

exchange play in the learning process and in the (trans)formation of children's peer relations and hierarchies. We are treated to a fascinating examination of the Pokemon trading card craze that raged throughout Britain in 1999-2000 (and which continues today), which is used not only to illustrate the importance that particular knowledge or skills can give to a child's personal prestige and self-worth, but also to examine the kinds of opportunities available to children to transpose aggressive, territorial conflicts into more meaningful relationships. Comparing children's bodily competence in relation to specific objects and activities (e.g. football vs Pokemon cards), Evans reiterates an earlier argument about how the physical disposition and constraints on the body that formal learning demands, and that the disruptive boys singularly fail to achieve, contribute to the increased educational failure of working-class white children. We are also reminded of the importance of recognizing what is meaningful to boys, in order to make formal learning meaningful to them.

The book has no formal conclusion and therefore no space in which the author clarifies the arguments and analytical claims that have been suggested throughout. Instead, the final chapter provides us with a glimpse of the biographies of several Bermondsey men who, after varying brushes with the law, have 'gone straight'. It is not entirely clear whether such examples represent a selection of possible futures that Evans imagines for the boys who are profiled throughout the book, or if there is some other intended objective.

In addition to a clearer exegesis of the author's claims, the book might also have benefited from a more dedicated discussion about how ideas of social class and being 'common' in contemporary Britain correlate with the politics of race and ethnicity. We are also left wondering about the exceptions: those few boys (and girls) who do engage successfully in the formal learning process, and who consequently manage to do well in school. While we are introduced to a small cohort that Evans calls the 'imaginative boys' (p. 105), who engage more fruitfully in the formal learning process, relatively little attention is paid to the issue of what sets these children apart from those 'disruptive boys' who are destined for educational failure. There is also little explanation of how the analysis can be extrapolated from the unique situation in Bermondsey to working-class communities in other parts of London and beyond, nor much

explicit engagement with broader theoretical debates or reference to other relevant material.

These are minor criticisms, however, in the face of the book's vivid ethnography, engaging narrative style, and obvious attempt to reach a readership beyond academe. Overall, the manner in which Evans illuminates the inextricable relationship between social class and educational failure, but above all the way that she strengthens our understanding of what is meaningful to a working-class white person, cannot be underestimated.

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LANCY, DAVID F. *The anthropology of childhood: cherubs, chattel, changelings*. xii, 466 pp., figs, illus., bibliogr. Cambridge: Univ. Press, 2008. £55.00 (cloth), £19.99 (paper)

David Lancy's *The anthropology of childhood: cherubs, chattel, changelings* is a significant and useful contribution to the field in that it draws together the literature on the anthropology of children from both the perspectives of physical and cultural anthropology as well as history. It is very much a study built upon the biological basis for or interplay with culture which shows by continual contrasts how modern Western society is uniquely a *neontocracy*. Lancy comprehensively makes the case for alternative realities in which children are viewed either as 'unwanted, inconvenient *changelings* or as desired but pragmatically commodified *chattel*'. He argues that the notion of children as cherubs is a narrowly culture-bound recent invention and that the 'reader will be brought to question attempts to export our child-centered utopia to the rest of the world, which cannot afford to ignore the economic costs and benefits of having children' (p. 13).

Alongside its companion web-site (<http://anthropologyofchildhood.usu.edu>), it will provide essential reading for a broad audience interested in how children are imagined and treated in different societies as well as in different historical epochs. Inspired by Sarah Blaffer Hardy's *Mother Nature* (1999) and written in a highly accessible manner, it will be particularly useful for undergraduate classes and for those looking for a general overview of the anthropology of childhood. Arguably, the strongest parts of the book are the historical overviews and the more contextualized discussions, such as in the penultimate chapter, titled 'How schools can raise property values', and the stark final chapter, 'Suffer the children'.

Above all, the anthropological and historical materials brought together here have critical implications for those who value the notion of the sanctity of the rights of the child. This is of special concern when addressing the developmental paradigm in which human rights, justice, and democracy are so closely linked with programmes concerned with improving child welfare. Indeed, Lancy considers our tendency to moralize in these contexts where, for example, a boyfriend shakes to death his girlfriend's infant.

Considering the moral and intellectual consequences of such a position, although this book specifically attempts to bridge physical and cultural anthropology, it ultimately illustrates how and why there is necessarily an unbridgeable divide not only between humanists and more biologically orientated anthropologists but also between those who are struggling to achieve 'good' in the world and those who merely criticize all such efforts as only having negative consequences.

Lancy's study essentially argues that nothing can be done about the suffering of children and their increasingly dire futures unless we change our ethnocentric views regarding children and accept the alternative reality of children as chattel and unwelcome changelings. As he concludes about efforts to improve the lot of children in the developing world: until we confront our own ethnocentrism, the First World will play a minor, 'if not negative role'. There is a fundamental contradiction here. Lancy urges us to accept alternative views of children as chattel and unwelcome changelings and yet blames the exploitation of children on the global economic and political consequences of Western consumerism. Moreover, if, as he argues, for most of human history, and even today, children have been and are still regarded as chattel, why blame the West at the same time as arguing that it is a Western ethnocentric value judgement to condemn the idea and practice of children as chattel and changelings?

The key debate which this study may inspire could be whether there is an irreconcilable difference between cultural relativism and the enlightenment notion of universal human rights. And if so, what are the moral consequences? While the author maintains a relativist position, he takes an unqualified non-relativist position on the attempts by international organizations to ameliorate the suffering of children. Indeed, he casts the deepest aspersions upon their efforts. One might ask then whether the author should not have taken the same care in assessing the

efforts of the 'international intelligentsia' to improve children's welfare, never mind addressing the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which no mention is made.

From the bringing together of a selection of 'horror stories' about child labour and poverty, the uninitiated will learn, for instance, that in Mexico 7- to 14-year-old children make up 30 per cent of the agricultural workforce, that in African nations children are increasingly used for cheap labour, virtually as slaves, and that in Asian nations daughters are 'unhesitatingly' and 'willingly' sold into prostitution or dangerous factory labour and industry as young as the age of 5. In extending this litany, Lancy notes that all of this was commonplace in the West until relatively recently, and instead of condemning these excesses, he concludes that child labour is naturally a 'contentious issue'.

Throughout the study this is the key point: that the West should not be attempting to extend a moral hegemony globally, especially in contexts where children are traditionally understood to be chattel. Lancy argues that in the pursuit of this hegemonic ideal, international agencies are doing more harm than good to both the children and their communities. While the effectiveness of aid and the 'civilizing mission' can no doubt be criticized, surely that does not mean that we should not uphold the sanctity of the rights of children of the poor in all cultures and places? Nor does it mitigate the importance of helping to achieve that goal even when it runs contrary to local custom and value. The problem with the faith placed in cultural relativism here is that it requires the sacrifice of humanitarian ideals on the altar of cultural diversity and biological imperativeness.

My personal view is fundamentally opposed to Lancy's view, even though I accept the fact that how children are imagined and treated is necessarily culture-bound. Here are my own core culture-bound beliefs as to what constitutes a necessarily humanistic and moral reply to Lancy. The moral primacy of the modernist universals of 'love' and 'justice', of 'human rights' and 'common decency', necessarily supersedes any consideration of biological fitness. Cultural relativism and biological explanation are simply incompatible with this position. Take for instance, the study Lancy cites of bereavement: '[P]arents' expression of grief at the death of a child peak not in early childhood but rather at adolescence. By the teen years, a parent has made nearly 100 percent of their investment in the child and will receive, if it perishes, zero genetic return' (p. 9). I find this suggestion that

relative grief is a function of the success or failure of reproductive success to rest upon a morally and spiritually repulsive argument.

Nevertheless, Lancy's book successfully raises the question: what is being done to change things for the better, against what odds, and with what anthropological nuance? In all this, it is to be hoped, Lancy's study will stimulate much more than a furious debate about the so-called civilizational 'infantilization of the South' and the failure of development. It is even possible that the long-term result of such a debate might be to drive more anthropologists into the ranks of the development community, where they will continue the complex struggle to ameliorate the suffering of the children of the poor in the most challenging environments both in the North and in the South. At the end of the day, it is all surely about how to use anthropological knowledge to best support the universal enlightenment-based right of all people for liberty, prosperity, and justice, and – dare one say – happiness. Towards those ends, beyond the fascinating compilation of such wide-ranging attitudes that humans have towards their offspring, Lancy's unsettling rather than delightful book is to be highly commended.

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MONTGOMERY, HEATHER. *An introduction to childhood: anthropological perspectives on children's lives*. 296 pp., bibliogr. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008. £17.99 (paper)

As if piqued by Hirschfeld's accusation that children have been left out of anthropology, textbooks in the anthropology of childhood, which have been conspicuous by their absence since Helen Schwartzman's 1978 investigation of theories of child play (*Transformations: the anthropology of children's play*), are all pouring out at once. Following David Lancy's retort, *The anthropology of childhood* (2008, reviewed above), and Robert LeVine and Rebecca New's anthology *Anthropology and Child Development* (2008), we now have Montgomery's contribution to the field. While all of these volumes attest to the healthy liquidity of the sub-discipline, it is Montgomery's excellent overview of the subject that every anthropologist specializing in childhood studies will be kicking themselves for not having written, covering as it does every aspect of the topic and bound as it is to become a set text wherever the subject is taught.

Following the first few pages of the book, which reiterate Schwartzman's discussion of nineteenth-century anthropological views of the child as primitive, the discussion moves on to the Culture and Personality school of the 1930s, the Six Cultures study of the 1960s, and the early twentieth century British school: Malinowski, Firth, Richards, and Fortes. Montgomery then traces the emergence of more recent child-centred anthropology to the theoretical lead of feminist studies of the 1970s, arguing that many anthropologists who focus on children are motivated to include in the discipline a demographic group seen to be vulnerable and voiceless. A point that Montgomery might have problematized further is that while women keep their gender, children grow up. The equation of women and children by anthropologists is therefore the same type of fallacy that Montgomery herself later mentions the Tuareg make when they equate their children to slaves and blacksmiths: while all three groups are polluted and inferior, children are like Winston Churchill, who when accused by a woman at a function of being drunk reportedly replied 'and you're ugly, but I'll be sober in the morning'. Unlike women and slaves, children are armed with a Churchillian riposte to their isolation, and Montgomery demonstrates how societies guarantee this in the book's final chapter, devoted to initiation.

Before we reach the end of childhood, though, we first need to know what a child is, and the second chapter lays down Ariès's classic and provocative historical argument in *Centuries of childhood* (1962) regarding the recent invention of childhood as a foundation upon which Montgomery builds her review of social constructionist perspectives in anthropology, exploring the whole gamut of possible conceptualizations of children, as equals at one extreme, through helpless incompetents, to cannibal witches at the other (echoing here Lancy's cross-cultural investigation of children as 'cherubs, chattel, changelings'). Chapter 3 covers cultural models of the beginnings of life in the womb, including a discussion of spirit children and of reincarnation. Chapter 4 investigates the recently burgeoning literature on fosterage, starting with the work of Jack and Esther Goody, and goes on to cover debates on street children and siblingship.

A fifth chapter is devoted to a trilogy of topics, including linguistic approaches to the study of childhood, child play, and children at work. Despite their tantalizing brevity, each one of these sections is touched with the insight that