

Book Review: Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000. ISBN: 978-0896086074 (paperback). 150 Pages. \$6.49.

Reviewed by Iliana De Santis¹

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Vandana Shiva's *Stolen Harvest* is an enticing work dedicated to outlining the effects of globalized large-scale agriculture on the environment, small farmers, and food quality. Throughout the book, Shiva does a great job sparking questions about why we continue to allow industrialized farming when it is obvious that it has detrimental affects on the environment, and what we consume. Shiva's argument about the negative affects of globalized, commercialized farming is supported through her empirical work, but she comes from a perspective rooted in her Indian heritage that sometimes leads to rhetoric that interferes with the issues that she is trying to raise.

Shiva's book is separated into seven distinct sections, each highlighting a sector of the market, or the environment that industrialized farming is negatively affecting. The first section, "The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply", focuses on how biodiversity is being replaced with genetically modified food markets. She touches on how a genetically modified market leaves no room for the exchange of seeds along with an exchange of knowledge and cultural heritage. She sheds light on the fact that monoculture systems have large amounts of wasted inputs that essentially make them more wasteful, and less productive than traditional polyculture systems. Shiva argues that corporations are stealing farmers'

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harvests through genetic engineering and patents, creating a totalitarian system that squashes food democracy.

In “The Stolen Harvest of the Sea,” Shiva illuminates the devastating ecological effects of aquaculture, or industrialized fish farming. Turtles, in Indian culture are treated with reverence; this is not mirrored by industrial agriculture’s use of mechanized trawlers that kill sea turtles in their efforts to catch fish. “Rape and run” fish industries are promoted in third world countries to supply the western world with luxury foods. This results in the pollution of coastal waters, and the salinization of aquifers, leaving fresh water unpotable for those living in the third world countries. The first and second blue revolutions have had devastating ecological, and cultural effects.

The section entitled “The Stolen Harvest of Seed,” identified that plant diversity is being seriously threatened by monocultures and seed monopolies. Terminator technology gives multinational seed and agrochemical industries most of the control over the world’s food supply. Seed piracy allows industry to market, and profit from hundreds of years of cultivation and experimentation, in which the patent holder sometimes had no part. Two major players, Monsanto and DuPont, have systematically bought up the seed industry. This places the future of biodiversity in the hands of corporate giants.

In the section, “Reclaiming Food Democracy”, Shiva describes food democracy as, “a new solidarity between environmental democracy and sustainable-agriculture movements, farmer’s movements, consumer movements, and new movements of public interests scientists.” In this final section, Shiva calls for movements in support of organic agriculture, and against genetic engineering. Shiva asserts that building alliances between public interests scientists and people, producers and consumers, and various other groups will create a sense of solidarity needed to tackle issues of food democracy.

Shiva, throughout the book highlights ecological, and environmental issues that I never knew were a problem. Her research on the various food revolutions gives readers empirical data to support her argument that industrialized farming is not only harmful to the environment, but to plant diversity in general. Her arguments are buttressed with compelling investigations, and her emotional interest in the subject. Her critique of

international lending institutions throughout the book is harsh, and relentless. Her descriptions of the shortcomings of the WTO throughout are ruthless, and seemingly inspired by a rather personal distaste for the lending institution. Although her perspective on lending institutions seems at times overwrought, and harsh, the book as a whole gives the reader a great new perspective on the effects of globalized commercial farming, and provokes the reader to consider what the production of the food they eat is doing to the environment, and those who farm it.