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Review: Climate Change isn't Everything: Liberating Climate Politics from Alarmism

By Mike Hulme

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Hulme, M., *Climate Change isn't Everything: Liberating Climate Politics from Alarmism*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2023. 208 pp. ISBN: 9781509556151, \$69.95.

A prolific professor of geography at the University of Cambridge, Michael Hulme is the author of many memorable books, including *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* (2009). His latest, titled *Climate Change isn't Everything: Liberating Climate Politics from Alarmism*, follows a similar path and requires a strong dose of nuance from its reader: the author argues and repeats that climate change is an important issue, but there are simultaneously many other global issues that can be alarming in a short-term perspective, and people should firstly be wholly aware of these various and complex situations (wars and other conflicts, interreligious tensions, etc.). Another core idea in this book is that one should not automatically blame climate change for everything and for all global problems, for example, the case of massive and uncontrolled migrations from South to North. And finally, alarmism added to ongoing issues does not help in any sense and cannot accelerate solutions, and it is indeed part of the larger (and broader) problem of climate change.

An important and timely book, *Climate Change isn't Everything: Liberating Climate Politics from Alarmism* is divided into seven chapters. Intelligently, Mike Hulme introduces many interesting and relevant concepts such as ideologies, discourse analysis, argumentation, and rhetoric around the ongoing debates about climate change. For example, he conceives climate reductionism as an ideology, coined here as “climatism” (p. 8). The two neologisms “climate reductionism” and “climatism” are his own invention (p. 8). These new terms, and the following argumentation that comes with them, are the essence of his scientific contribution, brought with conceptual clarity and wit: “Climatism grows out of climate reductionism, but is more pervasive and insidious” (p. 8). The author adds that “at its most extreme, climatism uses the idea of climate change to ‘naturalize’ the problems of the world”, either in Ukraine or Afghanistan, as if

these international and multilateral issues were solely attributable to climate change, and nothing else (p. 8). As a consequence, the narratives are often constructed, based, and switched to a storytelling pattern in which the hazardous situations and their causes are pictured in the same fashion, cause, and explanation, founded only on climate change: “Thus all hurricanes and heatwaves, for example, become viewed as manifestations of the behavior of fossil-fuel companies, colonialism, capitalism, Amazonian loggers, rich meat-eaters or frequent-flyers, forgetting that hurricanes and heatwaves are natural features of the world’s climate” (p. 9). Even this broad formulation could possibly ignite attacks and counter-narratives from polarized opponents who cannot capture every nuance in his argumentation; so the author puts his thoughts in a clear and very nuanced way: “What I am doing in this book is arguing against the ideology of climatism with its narrow and reductionist field of view, and in favour of a more contextually sensitive, diverse, and pragmatic approach to incorporating the challenges of climate change into everyday politics” (p. 10). Aptly, Hulme observes that even when some inconsequential commentators are trying to analyze some of the dire conflicts in the Middle East, some of them will unduly attribute the ongoing wars and inter-ethnic conflicts in countries such as Syria on causes mainly related to climate change, instead of invoking a more complex and interrelated web of intertwined issues and narratives. Quite rewarding and well documented, the central portion is centered on the politics of climate change. In the last chapter, Hulme brings some opposite arguments into a larger debate of opposing ideas and clashing viewpoints related to climate change issues. He is quite a unique thinker, and his books should be translated into other languages.

In sum, Mike Hulme’s *Climate Change isn't Everything: Liberating Climate Politics from Alarmism* is a rigorous, inspired, thought-provoking book, that illustrates how a multifaceted debate can sometimes be (mis)understood, misperceived, debated in all directions, and be instrumentalized within the public sphere (p. 107). This strong book could simultaneously be used in domains within or beyond environmental studies and climate change studies, for example, and in geopolitics, of course, but also in philosophy of science and nature, sociology of the environment, narrative studies, media and discourse studies, and even in ideology studies.

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