultural enterprise, undermine the sovereignty of the world's farmers, and affect the quality of our food supply. Shiva lays bare an account of elite corporate philanthropy's power to influence the direction of agricultural research with no public accountability."

— Peggy M. Shepard

Executive Director and Co-Founder, WE ACT For Environmental Justice

In an exceptionally important intervention, Vandana Shiva and colleagues expose the deceptions of the domination paradigm as it enters the late phase of its destruction of life, community, and the mental well-being of our children. This book provides an important signpost to reweave our human family and regenerate what has been depleted. We must collectively resist a system that concentrates wealth and power, leaving a few billionaires to speak as if they have our best interests at heart. Buy this book, it will support your ability to discern the falsehoods!"

— Gail Bradbrook

Co-Founder of Extinction Rebellion

A must-read for anyone fighting to reclaim food sovereignty, protect Indigenous knowledge, restore biodiversity, decolonize nature, and repair damage to the planet. The book not only identifies real threats to humanity and false solutions but also shows that we owe a debt of gratitude to the Indigenous communities reserving the most effective principles to heal, regenerate, and protect our ecosystems. This book teaches us to emancipate ourselves with dignity and freedom so we may live in harmony with nature."

— Fadhel Kaboub

Associate Professor of Economics at Denison University, President of the Global Institute for Sustainable Prosperity

# PHILANTHROCAPITALISM AND THE EROSION OF DEMOCRACY



*A Global Citizens' Report on  
the Corporate Control of  
Technology, Health, and Agriculture*

EDITED BY Vandana Shiva

FOREWORD BY David W. Orr

 SYNERGETICPRESS

like Vandana Shiva. Under the flag of feeding the world and armed with technology that can manipulate down to the fine grain of life, Gates and others are enclosing the final commons. That is a fight we must not lose.

In sum, we are kin to all that ever was, is, and ever will be. Vandana Shiva captures this ancient truth with an invocation: “We are the land. We are the soil. We are biodiversity. We are one Earth family deriving our common humanity and identity from the land and Earth as earthlings, sharing our common sustenance for life, breath, food and water through community and mutuality.” Amen. The crux of the problem, she writes elsewhere, is “the Eurocentric concept of property [that] views only capital investment as investment, and hence treats returns on capital investment as the only right that needs protection...not labor, or care and nurturance.”<sup>9</sup> The battle, then, is ultimately one about politics, which is to say about power and greed—justice and fairness within and between generations and species. It began long ago in the enclosure of common lands, forests, and waters and morphed into the enclosure of everything that could be fenced off to exclude common use, common decency, common justice, and a common future. It is ultimately a struggle to protect “a peoples’ inalienable right to rule themselves.”<sup>10</sup>

David W. Orr, Paul Sears Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Oberlin College currently Professor of Practice, Arizona State University. Author of eight books including *Earth in Mind* (Island), *Down to the Wire* (Oxford) and *Dangerous Years* (Yale) and co-editor of *Democracy Unchained* (New Press).

<sup>9</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Reclaiming the Commons*. Santa Fe: Synergeticpress, 2020, p. 244; see also Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief!* Oakland: PM Press, 2014; David Bollier, *Think Like a Commoner*. Gabriola Is: New Society Press, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. New York: Public Affairs, 2019, p. 513.

## Introduction

### *Philanthrocapitalism and Colonization in the Digital Age*



VANDANA SHIVA

*We are the land. We are the soil. We are Earthlings. We are biodiversity.*

We are one Earth family, deriving our common humanity and identity from the land as Earthlings, sharing our common sustenance for life, breath, food, and water through community and mutuality.

When we care for the land and the soil, we reclaim our humanity. Our future is inseparable from the future of the Earth. It is no accident that the word human has its roots in *humu*—soil in Latin. And Adam, the first human in Abrahamic traditions, is derived from *Adamus*, soil in Hebrew. Land is what defines Indigeneity, identity, community, country—our very being, our life, our freedom. The ancient Bhumi Sukta, the prayer to the Earth in the ancient Atharva Veda recognizes that the Earth is mother, and we are children of the Earth.

*“Impart to us those vitalizing forces that come, O Earth, from deep within your body, your central point, your navel, purify us wholly. The Earth is mother; I am child of Earth.”*

—Bhumi Sukta, Atharva veda XII. 1.12

For Indigenous people across the world, land is not just soil and rocks and minerals; it is living. It sustains the community and is sustained by people and culture. This reciprocal relationship between land and people—being cared for by Mother Earth and caring for Mother Earth—allowed Indigenous people to live on the same land over centuries without degrading the land. The Indigenous Australians farmed the land for over 60 centuries. Even today, despite two and a half centuries of colonialism, this relationship to land determines the identity and way of life of the Aborigines. This deep relationship between people and the land is often described as “connection to country.”

As Dhanggal Gurruwiwi, a Galpu Elder from Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory, explains, “The land and the people are one, because the land is also related....In our kinship system, as a custodian I’m the child of that land.” In Indigenous cultures, the land gives us the law on how to live on this earth with other species for the well-being of all. The law gives us the knowledge and responsibility to care for the land, the purpose of being on the earth, and belonging to the earth community.

As Mary Graham writes about aboriginal world views, “There are two major axioms in Aboriginal (Indigenous) worldview. One is that the land is the law and the other is that you are not alone in the world.” There is no anthropocentrism in Indigenous cultures: “And therefore, we concede to our fellow creatures, even our animal fellows, the same rights as ourselves to life on this earth.”

Land is what defines Indigeneity: “Since time immemorial, First Nations have had an intricate, respectful, spiritually, and physically dependent, grateful, and protective tie to the land. The nature of this tie is not so much one of ownership but one of stewardship. They feel they have been bestowed with a responsibility for the land (and sea) and all of the creatures that inhabit the land with them.”

Indigenous cultures have seen themselves being part as part of Mother Earth—not separate from her as masters and owners. We come from the land; the land is our Mother, who gives us care and for whom we must care. The land is our home, our place of belonging.

We belong to the land; land does not belong to individuals as private property. Colonization, fossil fuel industrialism, and globalization have led to a metabolic rift and rupture between humans from nature, Indigenous cultures, and the land to which they belong.

### COLONIZATION, ENCLOSURES OF THE COMMONS, AND CREATION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

Before colonialism, in India and in Indigenous cultures across the world, land was a commons, not private property. As Dharampal has reported, the Village community had supremacy over land and its use. The local community was the highest competent authority that made decisions on land use. The right to use land was permanent and hereditary as decided by custom and practice. The British violently destroyed our diverse, decentralized, democratic, self-governance community structures governing the customary practice of land rights and land use rights and imposed private property rights by institutionalizing “Zamindari,” or landlordism. As Sir WW Hunter wrote in the Imperial Gazetteer: “The Indian Government is not a mere tax collecting agency, charged with the single duty of protecting person and property. Its system of administration is based upon the view that the British power is a paternal despotism, which owns, in a certain sense, the entire soil of the country.”

In one stroke of a pen in 1793, Lord Cornwallis, through the permanent settlement, dispossessed the peasantry, tied 20 million small and marginal farmers and peasants into bondage to Zamindars created by the British to extract genocidal “lagaan” (taxes or rents). The British control over land and extraction of lagaan became the source of wealth for the empire and poverty and famine in India.

Over the course of 200 years, the British extracted an estimated \$45 trillion from India through the colonial enclosures of our agrarian economies, pushing tens of millions of peasants into famine and starvation. The displacement of people from the land was one interconnected violent global process taking place at the same time across the world. The peasants in India and in England were both

victims of the colonial process of enclosing the commons to create private property.

According to English Common law, the enclosure of a commons required the unanimous consent of the entire community. No authority had the right to alienate and enclose the commons. Even one member could block the enclosures. This right was fundamental and inalienable.

Between 1628 and 1631, head-on clashes took place between the peasantry and the lords of the manor on attempts to own the land. The Parliament started to pass laws to enclose the commons and undermine individual rights, passing 3,380 bills between 1770 and 1839 to reach this goal. It took two centuries of violence to enclose the commons in England.

### ENCLOSURES OF THE COMMONS: THE “CIVILIZING MISSION” OF COLONIALISM AND THE “CREATION MYTH” OF CAPITALISM

Locke’s (1632–1704) *Treatise on Property* was primarily a justification of the enclosures of the commons, creation of private property, based on the “civilizing myth” of colonialism that Indigenous people are primitive and need to be “improved” and the “creation myth” of capitalism, the manufacture of the illusion that “capital,” a dead construct, is a creative force and creates wealth. Locke used the construction of “primitiveness” of Indigenous land use in Turtle Island to justify the creation of private property through the appropriation of their land and enclosures of the commons. As he writes in his second treatise: “For I ask whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of America left to nature without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres will yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life as ten acres of equally fertile land in Devonshire where they are well cultivated.”

Indigenous peoples of the Americas have been farming for centuries without leaving an ecological footprint. That they did no harm to nature is not “primitiveness” but ecological sophistication and

sustainability. While developing the colonial myth of primitiveness of Indigenous peoples, Locke was also developing the “creation myth” of capital to justify the enclosures in England.

Locke wrote that property is created by removing resources from nature and mixing it with “labor.” For Locke, “labor” was not the biological and physical work of the women and the peasants. The creation of property is based on the fictitious “spiritual” labor as manifested in the control of capital. “Intellectual property” and patents on seeds are a continuity of this false assumption of capital, a dead construct, as the creative force of production while defining the real creative forces—nature and people—as dead and inert inputs.

Mother Earth, as the very basis of life, disappeared as a creative force. The work of women, Indigenous people, and peasants disappeared as the creative source of production of the food we eat and the clothes we wear. Living economies based on the commons disappeared as land was grabbed, the wealth created by the earth and people were appropriated and extracted.

### THE DIGITAL BARONS AS THE NEW LANDLORDS

A new enclosure of the commons and land grab is now taking place. The tech barons are the new landlords and feudal lords of the digital age. Leading the new tech feudalism and colonialism is Bill Gates, who has emerged as the biggest landlord of America, owning 242,000 acres of farmland across the US. Gates is not just buying land as a high-value “asset” to be added to the portfolio of investments through Cascade Investments. It is part of the diversification of the portfolio. Land, digital agriculture, and lab food (Impossible Foods) that makes “plant based” meat are the new investments. Above all, Gates is seeking control over the most important aspect of the real economy: land, food, and farming. This is a point made by Kissinger. Food can be used as a weapon; therefore, by controlling food, you control people. Land grab in the digital age is being presented as “helping family farmers by relieving them of the expensive burden of land ownership and freeing up the farmers capital for operating expenses.”

Since the Green Revolution, corporations have been defining what is a “lucrative operation” for the farmer. But small farmers got into debt and lost their land. In extreme cases, when the debt trap drove them to losing their land, they lost their lives by committing suicide. I see the epidemic of farmer suicides in recent years both as a result of the hopelessness of being locked in a vicious cycle of indebtedness and a sign of loss and pain resulting from being forced to part from the land, from Mother Earth, from *Mati Ma/Dharati Ma*.

While tech barons like Gates distract us with new constructs like “dematerialization,” like the early colonizers they seek to control the real economy: land, seeds, agriculture and food. Controlling the resources that sustain life is controlling life. It is very profitable business and investment for billionaires. But it is a new debt trap for farmers.

Gates now controls the 773,000 seed accessions collected from farmers during the Green Revolution and held in the CGIAR public gene banks. He seeks to create and control one CGIAR where the voices of farmers and countries do not count. Gates has created Gates Agricultural Innovations, also known as “Gates Ag One” to control the imagination of the future of food and farming.

People across the world have woken up to the destruction to the health of the planet and our health by large industrial farms and food systems and the need to have small farms which grow more food, conserve and regenerate biodiversity and the earth, and sustain more people. To push the food system further and faster down the violent unsustainable path of largeness, we need a new spin on “sustainability.” As is claimed, “Gates Ag One aims to help poor farmers, especially in Africa and South Asia, get the tools, technologies, and resources they need to lift themselves out of poverty.” If each acre can produce more food, that’s good news for farmers. But it also means we can devote less of the planet’s surface to farmland, which is good news for forests and ecosystems.”

These were the claims made when the Green Revolution was imposed on Punjab in India and now on Africa through AGRA, the Alliance for the Green Revolution in Africa. However, as I have

shown in my book, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, farmers of Punjab got trapped in debt. As Tim Wise shows in his contribution, AGRA has created hunger in Africa.

Further, the claim that industrial agriculture produces more food is false. Industrial agriculture produces nutritionally empty commodities, not food. As Navdanya has shown, “yield” is a not an accurate measurement. Nutrition per acre is what matters. Biodiverse, regenerative organic farming is the proven path of increasing nutrition per acre by getting rid of poisons. It protects the land by regenerating the soil, biodiversity, and water. It intensifies biodiversity and nutrition, not chemicals and poisons.

Brushing aside centuries of sustainable agriculture knowledge and practice, Gates is promoting digital agriculture with partnerships with the Poison Cartel. The myths of the Green Revolution are being continued in Gates Ag One, that chemical industrial farming grows more food: “American agriculture today is being transformed as farmers employ new technologies and Big Data to help them manage their crops. That can mean better yields with decreased use of fertilizers and pesticides. Which in turn means less impact on the environment.” In a world economy organized on the myth of limitless growth and limitless greed, there are no limits. There is a perpetual demand for more land to grow more commodities.

The Amazon is being invaded into not to grow food to grow GMO soya for biofuel and animal feed. Gates Ag One is a plan to grow a handful of crops on very large farms with drones and robots, intensive chemical use, GMOs, to produce “raw materials” of carbohydrates and proteins for lab food. Land grab translates into the end of farmers, an end to real food that comes from the land and nourishes us. Gates-linked Cottonwood Ag is one of the founding members of a new coalition of farmland owners, operators and environmental groups called Leading Harvest to impose one global monoculture of unsustainable industrial agriculture on the world through is working to come up with “verifiable standards for sustainable farming”

and create “a kind of sustainability seal of approval certifying that a given farm meets environmental standards.”

Our work in Navdanya has shown that food sovereign farmers practicing regenerative organic agriculture, fair trade and local circular economies can grow more food using zero chemicals, conserve more water by shifting to water prudent nutritionally dense foods like millets and organic farming and increase farmer incomes by stopping the hemorrhage to but costly chemicals and be locked into unfair corporate controlled trade.

Farmers need freedom, justice, and fairness. Navdanya farmers are earning 10 times more than chemical commodity producing farmers through defending their seed freedom, food freedom and economic self-reliance. Instead of supporting the Seed, Food and Land Sovereignty path that farmers and ecologists are calling for, Gates wants to further fragment farming, further centralize control, and further promote a fake science of sustainability.

An industrial, globalized food system is allowing farmers to receive only 1 to 5% of what the consumer pays. Instead of ensuring that farmers are paid fair prices for food they grow to nourish us, Gates wants to lock them into new systems and control and dependencies and push them to a zero-budget economy where they receive nothing for the nourishment, food, and health they provide society.

Instead, as the Leading Harvest group says, “farmers will be paid for sustainability...There will be incentives for things like using less water, fewer chemicals, and storing more carbon.” In other words, farmers will not be paid for growing food and the incentives will not be for farming systems as a whole, but for fragments of the system which can be tied to the new “net zero” climate solution based on continued emissions with “offsets.” This is a global food and agriculture dictatorship. Conditionalities under any condition violate democratic principles and human rights. Farmers are guided by Earth care. The culture of Earth care needs to be respected and rewarded.

Conditionalities to “climate sins” of continued emissions is morally and ethically bankrupt. It is the contemporary equivalent of the “indulgences” received by the catholic bishops and priests. Pollution

is against ecological principles. Conditionalities based on fake science and fake solutions will accelerate the violence against the land, the earth, the farmers. It will, of course, create new markets, new rents, new profits for Gates.

Gates is seeking new forms of *lagaan* collection from farmers through more chemical intensive farming, more “Bija Lagaan” from GMOs and patented seeds, and new “data *lagaan*” by locking farmers into digital agriculture. He has called data the new gold. But the tech billionaires get the gold and the land. And farmers lose their land, livelihoods, and life. His dystopian vision is to drive diversity, health, and freedom to extinction by controlling complex systems of seeds, knowledge, agriculture, and food. He violently imposes the monoculture paradigm of industrial farms and agriculture which further perpetuate disease-creating globalized food systems.

## RECLAIM THE LAND: LAND BACK AND MITTI SATYAGRAHA

Indigenous people around the world—from Australia to America and India to Africa—have resisted land grab. All our struggles for decolonization and movements for freedom have been movements to defend Mother Earth and our rights that flow from her. Small farmers of India have resisted land grab since the beginning of colonization. In regions of the Northwest of India, peasants resisted Zamindari and defended themselves as independent owner cultivators and small farmers. The peasantry led India’s first freedom movement against the British in 1857 and ended the rule of East India Company. The crown took over 10 million people over 10 years beginning in 1857.

Peasant movements led by Sir Chotu Ram, the Agriculture Minister of the Northwest Provinces, defended their land rights through the 1900 Land Alienation Act in the North Western Provinces. In 1984, Punjab farmers led the resistance to the slavery of the Green Revolution and the threat to their land and freedom. Even the contemporary farmers struggle is in defense of the land of peasant cultivators. As they say, our struggle is for the soil and soul (“*jameen*

our jameer”) of India. Following Gandhi’s footsteps when Gandhi started the Dandi March for the 1930 Salt Satyagraha (Civil disobedience against the British laws on Salt Monopoly making it illegal for Indians to make salt) farmers have started a Mitti Satyagraha (Soil and Land Satyagraha) against corporate controlled food and agriculture systems and laws to impose it, collecting it from every place where farmers’ blood has been shed in defense of land and soil from colonial times to the present.

Indigenous people of the Americas have started the Land Back movement. The Land Back movement is restoring our relationship with Mother Earth, overcoming the colonial separation, reclaiming the sovereignty of the land and all her beings as living and members of one Earth Family, embodying land sovereignty by reclaiming our commons by reclaiming our potential to live as community.

Will the future be shaped by the new digital zamindars, or will we return to Mother Earth, *Dharti ma*, remembering that we belong to her as children? Will we take her instructions to protect her, and in the process, protect the future of humanity? Otherwise, our planet will be shaped by those who are finding new ways to run the money machine by using old colonial systems of land grab while small farmers are losing their land because of debt and mortgages due to capital-intensive industrial. The World Economic Forum and the billionaires of the world, have launched “The Great Reset,” telling us, “You will own nothing, and you will be happy.”

They are not joining the movement for returning to Mother Earth belonging to her, not owning her as property. They are not saying they will give land back to Indigenous communities from whom it was grabbed. Their version of the “Great Reset” is not suggesting that we live like Indigenous cultures as one Earth Family, free of inequality, injustice, and hierarchies.

They are not referring to reclaiming the commons when they say we will own nothing, which means, “We will own everything: your land, food, body, and mind.” They are referring to a deeper colonization and privatization, including the commons of life, now aided with invasive digital technologies.

Leading Harvest is about the next step of extraction. Reclaim from the earth and from farmers. It is not about caring for the land

to create an abundant harvest and sharing the gifts of the earth as commons. It is an agenda for the ultimate enclosure of all commons, privatization of the last resource, and all the life-giving processes of the planet. But we have a choice. We can use our living intelligence to return home. To return to the earth. To return to the land. To co-create with the land.

We need to return to the land, the soil, for reclaiming our true identity, as the ecological basis of our being. All we need to remember is the “law of return,” of giving back to the land with love and gratitude. It is through the soil and the land we are connected to other beings. When we take care of the land, we cultivate the earth community, cultivating hope and justice. We meet all our needs while not depriving others of their share to the gifts of the land.

Systems of extraction demand more and more land to meet the needs of fewer and fewer people. That is why a billion people are hungry. Ever increasing numbers are homeless and refugees. We can reduce our ecological footprint while leaving no one hungry. My work in service to the earth through Navdanya over the last few decades has taught me that when we shift from an extractive economy to the economy of care and giving, we produce more for more beings. When we obey the law of gratitude, the law of return—which is the law of the land—the soil becomes more fertile, more biodiversity flourishes, we grow more food and healthier food, have more to share with others.

The land provides for all, and provides everything we need: our food, clothing, shelter, and even identity. We can meet our needs and the needs of all with circular economies based on solidarity, care, and generosity. Creation of local living economies rooted in the land is now an ecological, ethical, justice, and survival imperative. Returning to the land is the road to resisting getting caught in the web of power constructed by Gates and other philanthrocapitalists.