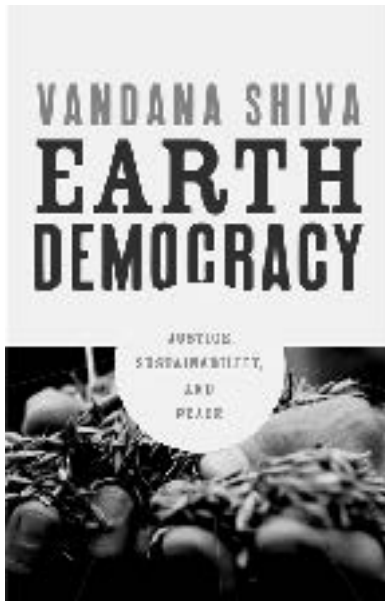


Reviews



Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace. Vandana Shiva, Cambridge: South End Press, 2005. 205 pp. ISBN 0 89608 745 X \$15.00 Soft Cover

Reviewed by
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The seemingly paradoxical idea that the earth is ours and yet we do not own it is at the heart of Vandana Shiva's compelling new book *Earth Democracy*. Vandana Shiva is a contemporary intellectual and activist: founder of the Navdana movement for biodiversity, director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, and leading critic of globalization. *Earth Democracy* is a new addition to Shiva's growing number of books critiquing the neo-liberal world order and advocating an alternative. It is a great read for those who would like an introduction to the structures of neo-liberalism and suggestions for alternatives.

Shiva relies on a Gandhian perspective of people's relationship with the earth and with one another. She articulates this perspective through the concept of Earth Democracy. According to Shiva the key concepts of Earth Democracy are to recognize the intrinsic worth of all species and cultures and to sustain the earth and maintain all living creatures' access to the resources that they need for sustenance.

In "Living Economies," the second chapter, Shiva contends "WTO rules are not just about trade. They determine how food is produced, who controls food production" (35). She tackles Hardin's classical neo-liberal argument, regarding the tragedy of the commons, which argues that the commons need to be privatized in order to be sustained. Instead she supports a contextualized worldview that recognizes the history of colonization and argues that the role of the state is to protect the public trust and that land should be collectively owned, not individually.

In "Living Democracies" Shiva urges citizens "to reclaim their freedom," and "to reinvent democracy" (74). She fleshes out her argument against the neo-liberal order

by examining the Washington Consensus. The Washington Consensus fails to account for diversity at various levels; moreover it is not able to recognize the economic and social costs of implementation.

In "Living Cultures" Shiva discusses WTO policies on farming that have led to a trend of farmer suicides. She also undertakes a gender analysis and observes that female feticide has increased within the educated class in India. She associates this with the increase in value placed on individuality and material wealth. In making the connections between imperialism and patriarchy she asserts that "men can pretend that those whom they exploit and who support them, are dependent on them. Patriarchy presents women as dependents. Imperialism projects itself as liberator – the colonized are dependent on the empire for freedom and liberation" (113-114).

In the final chapter, "Earth Democracy in Action," Shiva warns that developing countries need to learn from the mistakes of the industrialized world, especially with regard to food production. She argues against the cookie cutter approach employed by international monetary institutions. "Industrial food is cheaper not because it is efficient – but because it is supported by subsidies and externalizes all costs – the wars, the diseases, the environmental destruction, the cultural decay, the social disintegration" (164). She reminds us that certain things were not meant to be excludable: everyone needs access to basic resources, with the number of resources varying according to one's needs.

Shiva attempts to clarify and coalesce a number of important but potentially dry topics. Occasionally, it can appear that she is tangential. Nevertheless, the book is a solid and nuanced approach to globalization and biopiracy and a must read for anyone interested in an introduction to this field.