

Radical **Middle** Newsletter

“Idealism Without Illusions”

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Issue No. 120-e (May 2009) -- Mark Satin,
Editor

Zakaria's humanistic pragmatism meets Hartzok's visionary idealism

Summary: For many people, *Newsweek International* editor Fareed Zakaria's *The Post-American World* goes as far as a “responsible” commentator can go in imagining a better world. But for economist and grassroots global activist Alanna Hartzok, writing from her eco-homestead in south-central Pennsylvania, Zakaria doesn't go nearly far enough; and in her book *The Earth Belongs to Everyone*, she outlines the positive, “highest values of right and left” agenda that the global justice movement has long needed.

I. Bring rising nations on board!



Fareed Zakaria is a man on a mission. He came to the U.S. at the age of 18 from India (where his father was an Islamic scholar), earned a Ph.D. at Harvard, served as managing editor of *Foreign Affairs* magazine, and is now editor of *Newsweek International* and host of a weekly global-affairs program on CNN (and serves on the boards of Yale University and the Council of

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Foreign Relations). And he's not yet reached the age of 45.

His mission is about more than self-advancement, though. It's to teach the U.S. that it doesn't have to be a bully to have profound influence in the world – exactly what he conveys with clarity and panache in his new book [The Post-American World](#) (Norton, 2008).

Zakaria likes the way the world is going (“Over the past few decades, countries all over the world have been experiencing rates of economic growth that were once unthinkable. . . . [T]he share of people living on a dollar a day or less plummeted from 40% in 1981 to 18% in 2004, and is estimated to fall to 12% by 2015”). He finds the U.S. basically healthy, too, though he laments our struggling urban school systems and worries along with other radical-middle thinkers that our political system seems to have “lost its ability to create broad coalitions that solve complex issues.”

What bothers him deeply is that – despite the sunny skies abroad and our own basic good health – we seem paralyzed by fear of the world and (for the first time) fear of the unknown. This has already affected our global behavior for the worse, he says, and may cause us to become even more belligerent and isolated and protectionist in the future.

His book is meant to remedy that. It is mostly a delightful and endlessly engrossing introduction to “the rise of the rest” – China and India especially, but also such potentially major nations as Brazil, Russia (again), Turkey, Indonesia, and South Africa. Fifty nations may be “basket cases” needing “urgent attention,” he says. But in the other 142 “the poor are slowly being absorbed into productive and growing economies. For the first time ever, we are witnessing genuinely global growth.”

Zakaria wants us to feel at ease in this new world. And he wants us to learn how to live in it in a way that will maximize our influence without causing us

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to harm either our own long-term interests or anyone else's valid interests.

To that end, he puts forth "New Rules for a New Age." These can give you the flavor:

- We can't do everything. Therefore, we should choose to focus on what's "truly important" (e.g., forging mutually beneficial long-term relationships with China and India) rather than on what's "seemingly urgent" (e.g., bringing U.S.-style democracy to the Middle East);

- Many emerging nations have divergent interests. We should strive to act as their "honest broker." That would involve forging close ties with each of them;

- The world is spontaneously developing a "bottom-up, networked order. . . . No one institution or organization is always right, no one framework ideal. The U.N. might work for one problem, NATO for another, the OAS for a third. And for a new issue like climate change, perhaps a new coalition that involves private business and nongovernmental groups would make the most sense." The U.S. should embrace such an "ad hoc order," which one former State Department official calls "a la carte multilateralism."

II. Bring everyone on board!

Alanna Hartzok might not oppose most of Fareed Zakaria's New Rules. But she would object to his sunny analysis of global and U.S. trends ("We are," she says, "living through yet another dark night of the collective human soul"), and she would find his rules woefully inadequate to the task at hand.

That task, she wants you to know – in her first book, [The Earth Belongs to Everyone](#) (Institute for Economic Democracy Press, 2008) – goes a lot deeper than coaxing the great powers to get along. Ultimately it involves discovering how we can heal our enormous "person / planet pain."

[Society, 1976, 1978 \(includes 1976 text PDF!\)](#)

OTHER PRIOR RADICAL MIDDLE TEXTS:

[50 Best "Third Way" Books of the 1990s](#)

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Politically, it involves forging permanent global institutions that would represent the poor majority ([Rothkopf-like counter-institutions](#) instead of – or alongside of – Zakaria’s ad hoc arrangements). Economically, it involves implementing “solutions to the needless material deprivation that so many suffer in a world that has plenty for all.”

For the world *does* have plenty for all. *Now*. And who are the Fareed Zakarias of the world to divert our comfortable selves from that uncomfortable fact?

Like Zakaria, Hartzok has been on a lifelong mission – a “25-year vision quest,” she calls it. It is not so different from Zakaria’s mission as either of them might think, but it took them down different byways.

Hartzok is a graduate of West Georgia College (though her schooling continued at the Institute of Psychosynthesis in Montreal, the Institute of European Studies in Vienna, and the Henry George School of Social Science in San Francisco, not to mention a school in Lebanon where she taught Palestinian refugees). Around the time Zakaria landed on these shores, Hartzok “bore two children in San Francisco, and then endured a period of personal poverty and homelessness” there.

A bit before Zakaria began running *Foreign Affairs* magazine in New York City, Hartzok began representing nonprofits at a dazzling variety of conferences around the world. About when Zakaria was establishing himself at *Newsweek International* and CNN, Hartzok was co-founding the [Earth Rights Institute](#) in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania (where she grew up) and creating “Aradhana,” a small eco-homestead there.

What have Hartzok’s experiences taught her? First and foremost, that we need something she calls Earth Rights Democracy – a new form of political economy “based on equal rights to the land and resources of the earth.” For as the title of her book proclaims, “The earth belongs to everyone.” It is

our birthright. And we should all benefit equally when others use it for private gain.

And if we all benefit equally, then we'll all be able to at least make a go of it financially. No more Council on Foreign Relations board members reassuring the wretched of the Earth that – so long as they're not in the 50 “basket case” nations (knock on wood) – they'll have only a couple of decades or generations to wait.

If you detect a little Henry George in Hartzok's analysis, you wouldn't be wrong, but it's Henry George radically updated for the 21st century.

Like George, Hartzok believes that the principal role of government – at all levels, municipal to global – is to capture “rent” for public benefit. But by “rent,” Hartzok doesn't just mean collecting the (unearned) increases in land values that landlords now receive simply by virtue of owning land in prosperous neighborhoods. She also means collecting monies whenever private entities

- fell trees on public lands,
- discharge pollutants into the air,
- mine oil and other minerals,
- access the electromagnetic spectrum,
- or do any of the other significant things that are done to this Earth, our home.

Bits and pieces of this have been proposed by reputable economists over the years. (It appears that the indefatigable Hartzok may have met them all, too!) Hartzok's genius has been to tie it all together into one shining “Earth Rights” package, and to draw out some of the exciting implications.

Among them: in the developing world, no more abject poverty (so long as there's a competent authority to collect and distribute the “rent” monies). In the U.S., the rent monies could substitute for most or all taxes on wages, investment income, and homes (and other buildings). Or the monies could go to individuals in the form of an annual “citizen's dividend.”

The most moving parts of this book are where Hartzok guilelessly describes her attempts to take the Earth Rights message to the far corners of the earth – from a meeting of the Millennium People’s Assembly Network in Bangkok, Thailand, to a Christianity and Human Rights Conference in Birmingham, Alabama; from the United Nations Habitat II Conference in Istanbul to the corridors of the Pennsylvania legislature (where she successfully lobbied to implement a tiny piece of her vision, authorization for municipalities to establish a “split-rate tax” on land and buildings).

Remarkably, the principal themes of ALL the texts discussed in [our year 2009 articles](#) are reflected in Hartzok’s book and life:

- Revesz and Livermore’s favorite cost-benefit analysts would swoon over Hartzok’s sophisticated, numbers-laden chapters on the advantages of the split-rate tax for Pennsylvanians (and would be pleased to know she used those numbers in her lobbying of the PA legislature);
- Hamilton’s sense of connectedness is beautifully captured in Hartzok’s chapter “A Friend of Mine Bombed a Friend of Mine” (Hartzok’s sponsor at an event at the U.S. Army War College turned out to have bombed the home town of an Iraqi friend she’d met at a U.N. conference);
- Rothkopf’s “superclass” is never far from Hartzok’s awareness, or ire;
- Shirky’s Web-based populism of the future is being acted out now by Hartzok’s Earth Rights Institute, a grassroots global networking organization run from her small homestead in south-central PA;
- *AmericaSpeaks*’s “wise democracy” is the very point of the U.N. “Second Assembly” that Hartzok supports . . . an advisory body (maybe more) that would consist of 500 reps from around the world who are all well versed in the “reason(s) for the person / planet pain” in their regions, as well as in

possible solutions;

- Chickering and Turner's "organic democracy" is well illustrated by Hartzok's persistent attempts to involve herself in her community – from serving as co-chair of the Housing Task Force of the Greater Chambersburg 2000 Partnership, to writing op-eds for the local newspaper, to speaking at local churches and colleges;

- Kleiner's business "heretics" would be the principal audience for several of the more dollars-and-cents oriented chapters in Hartzok's book;

- Yamada's "dignitarian" perspective is beautifully reflected in Hartzok's chapter "Who Owns the Earth?" (her short answer: We all do!).

III. Both / and

The world probably cannot advance without the humane pragmatism that sustained Fareed Zakaria during his long journey from a Muslim household in India to the Council on Foreign Relations. But it is probably also true that it cannot advance without the visionary idealism that sustained Alanna Hartzok during her long journey from homelessness to making the world her home.

Is it too much to wish that the next generation will put up leaders who can combine both gifts?

RE:SOURCES

Both authors discuss their key ideas online. For Alanna Hartzok, see [E.F. Schumacher Lecture at Amherst College](#) (text only); for Fareed Zakaria, see [interview on BBC WorldNewsAmerica](#) (YouTube videotape).

BOOK AWARD

Although I deeply admire all the books we've discussed from the year 2008, the 2008 **Radical**

Middle Political Book Award -- the [29th annual book award we've given out](#) (going all the way back to *Renewal* and *New Options* newsletters) -- goes jointly to Alanna Hartzok's *The Earth Belongs to Everyone*, above, and Lawrence Chickering and James Turner's [Voice of the People: The Transpartisan Imperative in American Life](#).