

central reforms were implemented locally; on the other, we become witness to how the educational agents of the early 20th century exchanged the horse for the journey by foot – and how they did this in very different ways: cooperatively and reluctantly, with more or less coordination, and as both professionals and laymen. *The Emperor's New Schools* lets the reader participate in this journey.

Barbara Schulte

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ASSA DORON / ROBIN JEFFREY, *Waste of a Nation. Garbage and Growth in India*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018. 416 pages, 4 maps, €27.00. ISBN 978-0-6749-8060-0

Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey have set themselves the ambitious goal of delving into the many facets of India's waste issue. *Waste of a Nation* is the result of their tireless exploration, spanning an impressive range of spaces, practices and streams of waste across the subcontinent. The book presents a mosaic of outlooks on waste and its handling that carefully unfolds the complex challenges that India faces in its "encounter with the detritus of consumer capitalism" (p. 12). In doing so, it comprehensively portrays the extent of the problem, reflecting on both its magnitude and the variety of relations it involves, which are in several aspects particular to India.

The journey across India's waste material landscapes invites us to consider the formidable expansion of consumer goods that is eroding the country's traditions of frugality, taking us down manholes with sewer divers and along value chains as diverse as ship breaking and hair recovery. Emblematic trades of the informal economy of waste such as plastics and electronics are also described in detail. The authors discuss multiple aspects of India's waste and sanitary infrastructure, from the deadlocks in meeting the abysmal sewage challenges and the current government's struggles to end open defecation, to the recently built plants which attempt to deal with solid waste in accordance with the new legal frameworks. Actors and institutions are also subject to scrutiny. The historical, political and cultural difficulties of local governments are thrown into the balance, before the book concludes with an examination of the lifeworlds and narratives of various groups of actors involved in waste: first, its professionals – the engineers and managers entrusted by public administrations; second, the vast number of its handlers, toiling at the very bot-

tom; third, the networks of recyclers, bringing new life to waste; and finally, the NGOs and associations battling for waste handlers' dignity and showcasing practicable decentralised arrangements.

Whereas many of the challenges presented are not unique to India, Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey methodically bring our attention back and forth between the situation in the rest of the world and the issues specific to India, which considerably complicate matters for the country. On the one hand, India faces unprecedented levels of human and material density exacerbated by urban and capitalist growth. On the other hand, the practices and ideas related to caste associate the moral pollution of waste with those who handle it, turning it into the preserve of distinct low-status groups, thereby removing it from everyone else's concern. But the authors embrace an optimistic outlook and seek to acquaint us with the distinct assets India has at its disposal to cope with the unprecedented situation confronting it: a legacy of practices of thrift, large pools of labour with the capacity to process waste in ways unachievable elsewhere and a vibrant civil society.

Waste of a Nation is a remarkable contribution thanks to the scope of its coverage and its synoptic outlook on waste relations, blending history, ethnography and technical concerns. To assemble this narration of the messy worlds of Indian waste, countless vignettes gathered across the subcontinent are compiled with a vast array of secondary sources to produce a rich text that is enjoyable to read and efficiently sums up the extent of our knowledge on the issue. Surveying such a panorama of experiences, the ambition of the book is understandably not a theoretical one. The most significant contributions of the recent literature do appear in the text but usually to provide additional evidence rather than build a theoretical discussion. If the reader may at time regret the lack of a deeper engagement with such themes, the authors' choice is amply justified by their empirical focus, and coherently maintained throughout the manuscript. One of the main strengths of the book is probably its success in bringing together different waste types and relations that are otherwise increasingly discussed separately in the literature on South Asia. While sewage and infrastructure dealing with human waste – the form deemed the most polluting – are usually debated in the context of the relations between caste and sanitation, scholars' examinations of garbage tend to range from the governance of institutionalised categories of solid waste to the material economies flourishing on its margins. *Waste of a Nation* is salutary in reminding us that this divide is somewhat artificial and needs to be overcome should one attempt to understand the distinctively Indian overtones of waste issues.

However, if the authors rightly point at cultural practices and ideas as major stumbling blocks that create apathy and lasting stigma, we can regret that they reluctantly enter into their political significance. Mostly, caste here appears as a cultural oddity and would probably gain from being more thor-

oughly analysed as a contested political construct. In addition, the book's attempt to realise an exhaustive coverage favours variety over depth, with the result of obscuring the intense politicisation of several areas of waste practice. For example, little is said about the politics of conservancy workers, and the political aspects of technology are rapidly glossed over. The authors' willingness to latch on to optimistic stories, especially in the last chapters, produces a stimulating account that is justly aware of the sector's dire need for fresh energy, role models and replicable examples. But interrogating darker spots, and considering the intricate ways in which waste is hijacked for all manner of political agendas may also bring its share of valuable lessons on the path toward sounder waste management. *Waste of a Nation* nevertheless gains a place of choice in the waste literature and deserves the attention of academics, practitioners and anyone else interested in the pressing environmental challenges faced by India today.

Olivia Calleja

MALVIKA MAHESHWARI, *Art Attacks. Violence and Offence-Taking in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019. 376 pages, \$60.00. ISBN 978-0-1994-8884-1

When the “incendiary” film “Fire” – a story of same-sex love directed by Deepa Mehta – hit India's cinemas in 1998, I happened to watch it in the conservative holy city and pilgrimage centre of Varanasi. I was told I was lucky that I did not understand the local slang that accompanied the screening as background noise. Fortunately, that was all I experienced. Elsewhere, as Malvika Maheshwari discusses in her new book *Art Attacks. Violence and Offence-Taking in India*, the movie “Fire” had triggered destruction at the hand of Hindu right-wing groups in several cities in the country. However, attacks against art are highly contingent on many factors and hence do not automatically translate into uniform reactions to the same cultural product throughout India. In fact, there might be no attack at all.

The events such as those surrounding the film “Fire” are at the heart of *Art Attacks*. In this book, Maheshwari argues that, since the end of the 1980s, artists have been routinely attacked, artworks damaged and exhibitions disrupted by self-styled groups hailing from across the political spectrum. Disruption of public spaces, destruction of property and assaults on artists have yielded visibility, glory and success to the attackers while at the same time providing publicity for the very art whose circulation they aimed to halt.