

BOOK REVIEW

Making Peace with the Earth, by Vandana Shiva. Winnipeg, Manitoba: Fernwood Publishing, 2013. \$ 24.95 CAN, paper. ISBN: 978-1-55266-566-4. Pages: 1-267.

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In April 2017, a demonstration of some 40 farmers from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu grabbed nation-wide attention: By putting live mice in their mouths, flogging themselves, stripping naked, carrying with them skulls of farmers who committed suicide, and threatening to drink their own urine, the drastic protest was intended to highlight the never-ending plight of India's farmers, due to which about 300,000 of them have committed suicide over the past 20 years (Lakshmana, 2017). In the state of Maharashtra alone, an average of seven farmers committed suicide every single day between January and April 2017 (Kakodkar, 2017).

Vandana Shiva's *Making Peace with the Earth* shows how the mass-suicide of Indian farmers is one of the many terrifying outcomes of what she calls a *global war against the earth*. This war is fought, as Shiva explains, by multinational corporations (MNCs) and nation-states as their faithful vassals: "Governments mutate from welfare states to corporate states as they deregulate corporations and over-regulate citizens (...). The enlargement of 'free-market democracy' becomes a war against Earth Democracy" (21). Throughout the book and with a focus on India, Shiva explores the different yet interrelated wars being fought against the earth, the means of war applied by MNCs and the Indian state, and the human and non-human costs of it. We learn how 'land wars' displace millions of people and devastate the environment in order to make room for Special Economic Zones (SEZs), mega-development projects, and the large-scale exploitation of natural resources; how 'water wars' based on the increasing privatisation of water services and assets exclude a huge part of the population from access to safe drinking water as well as to water needed for irrigation; how 'forest wars' replace an abundance of native tree families by monoculture plantations, in the process destroying local livelihoods and the ecosystems on which they are based; or how 'seed wars' lead to an ever-increasing dependency on highly expensive, and highly damaging, chemical inputs that in turn result in degraded soils and health risks on the one hand, and indebtedness and suicides of farmers on the other. The chapter on 'seed wars' in particular manages to explain a highly complex, technical set of issues around genetically modified organisms, biodiversity and intellectual property rights in an easily understandable and comprehensible way, a testimony of Shiva's long-term research and activism in this field.

The emphasis on themes of land, water, climate and seed conflicts then clearly links Shiva's most recent publication with earlier books such as *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis* (2008), *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* (2005), and *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit* (2002). What all of Shiva's work also has in common is an analytical focus on the role of the nation-state and MNCs from an eco-feminist perspective which sees the transformation of capitalist structures of domination as ultimate goal (Curran, 2007, 118).

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Based on this framework, *Making Peace with the Earth* provides a vivid and descriptive account of the politics and concrete impact of what Carroll and Jarvis (2015) call ‘deep marketisation,’ the latest phase of neoliberalism which is characterised by “an aggressive pro-private sector agenda that seeks to rapidly extend market exchange and social relations using means that work on, through, and around the state” (295). The state here no longer is the focal point and implementer of ‘Development,’ but a facilitator and accelerator of ‘Development,’ the achievement of which is being ‘outsourced’ to the globalised private sector. This “corporate-centric” (Shiva, 18) world demands that “local communities and the country should both give up their sovereign rights for the benefit of global free trade” (40).

One of the examples Shiva provides for this is the Indian state’s massive support for SEZs in order to promote exports and attract foreign direct investment. This is being achieved by employing ‘means of war’ such as handing out massive tax breaks, deregulating employment and labour laws, and seizing land for the private sector (33). As Shiva explains, these means of war “dispossess farmers and peasants and destroy agriculture, in favour of privileged corporate enclaves, which pay no taxes but burden the entire society with increased fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions” (35). This is typical for deep marketisation projects based on the rule of the ‘free market’ which subjects all social relations to the price form at the expense of any forms of social protection, including access to the commons and public goods (Da Costa and McMichael, 2007). Ironically, of course, such market processes are everything but free - the ‘free market democracy’ is, as Shiva shows, accompanied by an excessive force of violence employed by both the Indian state, through police, military and paramilitary units, and by MNCs themselves through local goons and private armies tolerated by, and sometimes even collaborating with, the state.

Dinerstein (2015) describes this as the ‘political construction of hopelessness,’ a key instrument of deep marketisation, which systematically uses violence, fear and frustration to oppress resistance and realise the state- and elite-favoured form of economic and social transformation, forcefully constructed as being *without any alternative*. In this vein, Shiva argues that what we can observe in the war against the earth and resistance against it is actually a war between two worldviews - the onslaught against the earth and its (non-elite, ‘poor’, ‘native’, ‘lower-caste’, minority...) inhabitants is embedded within a dualist Cartesian system that puts humans above nature and thus justifies the subordination and exploitation of nature. What is required then is “a shift in our worldview (...),” (Shiva, 265), however it remains rather vague how this shift can materialise itself and what it concretely entails.

The movements and resistance against processes of deep marketisation which Shiva describes in her book under the label of ‘Earth Democracy’ then are based on a worldview and a politics that includes “all life on earth and all humans who are being excluded by so-called ‘free market democracy’ based on corporate rule and corporate greed” (Shiva, 20). However, while Shiva provides numerous examples of resistance, such as the early Chipko movement to save forests, the Niyamgiri Hills movement against mining of Bauxite, or the Anti-Posco Movement to prevent a South-Korean steel plant joint venture, she avoids delving into details, which is also one of the biggest weaknesses of her work.

While ‘Earth Democracy’ is always being highlighted as a *reaction* against the threats emanating from the state and MNCs, it is often unclear what *concrete actions*, strategies and tactics Earth Democracy entails and how it is internally organised, as well as how its impact can be maximised. All the different movements featured in the book are portrayed in a rather homogeneous way, despite their rather different backgrounds and membership base. Questions of power are almost completely left out, for instance when it comes to strategies of leadership and equal participation within the movements featured, or the rights of women and other minorities. At times, Shiva also tends to portray small-holder and indigenous farmers as rather passive victims of the state and MNCs that can easily escape their situation by listening to the ‘vanguard’ of enlightened scholars, activists and NGOs which, not least, include her own organisation Navdanya that is prominently featured throughout the book.

Additionally, while Shiva takes great effort to make the case for the ‘environmentalism of the poor,’ she glosses over the fact that, at times, environmental conservation and economic interests are indeed in conflict with each other, which can for instance be seen in the aftermath of the Chipko Movement (see Mitra, 1993). Another aspect that can be seen critically is Shiva’s exclusive, class-based focus on the state and MNCs, which tends to assign the state a redemptive role once it is ‘freed’ from the dictates of national elites, the private sector and institutions such as the World Bank which impose their (neoliberal) demands on the state. Thus, once liberated from these constraints, the state is seen as rather unproblematic institution that protects empowered local communities (Shiva, 26). As can be seen in *Making Peace with the Earth*, such an attachment at class analysis eschews important questions of hierarchy and domination outside capitalist structures and overlooks other important sites of struggle.

Except for these shortcomings, Vandana Shiva’s book provides a useful entry-point for readers who want to learn more about the impact of globalisation and contemporary Development policy on marginalised people and the environment, especially within an Indian context but also beyond. Together with books such as Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs The Climate* (2014), it is an essential read for both lay persons as well as undergraduate students and anyone interested in issues of Development, climate change and the environment in order to understand and realise the scale of contemporary social, economic and environmental problems and the challenges we face and need to tackle in the future, considering the effects of both increasing climate change and an expansion of neoliberal market rule across the globe.

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