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## New Earth Politics: Essays from the Anthropocene

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*New Earth Politics: Essays from the Anthropocene* ed. by  
Simon Nicholson and Sikina Jinnah (review)

Fariborz Zelli

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Beyond those minor stylistic points, the book was purposefully written to be accessible to both academics and development practitioners. Those looking for a well-structured overview of NGO-related theories will find it in chapter 2. For a comprehensive snapshot of the political, social, economic, and environmental contexts that have shaped and that characterize contemporary Cameroon, turn to chapter 5, which presents a gold mine of quality research for comparative studies. Each chapter is usefully summarized at the end for easy reference, and the final chapter is separated into two sections: one addressing academic readers interested in theory development, and the other outlining research-based recommendations for practitioners. Readers in the academy and beyond will appreciate the book's jargon-free style and clarity. It is worth checking out.

Nicholson, Simon, and Sikina Jinnah, eds. 2016. *New Earth Politics: Essays from the Anthropocene*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

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"We are the asteroid" (p. 5) claim the editors of *New Earth Politics* in their introduction. This expression encapsulates what united some of the leading researchers on global environmental governance in this volume. The result is sixteen "essays from the Anthropocene," an era that, for Simon Nicholson and Sikina Jinnah, "has the potential to be long and dark" (p. 4).

So far, so gloomy—and so familiar. Scholarly work on the state of the global environment, and the governance thereof, frequently provides us with neologisms and puns to capture an ever-growing interdependence and urgency.

But this volume is much more than a quest for language. It reaches out. Nicholson and Jinnah steer away from the mantras of the modern ivory tower, asking what an engaged scholarship looks like in times of extreme human-caused environmental stress. This challenge unfolds into two cross-cutting themes. One targets (inter)actions scholars should cultivate to instigate political and social change, within and beyond their offices and classrooms. The second theme solicits recipes for maintaining hope in the face of environmental decline.

For the literature on global environmental governance, such a normative and self-reflective tour d'horizon by leading scholars is unprecedented, and it makes reading *New Earth Politics* an unusual and rewarding experience. The difference is not only one of content, but also one of form. Owing to Nicholson and Jinnah's superb editing, the book's format mirrors their vision of scholarly interaction. For one thing, they asked their authors to write in a conversational style and to include own experiences. This personal touch, one hopes, will not only be of appeal to curious colleagues, but also reach a wider audience.

Most notably, the editors brought all of the contributors into a continuous dialogue throughout the writing process, which is visible in the pairing of

chapters into eight complementary couples. The first of these twosomes takes stock of the mess we are in and how we got there. The ensuing seven sections look ahead and discuss the roles of research, teaching, institutions, civil society, geopolitics, climate change, and narratives in the New Earth. All are informed by guiding questions that the editors establish in short introductions to each section.

While the pairings are not meant to be perfectly antagonistic, most of the sections exhibit “productive tensions” (p. 12) between skeptical and hopeful accounts. In the first section, Ken Conca’s reality check on deeply interwoven economic, social, political, and technological problems meets a description of a dawning green civilization that, as Daniel Deudney and Elizabeth Mendenhall imply, may just be up to the challenge. Likewise, Michael Maniates cautions against exaggerated ambitions of teaching hope, while Karen T. Litfin offers a remarkable inventory of contemplative methods through which teachers and students may support each other’s learning processes. Similar encounters between critical and optimistic outlooks mark the sections on civil society (Peter Jacques and Erik Assadourian) and geopolitics (Judith Shapiro and Joyeeta Gupta).

Other pairings instead discuss alternative individual or societal pathways. In the section on research, Oran R. Young’s outstanding achievements in both academia and politics encounter Richard Falk’s autobiographical combination of scholarship and citizenship. In the section on climate change, Navroz K. Dubash’s calls for multi-objective institutions to manage energy transformations, while Wil Burns and Simon Nicholson, in turn, draw attention to climate engineering, an emerging technology meant to render these very transformations unnecessary.

In other sections, the productive tension is at best one of scope and terminology. Kate O’Neill calls for a scholarship that better grasps the evolving institutional complexities of global environmental governance. Maria Ivanova largely shares O’Neill’s concerns, while zooming in on the role of the United Nations Environment Programme at the heart of this intricate landscape. Paul Wapner and Peter Dauvergne both celebrate the creative potential of a growth-skeptical counternarrative, christening it in their contributions either environmentalism or New Earth sustainability.

Of concern, however, are the chapters that are not there. Since Nicholson and Jinnah based their selection on key themes of current scholarship, contributions on businesses and cities would have deserved a place in this volume. A section on theories and methods would also have been useful. Such a section could have provided a fruitful controversy between different research schools, as illustrated by Maniates’ and Litfin’s cross-chapter dialogue on teaching approaches. Also, climate change is the only environmental challenge given the spotlight of a full section, although the editors rate toxification and biodiversity loss as equally important markers of the Anthropocene. All this said, the volume never claims to deliver an exhaustive overview or attempts to replace existing textbooks. Also, the emphasis on climate change is telling, for the good and

the bad, in that it echoes the dominant theme of global environmental governance research today.

Sometimes the editors' normative ambitions turn objectivistic, for instance when they speak of "doing the right things" and "making the best" (p. 2), or in Assadourian's call for "converting the environmental movement into a missionary religious force" (p. 247). Such occasional excursions contrast with the otherwise dialectic nature of the book, but they do not dampen it.

The interactive layout and great editing make *New Earth Politics* a role model for future scholarly debates on the Anthropocene. The new epoch, as Frank Biermann observes in his epilogue, comes with built-in controversies. New fault lines will produce new winners and losers. The challenge is to leave triple-win rhetorics behind without getting cynical, and to navigate creatively within the uncertainties and tensions that are here to stay. For Nicholson and Jinnah, their very own navigation "was a joy to write and edit" (p. xiii). What better way to keep up hope, as scholars and citizens, in a long and dark age?