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Philanthrocapitalism: rendering the public domain obsolete?

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ABSTRACT
Engaging the lively debates about the next expression of neoliberalism, this study suggests that it is evolving into philanthrocapitalism. After a brief discussion of the trajectories from neoliberalism, the article addresses the core ideology of philanthrocapitalism. The central thesis explores how philanthrocapitalism is moving beyond the requirement of 'business practices' for recipients of donor funds, into enforcing 'business rule' on to the public domain. Although philanthrocapitalism is most debated in the fields of health care and education, this article uses empirical analysis of international agricultural policies trying to enlist Southern Africa policies. It explores how philanthrocapitalist rule is reducing transparency, participation and deliberation within the public domain, well beyond requesting efficient business practices for greater food security. It concludes with how smallholder farmers are actively organising to resist business rule over their genetic resources and farming practices.

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Introduction

Philanthrocapitalism and its insistence on 'business practices' for proficiency in order to solve social problems have been much debated, but there is little discussion about philanthropic foundations also forcing their 'ruling practices' on to the public domain. The debates about business practices suggest that issues of justice and human rights cannot be resolved by efficient money alone; social needs reflect complex historical and cultural interactions. Those on this side of the debate propose that the rise of individual wealth is reciprocally linked to growing inequalities, from local to global; the very few very wealthy are central to the social problems. Philanthrocapitalists reply that they made billions with their business practices, showing the profit motive is a proven instrument of social change.

As philanthropic projects fall under increasing criticism in education and medicine, debates about their efficacy may silence a more ominous practice: philanthrocapitalists are inserting class rule along with their cash. This article proposes to bring to the debating forefront a central philanthrocapitalist practice: to insulate economic relations and policies from governments and their civil societies. Their projects are trying to render decision-making a private elite affair, at many levels. It results from a logic of capital, one that is redirecting the making of economic public policies away from debate and compromise among diverse voices.

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Grounded in neoliberalism, philanthrocapitalism[1] is not just another expression of neoliberalism but goes well beyond it. The first section offers a brief summary of the trajectories from neoliberalism. The second section explains the central ideology of philanthrocapitalism and how it is expressed in the internal rule of many large philanthropic foundations. The third section provides the core of the article in suggesting and analysing the instruments of philanthrocapitalist rule, which remove transparency, participation and debates about the public interest from the public domain. The grounding of this theoretical debate gives empirical examples from the Gates Foundation's Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), based in investigations from when it was founded in late 2006. Regional examples come from Southern Africa, the author's region of research, but the study raises questions for the continent where AGRA is present. Other examples could be given in the fields of education and health care[2] but this article focuses on the vital sector of agriculture, providing food for us all.

The call is to debate and nuance the analysis, for generalities are appropriate but specificities elucidate the complexities and, sometimes, contradictions. Many will first respond that the 'ruling class always rules' under capitalism, but the goal here is to open debates about new expressions of capitalist rule in the twenty-first century. We have lamented and debated neoliberalism long enough.[3] Our theories need to catch up with what is happening on the ground and, for agriculture, in the ground.[4] In many ways that will become clear, smallholder farmers are way ahead of scholars in understanding and resisting the latest expressions of capitalist rule emerging from increasing global inequalities.

Neoliberalism: setting the foundation for philanthrocapital rule

Neoliberalism[5] created a global regime allowing the free flow of capital and advocating the free flow of commodities, while restricting the movement of labour. This regime facilitated the privatisation of state-owned or state-regulated infrastructure and production, advancing the privatisation of common pool resources and public goods, so globally widespread that it evoked new theories about 'accumulation by dispossession'.[6] Some of neoliberalism's projects failed by its own standards, such as the total privatisation of drinking water; governments had to return to socialise costs across all users, while providing this human necessity. For genetic resources to be privatised, courts had to agree that a living organism could be patented; a ruling legitimated in the US and the EU, but rejected by all African governments.[7]

The denationalisation of trade and of finance – away from both state regulation and nation-state identity – began with neoliberalism, facilitating the devolution of power to corporations. About 80% of global trade occurs within a corporation: goods cross borders without any change in ownership; the seller is the buyer.[8] The illegal practice of transfer pricing of commodities, moving across borders but owned by one corporation, now removes billions of dollars from the African continent:

> over 10 years [2003–2012], US$528.9 billion was spirited out through trade misinvoicing [transfer pricing] and leakages in the balance of payments. That is greater than either official development aid, US$348.2 billion, or net inward foreign direct investment, US$284 billion, received by Sub-Saharan Africa during the period of the study.[9]

As the Panama Papers document, tax havens allow corporations to avoid taxes from any nation-state, taking the free movement of capital beyond national jurisdictions.[10] Globally pervasive, private removal of capital cancels public development aid: 'For every development-targeted dollar entering the developing world in 2013, over US$10 exited illicitly. This has held true since 2010'.[11]

The 'philanthro' side of philanthrocapitalism refers to the ostensible giving of funds by large private foundations promoting 'venture philanthropy'. Similar to the intra-corporate exchange of goods dominating cross-border movement of goods, however, this transaction involves no change in ownership because it carries conditionalities to follow business practices under the guise of efficiency and 'showing results' based on measures selected by the controlling foundations (in education: standardised tests; in agriculture: 'improved' seeds). As will be discussed, entering into public/private partnerships, the foundation leverages government funds for its projects, redirecting public monies toward its goals (in agriculture: breeding crops for the global 'food value chain' using indigenous germplasm).

With the denationalisation of trade and finance, and with public/private partnerships, philanthrocapitalism extends the defunding of national governments for certain sectors. At the same time, it mobilises ('leverages') public funds for greater private corporate profit. Neither of these business practices is new. However, debating the transformation of 35 years of neoliberalism into another capitalist expression will help us to understand not only the loss of public funds but, as important, the loss of public deliberation and collective decision-making to address seeming intransigent social problems. The increasing global economic inequality,[12] within and across countries, raises questions about the growing inequality of political power to formulate national policies to care for the next generations or to sustain livelihoods or the planet.

Ideology to foster philanthrocapital rule

There are at least three aspects to the core ideology of philanthrocapitalist rule.[13] First and foremost is the message that financial wealth equals expertise. If one has accumulated billions of dollars, then s/he is automatically an expert, in most any field. This accolade is well expressed in the Gates Foundation's launching AGRA. With little or no experience in either agriculture or on the continent of Africa, the Gates Foundation decided it could hire the expertise to provide African food security.[14] AGRA ignores the histories documenting that African smallholder (<5 hectares) production was ploughed under to make room for export crops, or to provide food for white settlers in Southern Africa. Diverse strains of sorghums and millets became 'coarse grains', because they were unfamiliar to European agronomy.[15] Remaining important today is the lack of knowledge by most outsiders about the vast ecological diversity across the continent. An African farmer can explain important agronomic differences across just one hectare, revealing how such extreme variability fosters creative innovation for food crops during climate change.[16] But it certainly does not fit into AGRA expertise promoting large-scale uniformity across seeds, land and water requirements to engender rates of profit sufficient to attract global agribusiness.

The elevation of a narrowly-defined expertise across the spectrum of human endeavour is perhaps best expressed in the fact that laboratories cost more than a single scientific salary can afford and, therefore, the practice of science remains dependent on outside support. What deserves first attention can often come from the benefactor, not the scientist. What is 'left out' may disappear for the long term. 'For better or worse', says Steven Edwards, a policy analyst at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 'the practice of science in the twenty-first century is becoming shaped less by national priorities or by peer-review groups and more by the particular preferences of individuals with huge amounts of money'.[17] Although private financing of science has roots in the first gilded age, historian of philanthropy, Maribel Morey observes: 'there is *something new* in the way science is now being funded. Unlike their early-20th-century predecessors, for example, philanthropists today are targeting particular fields themselves'.[18]

This individual direction of scientific inquiry may fill gaps in public funding and advance discoveries, but editors of *Nature*[19] caution about the danger of violating the social contract to serve the common good. These issues become more severe if the scientific findings, good or deleterious, are kept secret, exemplified by the 20-year controversy over genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for human food. Privatisation of a GMO product often brings with it the privatisation of the scientific process, not simply the findings. In addition to patents and trademarks, US corporations and foundations are increasing their use of Confidential Business Information (CBI): 'philanthrocapitalists do not enjoy the light of day on their operations, offering many reasons for the secrecy, the most abused officially called "business secrets" under US law'.[20] A CBI can be granted if review of an application agrees that substantial competitive harm would result from disclosure. Unlike patents, CBIs can last *indefinitely*. Information referring to biosafety data or environmental impacts may remain secret.[21]

A finding emerging from privatised research increases the aura of expert, as it is advertised as a potential breakthrough, but one that is only open to scientists on the payroll. Honoured more than participation or deliberation, expertise derives from the ability to purchase and direct scientific inquiry, to avoid the scientific process of transparent replication and to gain closed legal authority over the findings. This confusion of expertise with authority lays the necessary groundwork for denigrating open deliberation even among scientists, but especially for shunning democratic decisions about application of the science or its public policy outcomes.

Private interest equals public interest

The second major aspect to the core ideology of philanthrocapital rule is the explicit confusion of the billionaire's private interests with collective interests or even the collective good. The ideology simply declares that by pursuing one's private ideas of how to place money, one is contributing to the collective good. Adam Smith's theory that pursuing self-interest may contribute to the public good has long been taken out of context and distorted. His first celebrated book was not *The Wealth of Nations* (1763) but *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Revealing strong reservations about the behaviour of wealthy elites of his time, Smith's full argument sets serious preconditions for his proposal that pursuing one's self-interest may contribute to the general welfare of society. Commenting on ethics and economic liberalism, Jerry Evensky explains: 'Only in a community of ethical individuals can the invisible hand do its job properly, for it is ethics that keeps the hands of individuals from disabling, and thus distorting the actions of, the invisible hand'.[22] According to Smith, therefore, only in the context of free competition (not global cartels) and a system of social justice (promoting equality) can the invisible hand promote general welfare.[23] Linsey McGoey designates this ideology as distinguishing philanthrocapitalism:

> I argue that what is most novel about the new philanthrocapitalism is the openness of personally profiting from charitable initiatives, an openness that deliberately collapses the distinction between public and private interests in order to justify increasingly concentrated levels of private gain.[24]

In part, this new attitude may come from the narrow Silicon Valley experience that electronic expertise facilitates communication among all, from Microsoft platforms to Facebook. But many will still find it difficult to follow that argument into the realms of 'for profit' secondary schools or privatising indigenous seeds that have been freely shared by farmers. McGoey names it well: the 'capitalisation of self-interest itself, the questionable upholding of self-interest as something indistinguishable from collective abundance'.[25] Self-interest takes on a value (capitalisation) within the programme promoted by the foundation. It stands alone, with little or no effort to integrate the ruling self-interest into others involved in the programme; it alone may define success or failure. This approach suggests philanthrocapitalism is surpassing neoliberalism, which at least had to claim its conditionalities were for the general good. Philanthrocapitalism is declaring the billionaire's self-interest *is* the collective good.

Internal rule of foundations: the practice of ideology

The third component of the core ideology of philanthrocapitalism, well-practiced in their foundations' internal governance, is to promote and enshrine expertise over democracy. It is an old dichotomy, more ancient than even Plato's dialogue in *The Republic* (Book VI) giving an elevated position of philosopher-kings over the *demos*. Expertise is preferred over democracy in the name of efficiency or effectiveness. Bill Gates is candid about what he prefers; in referring to his financing charter schools in the USA, he explained: 'Public education is … very resistant to change. The best results have come in cities where the mayor is in charge of the school system. So you have one executive, and the school board isn't as powerful'.[26]

Another step toward debating the instruments of philanthrocapital rule includes reminding ourselves how foundations themselves conduct their internal affairs. Across decades, scholars investigating the internal governance of large foundations have found comparable patterns, including that the trustees are accountable to no one outside their domain.[27] Deliberation is private and highly guarded, as the trustees seem to trust only themselves. Further, a board of trustees may enjoy perpetual existence, never voted out or fired by anyone outside their privilege. That this rule is presented today as a normal business practice for institutions handling more money than many governments signals their looming power against those elected governments.[28]

Laws do regulate some aspects of the foundations. In the USA, any business expecting a non-profit status (501.c(3)) from the US government must publish an annual financial report and cannot lobby or directly finance partisan causes. It must disperse 6% of its endowment every year, but what counts in that percentage allows considerable private discretion, encompassing luxury business travel and salaries of its own employees. A foundation may hold as much as 20% of the stock in a private corporation, but cannot 'self-deal' or engage in transactions with 'disqualified' persons, such as its own board members. These terms allow the Gates Foundation to invest in Monsanto's GMO research. Non-profit foundations pay only 2% excise tax on their net investment income and receive a tax deduction for each dollar donated, according to their official tax bracket. For the wealthier, that means a tax write-off of 39.6%. For the Gates Foundation, therefore, about 40% of what it allocates, while maintaining full control, comes from what would have been in American public coffers, for which citizens would be debating and choosing expenditure priorities.

Other governments' laws vary. Swiss law allows the Syngenta Foundation to fund scientists whose research agendas directly benefit the profits of the parent corporation. What merits as scientific investigation radically narrows if the first priority is profit. Tolerated and endorsed by governments, the approach used by philanthrocapitalists sees little difference in how they look at their investment portfolios versus their philanthropy. Further, many brag they have no 'socially-responsible' criteria (e.g. refusing to invest in a corporation that is strip-mining or exploiting child or prison labour) for their foundations' investments, from Warren Buffett, Howard Buffett, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg. McGoey's study summarises: 'What's novel today is the outspoken way that powerful donors admit and even champion the fact that *gift-giving is a useful vehicle for preserving privilege*, something that distinguishes them from earlier donors'.[29]

Those promoting philanthrocapital business practices to alleviate social problems rarely, if ever, admit the internal hierarchical command within their foundations. It is a ruling practice quite ordinary and normal to the trustees; under evolving philanthrocapitalism, those trustees are retaining control of the financial allocations they extend into public institutions. Yet trustees or CEOs of public agencies function under very different internal rules that require open participation and transparency; they negotiate within deliberative democracy every day. The next section analyses how philanthrocapitalism is transforming these public practices into its own image of hierarchical, top-down rule. They are not simply extending efficient business practices into public institutions; they are demanding that internal 'business rule' replace public deliberations.

Instruments of philanthrocapital rule

Instrument I: reducing participation

Because narrowly constructed expertise or authority is more highly valued than multiple voices of diversity, it is not difficult to advertise consent from the very few as full consensus. One way to understand philanthrocapital rule is to listen closely how consent, which includes subordination and acquiescence (especially, silencing dissident populations), transforms into consensus. With its financial power to exclude, philanthrocapital rule defines who is worthy of giving consent. Others may be summarily silenced.

In the field of food production, those who have been most silenced and ignored are smallholder farmers working under five hectares. These African farmers are relegated to the subordinate nomenclature of 'subsistence' farmers, although statistical findings conclude smallholders feed 70–80% of the world's population.[30] These successful farmers are excluded by the Gates Foundation as 'stakeholders' in AGRA, because philanthrocapital rule values economies of scale for large-scale food production linked to the global market. Further, profit is the most important characteristic of any globally marketed seed, silencing farmers who breed for several characteristics from stability to palatability to short germination times to minimal water needs, and more. Therefore, these farmers are not consulted, not part of the debates, absent from the five-star hotel conferences and numerous workshops. Those who receive financing interact to further enshrine the priorities, advancing focused debates.[31] Those not participating are not stakeholders but rendered marginal as subsistence farmers.

Table 1. Distribution of US maize crop.

	People (%)	Cars (%)	Livestock (%)
2000	90	5	5
2013	15	40	45

The dominant measure of success, for example among those growing crops for the global market, is yield per hectare. Heralding that single indicator allows international policy-makers and agribusiness to call smallholder farmers 'unsuccessful' and to ignore them. But if one simply changed the measure of success to *nutrition density per hectare*, they would rise to the top as the most qualified farmers.[32] The farmers promoted by agribusiness would fall to the bottom, for their yields are of low plasticity of one variety of one specie, providing little genetic or nutritional biodiversity across thousands of hectares. Further, they do not provide food security; they are selling to global cartels who use food for speculative commodity markets or for ethanol, now feeding cars more than humans. The US maize crop offers a stark example (see Table 1).[33]

Making ethanol from maize requires more energy than the ethanol provides. Yet, over an alarmingly short period of 13 years, feed for livestock and cars is displacing direct consumption of US maize by humans. Further, feeding maize to livestock and cars increases greenhouse gas emissions.

Smallholder farmers never say AGRA and its allies are all wrong; they would like to learn from the high-tech seed breeding. It is the Gates Foundation's AGRA which is trying to remove the farmers as participants, disqualifying them as stakeholders in scientific and policy discussions. Their voices, as diverse as their crops, would confound clear results required by Gates' programmes. AGRA does not entertain the ideas that highly diverse crops, multiple farming systems (including communal land use) and micro marketing systems might be viable options for local food security across an ecologically diverse continent. Such cacophony does not provide the crop genetic uniformity required for Wall Street profits derived from selling large quantities of uniform seeds, fertilisers and pesticides.

Instrument II: centralising control

Under evolving philanthrocapitalism, centralising control goes well beyond any national government to the centre of the relevant global cartel, which varies according to sectors. In food production, just six corporations control each sector: pesticides, fertilisers, farm equipment, private seed research, grain trading. For the global seed market, Monsanto, Syngenta and Dupont control 55%.[34] These cartels advocate 'harmonisation' of seed laws for greater efficiency in distribution, labelling it free trade. However, if the sector has only three big players, trade is neither free nor fair, for they can and do collude about price setting, product selection and limits to codification of safety standards. Eastwood calls it 'the current logic of global capitalism, with its goal … to place ultimate decision-making power about resource use outside of the purview of institutions of global governance'.[35]

A predominant example in agriculture is the organised drive to make governments adopt UPOV91 (Union for the Protection of Plant Varieties) into their own laws, as a way to facilitate the movement of seeds through customs requirements. Across the African continent, ARIPO (African Intellectual Property Office) repeatedly convenes meetings, partnered with AGRA, to promote harmonisation of seed laws within a region. UPOV91 is trying to impose the familiar uniformity of 'one size fits all' across the vast genetic diversities of the continent. It weakens or removes the ability of governments to exercise biosafety laws to protect locally bred varieties.

The centralising forces of this law are expressed in several ways, echoing the reduction of participation within philanthrocapital rule discussed above. UPOV91 only recognises seed breeders who produce 'distinct, uniform and stable' (DUS) seeds. Farmers' seeds, most often bred in the fields, do not qualify as DUS; therefore, by definition, farmers are not 'seed breeders'. UPOV91 is trying to deny thousands of years of agronomic history of farmers as breeders of our current food diversity. It removes farmers as participants at all levels of seed breeding policy-making.

Furthering centralised control, UPOV91 would set up administrative tribunals to adjudicate disputes over the transfer of seeds. Borrowed from the Chapter 11 tribunals of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), these UPOV91 tribunals would ignore any questions of conflict of interest. Members of the panel adjudicating the dispute are chosen for their expertise, not their jurisprudence acumen or training. Representatives of foreign seed companies, for example Monsanto or DuPont, could sit on a UPOV91 Southern African tribunal to rule about a seed regulation that affects their parent corporation, not even located in the region. Further, as an administrative tribunal, it does not allow judicial review or the right of appeal.

This regulatory centralisation would become so complete as to remove government sovereignty over national genetic resources, violating international laws in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA). These types of administrative tribunals ruling over genetic wealth could become as hierarchical and authoritarian as the internal rule of the foundations discussed above.

Centralisation of rule often requires delimiting the rights of others who may voice or enact differences from that rule. UPOV91 fulfils that promise by removing farmers' rights to save, exchange, experiment with or plant any seeds. These rights are enshrined in international law to recognise the vital contribution of farmers in breeding food diversity over centuries. But UPOV91 violates these treaties (ITPGRFA and the CBD Nagoya Protocol) by trying to transform farmers' rights into farmers' privilege. Only the seed breeder, whose plant varieties are sealed away from others for 20 years by the UPOV91 plant variety protection (PVP) regime, can extend a farmer the 'privilege' of access to the germplasm. Farmers' rights are also recognised as indigenous rights by many African constitutions, which UPOV91 would therefore violate.

Philanthrocapital rule, exemplified by UPOV91, removes all three of the following from the very peoples who first bred the genetic resources over centuries: (1) participation in seed policy-making; (2) judicial review of dispute settlements in seed exchange; and (3) human (farmers') rights. One might argue the Gates Foundation could be as totalitarian as it pleases with internal rule over its proprietorial cash,[36] but it would be very difficult to justify that 'business rule' over others' genetic treasures. However, the Gates Foundation and its allied agribusinesses are trying to legalise this seed regime across the African continent. For those in the North, they are trying to make this rule look 'normal' as efficient business practice. In fact, it is autocratic rule, similar to the private regimes within large foundations. However, African genetic wealth resides in the public domain.

Instrument III: leveraging public resources

Neoliberalism is well exposed for privatising government institutions: parastatals producing steel, health clinics and schools, extension services for farmers who provide national food security. This third instrument of philanthrocapital rule extends way beyond these waves of privatisation to tap remaining public funds for their private goals. Venture capital applauds the act of 'leveraging' others' funds as smart investment. What it means on the ground, or in the ground with seeds, is that a philanthrocapital foundation will offer a 'tied grant' to propel a project in one direction, toward a goal defined by the foundation, such as food security. But as soon as possible, the foundation leverages governments' funds to finance this project, still directed toward private goals and gains, but all in the guise of 'improved x' (improved seeds, more efficient seed exchange – all for greater food security).

From 2008–2010, the Gates Foundation through AGRA and its allies systematically reorganised the CGIAR (Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research) complex of international seed banks. On the African continent, ICRISAT (International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics) and IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) are called to serve AGRA, not the reverse. For example, ICRISAT-Matopos used to provide smallholder farmers with new strains of sorghums and millets (e.g. a few kilogrammes) to grow out (a few tonnes) according to certification standards, to sell to local seed companies (breeder seed > foundation seed > certified seed). Offering foundation seed to grow out into larger quantities was an excellent example of benefit sharing back to farmers, recognising they had provided the parent genetic materials that ICRISAT seed breeders used. After the Gates Foundation became involved, foundation seed bred by its scientists made available for outgrowing went to the highest bidder, changing 'benefit sharing' to a simplistic cash transaction at volatile prices.[37] Smallholder farmers now must outbid larger commercial growers if they want to continue their successful local entrepreneurial business of seed multiplication.

More serious, the annual reports of ICRISAT and other international seed repositories of CGIAR do not recognise the seeds they conserve: not as assets, nor as inventories in their cost accounting. The annual budgets are silent about the vast wealth of genetic resources held available for CGIAR access. One searches in vain – across sorghums, millets, maize, wheat, rice, and more – for the international public gene banks, with about 710,000 accessions,[38] to register their precious genetic troves as assets or inventories. Although these genetic resources are the future of human food, the annual reports and financial reports do not even mention them. Only cash (financial capital) appears.[39] Not recognising natural capital (germplasm) gives a false and partial accounting of the gene banks, rendering the philanthrocapital donor as the most important. If annual reports and annual cost accounting *do not mention* the natural capital of germplasm – the very essence of international gene banks – then the cash from the Gates Foundation becomes all important.

The farmers providing genetic wealth disappear once again. To summarise, the farmers as seed breeders disappear: (1) by definition under UPOV91 rule; (2) by overt exclusion from seed policy-making at national, regional or international levels; (3) as cultivators of foundation seeds into commercial seeds under reorganisation of the CGIAR consortium of international seed banks; and (4) via the business accountancy of these seed banks that enumerates only cash flows in annual reviews, totally ignoring the natural capital of seeds donated by farmers. These empirical examples from seeds in the food sector illustrates how philanthrocapitalism is taking charge of public institutions well beyond requesting efficient business practices. Foundations finance the philanthrocapital instruments (reducing participation, increasing global centralisation, leveraging public finances) that impose autocratic business rule within the public sector, in order to capture genetic resources produced and shared by local farmers.

Southern African farmers' resistance

Although smallholder farmers everywhere rarely have spare cash, they are highly successful bankers of other forms of capital: social, intellectual, natural and human. According to a UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) study including sub-Saharan Africa, 'on-farm agricultural capital stock represents 84% of total average annual investment',[40] demonstrating that smallholder farmers provide their own re-investment for the next season. Always short of cash, their four-fifths share of total investment in their farms represents these other forms of capital: social (organising), intellectual (indigenous knowledge), natural (living organisms) and human (labour mobilising). Analysing all five forms of capital, as explained by the relatively new field of ecological economics,[41] helps us to begin to understand the strength of the alternatives offered by smallholder farmers: they are masters of four of the five. It is just that philanthrocapitalists measure success mainly with cash; however, they do know the value of the other four because they are working hard via programmes like AGRA to capture that value from the smallholders (commodification, financialisation).[42]

In contrast to the bankers of finance capital, however, farmers share their wealth of knowledge of genetic resources. Southern African farmers' resistance rejects the controlling instruments (reducing participation, centralising power through uniform laws that delimit rights, leveraging public funds for private gain) of philanthrocapital rule by *actively employing the opposite* across their farming communities. Their organisations increase participation through sharing and decentralising food production and consumption. Further, sharing seeds and indigenous knowledge expands the public wealth of natural and intellectual capital, the opposite of leveraging public wealth for private gain. This section analyses organising activities of farmers' networks across Southern Africa, an area of expertise for this author. But many similar activities exist across the continent, and all are linked in efforts to transform international agricultural policies as another way to resist philanthrocapitalist attempts to impose autocratic business rule on to African food systems.

Participatory plant breeding (PPB)

The concept and process of PPB is as ancient as farming but it is gaining international recognition, emerging from problems that commercial plant breeders and their corporate sponsors have not been able to resolve.[43] Commercial plant breeders treat farmers as 'end users' or passive 'consumers' waiting for the next seed. This view results in farmer adoption rates of only about 30% of the newly marketed commercial seeds (for sorghum, much less at 10%). Southern African farmers, outside South Africa, still save or share locally about 80% of their seeds, the exception being maize. This resistance over decades to commercial seeds reflects the decisions of smallholder farmers that those seeds do not serve their needs and are not worth the expense. The industry regularly labels the farmers 'uninformed' or 'reluctant to change'.[44] Both agree that farmers are 'risk adverse' to seeds that might not grow well in their micro-climates (especially if one cannot provide the requisite fertilisers/pesticides or water at exactly the right times), do not offer the characteristics they are seeking, and require cash expenditure, and therefore possibly debt, to purchase.

In contrast, what farmers in Southern Africa are doing is mobilising the other forms of capital (natural, intellectual, social, human) over which they do have control. PPB can cultivate a selection of locally adapted and heterogeneous varieties and, equally important, release them without any 'value chains' of centralised control. The farmers make local selections, grounding their choices in indigenous knowledge, field experience of multi-location trials and on-farm characterisation of germplasm – addressing the needs of a broad range of seed cultivators.[45]

PPB recognises farmers as co-researchers who can select germplasm, make crosses and plan trials to direct the process of seed multiplication.[46] Their scientific work does not falsely separate the laboratory from field testing (the site where commercially bred seeds often fail). As Pimbert states:

> There is a strong need to 'democratise' the governance of food and agricultural research – to take a fair and inclusive approach … [that] recognises that technological fixes are not enough and sees science as part of a bottom-up, participatory development process in which citizens take centre stage.[47]

Collective actions share knowledge (intellectual capital), teach new skills (human capital), enhance biodiversity and genetic plasticity of local crops (natural capital) while providing ready diffusion (social capital) of ideas and seeds across local communities. None of these important achievements may be commodified or financialised into a cash value, but their creation of wealth is material. Paul Mason, in his analysis of 'postcapitalism', sees these sharing (economists call it 'non-rival') activities of research, production and exchange as more than resistance: 'The proliferation of these non-market economic activities is making it possible for a cooperative, socially just society to emerge.'[48]

Not every effort at PPB works well, but this process – in the context of commercial seed failures through two green revolutions coming from outside the African continent – also fully demonstrates that African smallholder farmers are far from 'subsistence farmers'. Their shared knowledge and cultivation of new varieties assist in adaptation to climate change. Their planting fields with 20 and more varieties (nutrition density) show the way for greater nutrition. Enhancing PPB process is both a form of political action and a practical technological solution to genetic erosion.

Community seed banks

Local communities own and manage their own seed banks, electing the seed bank leaders for a designated term.[49] The community may also select one or two farmers as seed breeders, designating land for propagation of larger quantities of selected seeds. Members decide the varieties to outgrow (*in situ* conservation) and the ones to conserve in plastic containers (*ex situ*) in the small seed bank building. The building is constructed fully by the community, using their labour and materials, with non-governmental organisations only providing what is not locally available, perhaps cement or plastic containers. Communities donate only farmers' varieties for the seed repository, with members setting storage conditions and lending protocols.[50]

One can borrow a small quantity of seed (highly dependent on size, i.e. beans versus miniscule amaranth seeds), only asked to return, after the harvest, more than what was borrowed. If the crop fails, there is no 'debt' for the borrower, but s/he will be encouraged to participate in a farmer field school to produce better next season, even in a drought. As Berg points out, the seed banks not only save seeds but, like banks, they put their [natural] capital to work through lending.[51] Through these practices, conservation is not separated from production or seed supply, and farmers' varieties are maintained and improved.

Community seed banks – highly participatory and decentralised to local communities – are critical in reducing genetic erosion from the aggressive promotion of 'improved' varieties from such interests as AGRA. According to the Ethiopian geneticist and recognised leader of African seed bank formations, Melaku Worede, a serious threat to African food security is replacement of indigenous farmers' varieties by genetically uniform crop cultivars, ones that require changes in agricultural strategies including changes in land use.[52] Given these threats, on-farm conservation via community seed banks offer alternative practices for extending sustainable use of farmers' varieties.

Farmer field schools

As documented by Braun and Duveskog,[53] over 87 countries and different organisations have assisted in graduating 10–20 million farmers from farmer field schools, across Africa, Asia, Latin America and West Asia, because they are critical as a medium for facilitating transfer of science, technology and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) across agricultural systems. They are so widespread that corporations also use them to teach selected farmers how to cultivate their latest commercial seed.

In Southern Africa (outside South Africa), however, farmer field schools are most often defined and run by the participants who choose their topics of interest and, especially, the methods of discovery-based learning they prefer. Meeting once a week, their classrooms are the fields. The topic can easily change from the planned discussions because a pest has arrived in the fields or a receding storm was far more adverse than predicted. This approach emphasises hands-on field learning, premised on collective, deliberative solving of problems. The schools mix gender and ages, where the younger ones learn farming practices but may be able to contribute with higher levels of education for other scientific problems. Widows can gain support from shared labour and also gain stature by teaching their farming expertise.

Farmer field schools provide the opportunity to share indigenous knowledge, often ignored or denigrated in other fora.[54] The debates are lively, often heated, sometimes only resolved at the end of the season when practices are tested in 'results-based' evidence. Farmer field schools provide the time and space for community empowerment through sharing of information and farmer experimentation and innovation. Highly democratic, field school participants decide the scientific priorities and agenda for investigation. Practical, farmer field schools provide political resistance to the philanthrocapital goal of rendering farmers as simply consumers of seeds bred to enrich a few corporations.

Ways forward

These farmer practices work with nature, on the ground and in the ground, but for them to be taken up by international policies requires stepping away from their dismissal and denigration by corporations, by many governments and, certainly, by 'donors'. One can readily see from the brief discourse above how PPB, community seed banks and farmer field schools are not attractive to AGRA and its commercial seed breeders: financial profit is insufficient to feed Wall Street. However, all three practices greatly enhance social capital (participation), human capital (increased skills), intellectual capital (indigenous knowledge) and natural capital (biodiversity of food crops, higher nutrition). These communities are providing local, biodiverse, nutritious food.

By understanding the trajectories of philanthrocapitalism in surpassing neoliberalism and by debating its actions to enforce a business rule – that destroys participation, increases centralising control and leverages public resources for private gain – scholars can join smallholder farmers in resistance. Our theories can begin to acknowledge what is already operative among many networks of smallholder farmers across the African continent. If we debate only the global market of 'food value chains', based in narrow and secret corporate seed breeding, we may better understand philanthrocapitalism. But we will miss other productive and scientific practices providing resource and exchange alternatives for biodiverse foods. Our theories need to acknowledge and debate these farmer alternative *practices*, because they offer the future of food.

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Note on Contributor

Carol Thompson, Professor Emerita of Political Economy at Northern Arizona University, USA, has worked on issues of food sovereignty in Southern Africa for three decades. She works regularly with Community Technology Development Trust's support of farmers' organising community seed banks and participatory plant breeding. She returns home to work for change in American policies toward food production. Professor Thompson has consulted on issues of genetically-modified organisms and biopiracy for diverse groups, from the Zapatista Governing Council (Mexico) and the Union of Medical Professionals (Costa Rica) to Peking University. She taught at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and the University of Zimbabwe in the field of international environmental policy. Her most recent book is co-authored with Andrew Mushita, *Biopiracy of Biodiversity – International Exchange as Enclosure*.

Notes

1. Other terms are used, such as 'venture philanthropy' or 'strategic philanthropy'. This study employs the term 'philanthrocapitalism' because the concept invokes more than a single transaction or relationship, but rather, a systemic change, as will be discussed, to employ huge sums of private capital for solving social problems using business methods (Edwards, *Small Change*). Not every foundation engages in these practices; the term designates large foundations that proudly advocate venture philanthropy.
2. Edwards, "Impact, Accountability, Philanthrocapitalism"; Laurie, "Who Lives, Who Dies"; Ravitch, "Reign of Error"; Reckhow, *Follow the Money*; Wiist, *Bottom Line or Public Health Tactics*.
3. For the African continent, starting with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), Berg, *Accelerated Development,* critiqued by Loxley, "Berg Report"; more generally, Peck et al., "Postneoliberalism"; Wanner, "New 'Passive Revolution'"; Mitchell and Sparke, "New Washington Consensus."

4. Graziano "FAO Calls for Paradigm Shift"; IPFRI, *Global Food Policy*.
5. According to David Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism,* 2: 'Neoliberalism is … a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade'.
6. Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism;* Fairhead et al., "Green Grabbing"; Thompson, "Philanthrocapitalism."
7. Mushita and Thompson, *Biopiracy of Biodiversity*.
8. UNCTAD, *Global Value Chains*.
9. Spanjers, "Illicit Financial Flows," 2.
10. ICIJ, *Panama Papers*.
11. Kar and Spanjers, *Illicit Financial Flows*, 15.
12. Oxfam, *Economy for the 99%*, reports in 2017 that eight individuals control as much wealth as the bottom 50% of the planet's population.
13. For an overview of the ideology of philanthrocapitalism, see Wilson, "Fantasy Machine"; Smith, "Imaginaries of Development."
14. Holmes, "Biodiversity for Billionaires"; Kaufman, "Let Them Eat Cash"; Morvaridi, "Capitalist Philanthropy."
15. National Research Council, *Lost Crops of Africa*.
16. Nteza and Gandure, "Migration and Adaptation Strategies"; Thompson field work with Community Technology Development Trust, Southern Africa, 2010, 2012, 2014–2015.
17. Broad, "Billionaires with Big Ideas," 1.
18. Morey, "The Right Way and the Wrong Way," 1.
19. *Nature*, No Science Left behind.
20. DeFrancesco, "Behind Closed Doors," 531.
21. Eck, "Confidential Business Information."
22. Tabb, *Reconstructing Political Economy*, 39.
23. Sackrey et al., *Introduction to Political Economy*, 26, 42–43.
24. McGoey, *No Such Thing as a Free Gift*, 187.
25. McGoey, *No Such Thing as a Free Gift*, 198.
26. Barkan, "Charitable Plutocracy."
27. Clotfelter and Ehrlich, *Philanthropy and Nonprofit Sector*; Dowie, *American Foundations*; Sealander, *Private Wealth & Public Life*.
28. Goss, "Policy Plutocrats"; Northcott, "Artificial Persons against Nature"; Vandenbergh, *Emergence of Private Environmental Governance.*
29. McGoey, *No Such Thing as Free Gift*, 24 (emphasis added).
30. Africa Progress Panel, *Grain, Fish, Money*, 59–60.
31. Morris et al., "Global Need for Plant Breeding"; Thompson field research with Community Technology Development Trust, Southern Africa, 2014–2015.
32. Oxfam, *SEEDS GROW*.
33. Tabulated from Conca, "It's Final."
34. ETC Group, "Breaking Bad," 4–5, 9.
35. Eastwood, "Resisting Dispossession," 1.
36. As discussed above, others would disagree, because in the US a substantial portion of every tax-exempt foundation's wealth, 39.6% at the top tax bracket in 2016, is diverted each year from the public treasury, where citizens could influence its use.
37. Thompson, participant observation, ICRISAT-Matopos, Zimbabwe meeting, 2010.
38. CGIAR, "Genebanks," 1.
39. Author primary research of financial and annual reports of ICRISAT, IRRI, CIMMYT, and Africa Rice Centre, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2015.
40. Lowder et al., "Who Invests in Agriculture," 19.
41. www.isecoeco.org
42. Thompson, "Philanthrocapitalism."
43. Andersen and Winge, *Realising Farmers' Rights*; SEARICE, *Pathways to Participatory Farmers*.

44. AGRA, "2016 Year in Review," 37; Mabaya et al., *Africa Agriculture Status,* 55–57.
45. Community Technology Development Trust, *Field Guide for Farmers' Field Schools*.
46. Mbozi, *Community-Based Seed Production*; Sperling et al., "Framework for Analysing Participatory Plant Breeding"; Sanghera et al., "Participatory Plant Breeding."
47. Pimbert, "Putting Farmers First," 2.
48. Mason, *Postcapitalism*, 143.
49. Mbozi, *Community-Based Seed Production.*
50. Thompson field work with Community Technology Development Trust, Southern Africa, 2010, 2012, 2014–2015; Feyissa, "Community Seed Banks."
51. Berg, "Community Seed Bank."
52. Worede, "Establishing Community Seed Supply System."
53. Braun and Duveskog, "Farmer Field School Approach"; Rusike et al., "Impact of Farmer Field Schools."
54. Wakeford et al., "Perspectives."

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