

Yet I can't help but feel there are legitimate initiatives that can be pursued within the existing capitalist society that may provide a smoother transition into more revolutionary solutions.

I put the book down questioning my own beliefs about what I think is the solution, and anxious about the downward spiral we are in. That feeling of uneasiness, yet desire to further investigate how I can be a part of a solution and what form that solution should take, is in itself reason enough to have read this book.

Keywords: socialism, capitalism, environmentalism

References

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Reviewer's Biography

Kate Neale is a researcher within the Centre for Children and Young People, at Southern Cross University. With a background in marketing and law, Kate quickly became disillusioned with the status quo and has been trying to use her powers for good not evil ever since. Her current research explores the relationship between children as citizens and their increasing status as consumers in both present and future marketplaces. With this knowledge she hopes to shed light on the real and potential impact and influence of children as consumer-citizens.

The Limits to Scarcity: Contesting the Politics of Allocation

Edited by Lyla Mehta

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Reviewed by Ranjan Kumar Datta

L. Mehta's book, *The Limits to Scarcity*, provides an opportunity to the reader to understand local and global crises and injustice through the contributions and experiences of different activists, scholars, and researchers. This volume's 14 papers by various international authors together create powerful narratives of a politicised, naturalised and universalised concept of scarcity. Understanding scarcity from alternative perspectives, the volume asks 'What exactly is scarce? When? Where? For whom? With what consequences?' (p. 165). Overall, the book provides a comprehensive understanding of the question of 'who gets access to what, when and how' (p. 88).

The flow and progression of the three sections work well, starting with political meanings of scarcity, turning then to the economic invention of scarcity, and finally considering scarcity in local and global policies. The authors engage readers politically and critically, deconstructing the neo-Malthusian concept of scarcity through water, food, and energy. In other words, they dismantle the political mobilisation of 'scarcity', suggesting that in fact there is more than enough for all, and that the problem is instead in the equal distribution of water, food, and energy through current political and economic systems. They not only challenge economic and development models' imposition of the idea of scarcity on both North and South, but they also change the reader's perceptions of the ways in which unequal social relationships and power practices, global over local practices, and the prevention of redistribution of limited resources are justified. In Part 3, Hildyard rightly argues that scarcity is a state product or tool which often misrepresents social reality. Both State economic/development models and the rules of scarcity move together to justify Malthusianism. The target is to (blame?) scarcity in producing poverty, environmental degradation, conflict and the like. Therefore, this book deconstructs the notion that 'scarcity is universalised and naturalised and it is convenient to stick to this simplified notion of scarcity' (p. 24).

The book does suffer from several weaknesses, including its density, diversity, theoretical complications, and replication. Its first obvious weakness is its failure to substantively deal with several concepts at a time. Various concepts like scarcity in terms of agriculture, water, and energy lead to distraction from its main target. A second and perhaps more serious weakness of the book is that it lacks concrete examples from people's everyday lives, which could lead to more in-depth findings regarding everyday traditional practices with land, water, and other resources (Escobar, 2010). Third, this book offers complicated theoretical concepts and discourse which may lead to readers' frustration rather than to creating new hopes or imaginations to counter socio-environmental injustice and dualism (McKenzie, Hart, Bai, & Jickling, 2009). The critical contributions may lead to multiple ways of understanding reality; however, they have not explained how to reconstruct alternative realities from the process of deconstruction. Finally, the replications of theoretical arguments by several authors can also be tedious for readers.

As an interdisciplinary environmental justice researcher/student who is personally engaged in ecological justice advocacy, I found the goal of this book to be timely and praiseworthy. This book is an important push towards a wider recognition of the social dimensions of water, energy, and agriculture as 'environmental' resources, and a useful counter to some of the more environmental determinist tendencies within environmental education literature. Mehta's critical understanding of 'scarcity' is a helpful guide for readers 'challenging dominant models [economic and development]' (p. 255). This book is also helpful for drawing '... new politics and imaginaries to create a more just world where resources are distributed equitably' (p. 255). *The Limits to Scarcity* is able to enhance readers' understandings in a way that welcomes different realities. It confronts the ways we see reality, the ways we interact, and the ways we justify social and ecological injustice. Moreover, I agree with Steve Rayner's argument in the foreword to the book, that 'this book's comprehensive critique of the totalizing discourses of scarcity that block such alternative modes of inquiry makes an excellent start' and it is a continuous process (p. xix). I am hopeful that some of the limitations, such as the lack of practice-based examples, lack of solutions, and replication, might be addressed in further editions.

The book includes a remarkable range of writings from Africa, North America, and South Asia. All of them trace the ways in which dominant models of scarcity have been mobilised to produce colonisers and colonised. Overall, the book is exciting in its

content, positioning, and arguments. It is an in-depth, critical, and comprehensive accomplishment. It raises readers' awareness regarding the totalising discourses of scarcity, or in other words, that scarcity has been constructed within historical economic and development models that have furthered and taken up 'scarcity' to their end. The authors of this book explicitly argue that the discourse of scarcity has a significant impact on '... how we think, speak and argue about nature, the environment, resources and sustainability' (p. 94).

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Reviewer Biography

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