

studies to support the claim that anarchism is at the center of movements that aim to live in more compassionate and sustainable communities.

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**Jeffrey Monaghan** is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at Queen's University, affiliated with the Surveillance Studies Centre. He has recently co-authored a book chapter that explores how an anarchist-influenced power theory of value (in contrast to the labour theory of value) can be a useful analytical tool for understanding social movements that confront capital. Co-authored with DT Cochrane, it appears in *Accumulation of Freedom: Writings on Anarchist Economics* (AK Press). He has also published several articles examining the suppression of radical movements.

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## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Manfred Liebel, ed.,** *Children's Rights from Below: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 272 pp. \$87.00 hardcover (9780230302518)

Significant international scholarship has recently emerged to theorize children's participatory rights. European scholar Manfred Liebel and his colleagues Karl Hanson, Ivan Saadi and Wouter Vandenhoe contribute to this area by importantly conceptualizing children's rights "from below." Drawing on sociology, political science, and socio-legal studies this thirteen chapter volume focuses primarily on majority world children on the margins. Assuming readers with a degree of familiarity with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and surrounding debates, Liebel and his fellow contributors are able to deeply explore the possibilities and challenges of acknowledging and fostering children's rights from below.

While advocacy for children's rights did not begin with the CRC, work in this area inevitably grapples with this significant convention. In articulating children's rights from below, Liebel and his colleagues convey mixed feelings about the CRC. On the one hand, it is a modernist document which certain groups have used to enforce a narrow, Western ideal of childhood. It was conceived by adults and it suggests that rights are bestowed from above. The CRC is also frequently undermined by state and global political and economic policies which hinder possibilities for children's rights. For instance, individualized legal rights do not always work well for children on the margins for whom rights are alien, and who believe that asking for rights shows weakness or invites reprisals. On the other hand the CRC is a flexible document which has incited significant interest in children's rights, and consequently the language of rights is emerging within children's organizing and demands.

It is such children's organizing within the majority world that has most captured the attention of the authors of this book. Liebel and his colleagues draw on the sociology of childhood to counter the top-down, narrowing aspects of the CRC, arguing instead that children are actively and competently involved in what Liebel and Saadi discuss as transcendent innovations, or collective actions initiated from below. This is what they mean by rights from below, whether such participation is framed in

the language of rights or not. This more localized rights work commonly emerges within contexts of marginalization and exclusion.

A strength of this text is its use of many such examples of children who successfully participate and organize, including children in child-headed households and in economic cooperatives. Particularly noted for discussion is the activism of working children's movements, an area most deeply explored in the chapter by Iven Saadi. Children in these movements are making their rights manifest and advocating new ones. They advocate for work, the right to choose to work, and the right to specific conditions of work, as well as for health care and education. Their more macro-level advocacy tends to arise in coalitions with adults, however, which in turn undermines their legitimacy with organizations such as the International Labour Organization as these children are then assumed to be manipulated by adults. Saadi counters that adult assistance is needed sometimes, e.g., in renting a space, but that it is the young people who are the leaders.

There is tension, within the CRC and in broader discussions of children's rights, between protection and participation. Liebel and his colleagues grapple with this tension as they explore the possibilities and challenges of children's rights from below. Much child advocacy work in the twentieth century has focused on children's protection and the provision of services. Those who embrace more participatory rights worry that provision and protection rights often foster only dependency and scrutiny while limiting freedom and undermining children's capacities. Liebel's chapter on age discrimination illustrates this challenge for him. Age discrimination is commonly embedded in state laws that regulate behaviour differently in children than adults, distribute goods and services unequally to children, and/or fail to consider future generations. Liebel attempts to balance between acknowledgment that discriminating laws can be necessary for children's protection while also contending that it is necessary to keep such discrimination in check so that it does not undermine children's needs, capacities and participation.

Tension between protection and participation rights is linked to beliefs about childhood, e.g., whether children should be considered beings in the present or developing into the future, and whether children can be considered competent beings. Karl Hanson's contributing chapter considers these questions by identifying a continuum of rights approaches, from paternalism to liberation. As we see in Liebel's discussion of age discrimination, this book clearly reflects "emancipation." Emancipation nears liberation in its focus on children as participating beings in the present, but includes some consideration of children as becoming and in need of protection. Liebel also argues against adult-centred benchmarks

of competence to determine whether someone is deserving of citizenship and related participatory rights.

The authors are troubled when participation is framed as something adults offer young people. Such participation can become a regulatory, self-governing tool. It also neglects children's own participation that already exists. Of similar concern is that often adult-led participation is framed as the 'right' kind of participation, while child-led participation is problematized or criminalized. Instead Liebel argues that children's participation needs to be understood through the view of protagonism, which embraces children's capacities, independence, and participatory activities. Yet while children are already advocating for their own rights, creating their own organizations such as micro-cooperatives, and voicing their concerns, Liebel contends that adults continue to have an important role to play in fostering children's voice, talking to children about what they need most and offering encouragement and support.

Overall, the authors identify and explore a number of challenges in conceptualizing and enacting children's rights from below. When is age discrimination appropriate or not? How can and should children's organizations be linked with other social struggles? How can children's organizations have any weight when lobbying has become so professionalized? And how do adults support children's rights from below, particularly when children are often assumed to be less competent? Liebel and his colleagues consistently argue towards recognizing and supporting children's participation. To illustrate what this might look like, Liebel ends the book with an example of how children's organizing in Bangladesh was co-opted through the involvement of adult-based NGOs, with community activist children gradually pulled into individualized advocacy. In contrast he describes another example, from Nicaragua, which is much more emblematic of children's rights from below, in which children really participate, see themselves with vital responsibilities and in which adults become involved as successful co-protagonists.

This book importantly contributes to theorizing children's rights and participation, with a much-needed focus on children's organizing in the global south, and it is ideally suited to graduate students and established scholars in the area of children's participation. I occasionally wondered why the authors were so committed to the fraught language of rights when discussing children's activism, and sometimes more care may have helped readers to distinguish between concepts such as advocacy, agency, participation and activism. These are very minor squabbles however. More unfortunately, readers wishing to engage with this valuable contribution will need to plod through some quite dry, difficult chapters. While each chapter helpfully opens with an outline of where the chapter

will go, the whole book is in need of another edit for organization and clarity.

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Rebecca Raby

**Rebecca Raby** is a sociologist housed in Child and Youth Studies at Brock University and affiliated with Social Justice and Equity Studies. Her recent book, *School Rules: Obedience, Discipline and Elusive Democracy* (UTP, 2012) explores tensions and inequalities in school rules and their application in high school, rule breaking as participation, and possibilities for students' more formal involvement in rule-making. Her current collaborative research with Shauna Pomerantz investigates gender and academic achievement in high school.

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