

Chapter 3: Our Relationships with Thieves at the End of the World

The Thief

Great to see you all here today as we roll out our Sustainable Intensification Revolution. I know many of you worry about the supposedly negative impacts of the Global Corporate Food Regime on the planet and what the misguided call social justice. But I'm here to tell you not to worry! We have plans for you!

Actually, two plans. But let's start with sustainable Intensification, whatever that means to you. Let me tell you what it means to us. Our number one goal is to grow our business. That means more ultraprocessed food, more meat, and more imported fresh vegetables on the side. To do that for you, we will continue to push indigenous and small farmers off their land so we can turn their tiny land holdings into vast plantations. We need to do that to let robotic tractors do their thing without having to bother with paychecks. With more genetically modified plants and livestock, along with ever more potent pesticides, herbicides, and hormones, we will grow as much corn and soybeans on as much land as we can get our hands on.

We want more meat so that every man, woman, and child who can afford our prices won't have to go to bed hungry. We will enter every market on the planet and buy all the public lands we can by corrupting governments of the Global South. Or if any of those backward nations get uppity and talk about domestic food sovereignty, we'll just speed-dial our good friends at the World Bank to tighten the screws on their colossal loan repayments. We have our government friends in the U.S. and Europe to watch our backs and not bother us with pesky environmental regulations. So, there it is. More economic growth. More profits. How great is that!

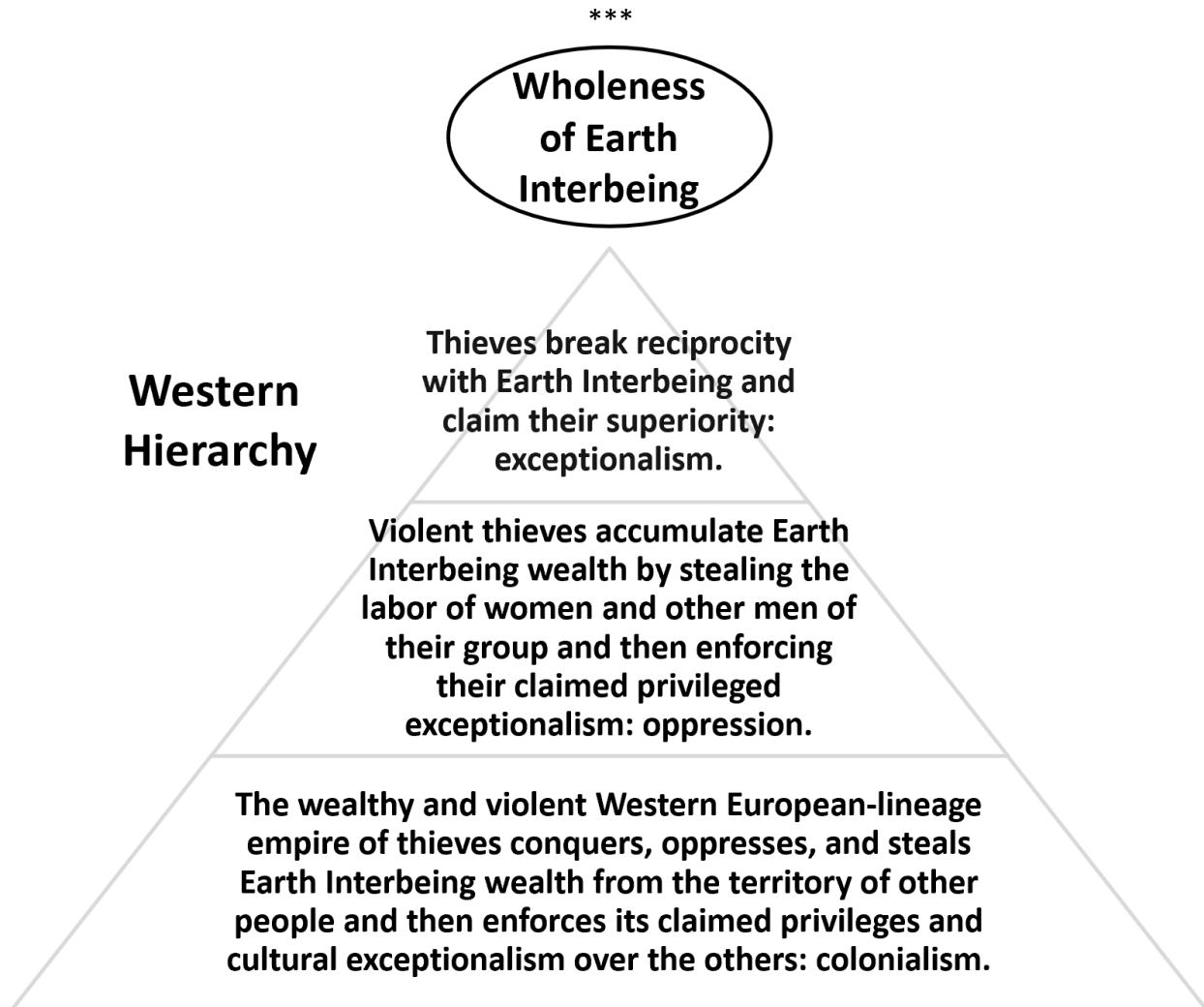
And now the second big announcement. We already have moved in this direction, but we now have the U.N.'s International Policy Climate Commission standing with us on this one (Deprez, 2024). We will partner in the great challenge to grow enough energy crops to fuel every car and plane on the planet by 2050! Please, no applause. Of course, we will have to convert a sizable chunk of land to do this – about three times the area of the United States, but hey! This is climate action writ LARGE.

Seriously, folks. The Global Corporate Food Regime wants you to know that we intend to bust our way right through global warming. Our drones, robots, hormones, patented seeds, chemicals, and even greater technologies yet to come will beat down whatever gets in our way. We have the best scientists that money can buy working for us day and night to make all this and more happen.

If something awful should happen, you know accidents happen, and we'll undoubtedly say that we're very sorry. But seriously, nothing to see here because we know deep inside us that the invisible hand of the market economy will make everything right. We used to say the sky's the limit. Now, we say real men have no limits *and* no liability.

So, let's put global warming and all this silly social justice gloom and doom talk into the rearview mirror and zoom into our techno-future in our biofueled SUV while munching on a great burger. Mmmmm. I can taste its incredible taste now.

That's it. I know you don't have any questions, so let's just mosey back to the tables and enjoy all the latest and greatest ultraprocessed foods. I challenge any of you to eat just one.



Please Note: The use of the word **we** in this chapter refers to those of us who hold more than \$1 million in wealth assets, the top 10% of the U.S. population, and the top 1% globally. In the U.S., the heart of the global corporate empire, we are primarily white and educated. Along with our wealthy counterparts in the rest of the world, we have the largest responsibility for the ongoing global corporate colonialism that causes the exploitation of other people, loss of biodiversity, transgressing Earth system limits, and global warming, a responsibility we ignore.

Others with less wealth than us certainly have adopted our Western consumer culture and thus harm others, life, and the Earth. But we as a group actively further Western colonialism and the growth economy by consuming far more than our share and protecting our privileges.

Young people and people with less wealth are victims of those with accumulated wealth. In this chapter, I clearly define my understanding of crime, the criminals, our motivation, and how we committed the crimes against all life and Earth.

Defining the Thief

Willingness to Harm Others for Self-Benefit and Then Ignore the Suffering Caused

All life takes from the Earth and other living beings to eat. Survival of life on Earth depends upon life adhering to the basic Earth Interbeing law of reciprocity, which requires life to give back for what it takes from the Earth Interbeing to restore its wholeness. This giving back for what we take preserves the community of life on Earth, ensuring endurance of community and resilience to changing conditions.

All life respects and adheres to the law of reciprocity, all except thieves. A thief steals what they want from others, causing their victims hardship, suffering, and even death. A thief willingly harms others for self-benefit and then ignores the suffering it causes, rejecting accountability for what it takes from others. Violent thieves kill.

The act of thievery separates one from another. We accept this separation from the Wholeness of Earth Interbeing because we keep the wealth we have stolen without having to give back what we have taken. Reciprocity prevents material wealth as the giving back of what we owe to the Earth Interbeing destroys accumulated wealth.

Thieves act violently. All oppression begins with violence and perpetuates itself through intimidation and extreme retaliation against resistance. We use violence to protect our exclusive rights of property, be it land, other people, other life, the Earth itself. We take from the Earth Interbeing without thought of repaying our enormous debt to it. Our lawlessness knows no bounds as we plunge deeper into planetary peril, even when surrounded with evidence that our ignorant ways lead to omnicide.

Many indigenous cultures have learned how to live reciprocally with other species in a living community, their balance with Earth Interbeing attested by their culture's survival for millennia. These living cultures have evolved ways in which they give back to the eco-community for what they take by minimizing what they take, sustaining the conditions needed for other beings they depend upon to thrive, teaching their young wholeness, and enacting sacred ceremonies and rituals. They adhere to the universal moral laws of reciprocity that applies to all Earth Interbeing interrelationships: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Western people behave like thieves when we harm others for self-benefit and then ignore the suffering we cause. We accumulate the wealth taken from others and consume as much of it as we can, ignoring how we destroy the very conditions upon which our lives depend. Westerners do not regard our relationship with the Earth and other life as important because we believe that our cleverness and technology will break through any limits imposed by Earth and life. The masters of the Western economy actively steer our gang of thieves armed with technology and weapons toward perceived opportunities that will further exceed planetary limits. If we destroy or exhaust one resource, we believe our cleverness and profit motivation will find another resource and technologies to replace it. We call this global colonialism.

Claiming Exceptionalism to Justify Our Thievery

The wholeness of Earth Interbeing arises from the interaction and cooperation of all life and Earth, the working together of unlike kinds toward a common goal of survival of life on Earth. Out of this complexity of interactions and interdependencies of the parts emerge, qualities that none of the parts

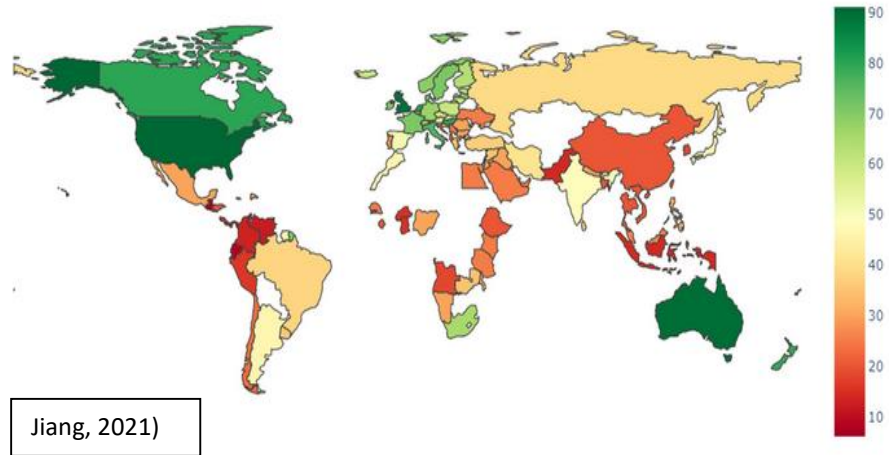
possess. We cannot think of wholeness as a sum of its parts. We cannot know the wholeness of Earth's Interbeing by studying its parts.

Thieves separate from this wholeness by breaking the law of reciprocity, the underlying commonality of the parts. We rationalize the emotional suffering we cause ourselves from this separation from the Earth Interbeing by claiming our superiority (exceptionalism) over Earth Interbeing and denying its wholeness, which thieves no longer have. Once we believe our lies about ourselves, it becomes easier to steal as now we feel we deserve what we take.

We justify the great wealth disparity between us and others because we have greater intelligence, creativity, capacity, and initiative to fulfill our potential. We define the standards and moralities of our culture that we expect others to obey, such as respecting and protecting our private property. Yet we do not hold ourselves to any such expectations as those that violently steal have such a high degree of superiority that we transcend moral limits.

In our times, the needs and interests of individuals precede a community, the bedrock belief of our culture and capitalism.

Individualists place their interests above those of the community and, as thieves do, impose what they want upon others with violence if necessary and then ignore the suffering caused. High levels of individualism are associated with environmental destruction and climate inaction nationally (Jiang, 2021).



Collectivism vs. individualism world map Note: The colored tape in the right part of the figure indicates the individualism index's value, with a larger number representing stronger individualism. Red in the figure indicates extreme collectivism and green indicates extreme individualism.

Western exceptionalism originates in the sharp distinction we make between us and them. We rank others according to their usefulness and exploitability. As the absolute observer, the center of the universe, we view all others as objects devoid of our great inherent worthiness and beauty, objects that exist only for our self-interest and are completely vulnerable to our exploitation and extraction. Westerners perceive others below our superior rank as tools, lacking goals of their own, feelings, and moral sensibilities. We view nonhuman life forms as bodies without consciousness or feelings and the Earth as lifeless. We hold or treat others below our rank as private property.

The Privileges of Thieves

Like thieves, Westerners have lawlessly claimed privileges that others do not have, especially those whom we kidnapped into slavery or subjugated through colonizing and land dispossession. Men for millennia have claimed privileges over women, a prejudice that Western men perpetuate within our culture and through global colonialism. Further, we privilege our culture over that of others – our property laws, science, standards of beauty, and the American way.

Privileges give us advantages that the unprivileged do not have, such as increased access to material resources, greater opportunities, social mobility connections, and access to emotional and physical health care. Voting rights, zoning laws, and limited access to basic needs are ways which Western outlaws use legal means to protect our privileges. Privileged thieves expect others to treat us with respect, yet we tend to ignore the crimes committed by our privileges.

Rarely do thieves give up our way of life. While global warming has no favorites, the privileged know that our wealth will protect us from suffering longer than those with fewer advantages. We choose to keep the global warming-causing system going as long as possible to prolong our way of life. Thus, we have the kind of climate action that avoids targeting the behaviors of the privileged thieves, those most responsible for global warming. We all know how angry privileged white people can get when you start treating us in ways we deserve.

When people act like thieves, disregarding natural limits and assuming unfettered dominion over the Earth and all life, the Wholeness of Earth Interbeing comes forward to assert its power against those who have violated its ways. Western colonialism now wages a great battle against the remaining indigenous people, all life, and the Earth itself to subdue all of Earth's Interbeing to our will. In this great battle, all people, all life, and the Earth suffer.

Our growing awareness that people cannot break the Law of Reciprocity and dominate the Earth's Interbeing opens us to wholeness.

Note 1: To review some of the many harms of the Global Corporate Food System, please follow this link:

<https://habitatforall.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Whats-on-Your-Plate-for-Dinner.pdf>

Note 2: Check out this summary of all the top-of-the-pyramid rationalizations people give who say they love animals but eat meat:

<https://habitatforall.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Excuses.pdf>

Study Questions

1. What do you feel about the land back movements of Black and indigenous people in terms of property rights?
2. Which of your privileges would you give up?
3. How do you imagine reciprocity might work within your own life?

Resource

Alexandra Deprez *et al.*, Sustainability limits needed for CO₂ removal. *Science* **383**,484-486(2024). DOI: [10.1126/science.adj6171](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adj6171)

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