

## BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

**Foster, Karen R. and Dale C. Spencer, *Reimagining Intervention in Young Lives: Work, Social Assistance, and Marginalization*, 2013. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press. 196 pp., \$32.95 paper (9780774823319)**

**S**ocial workers, psychologists, counsellors, advisors, teachers, and youth/child care workers intervene with adolescents and young adults in different contexts and at different stages of their lives to promote their well-being. *Reimagining Intervention in Young Lives* is a qualitative inquiry of intervention among marginalized young adults; the authors develop several criticisms of current practices. Their central thesis is that the interventions initiated by public servants or delivery agents are guided by inadequate statistical “at risk” factors and neoliberal political interests. The authors use a case study at the Ottawa Youth Employment to analyse the political purpose served by intervention (3). Combining participant interviews with concepts drawn from post-structuralist authors such as Deleuze and Guattari, the authors question the use of statistical “at risk” factors by delivery agents to guide their intervention. They propose instead to intervene with an alternative framework in mind: the rhizome.

Forty-five young adults, aged between 16 and 24, were recruited in 2008 and 2009 through the Ottawa Youth Employment for in-depth semi-structured interviews. The young adults recruited were unemployed, patrons of the Ontario Youth Employment and were receiving social assistance through *Ontario Works* or *Ontario Disability Support Program* at the time of the study. The authors assert in the introduction that the book’s main goals are: 1) to illustrate the political purpose of intervention through a case study of Ottawa Youth Employment and 2) to give a voice to youth living in the margins. In the first chapter, Foster and Spencer discuss the main theoretical concepts that inform their analysis: micropolitics, lines of segmentarity, and the rhizome. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari, the authors explain how lines of segmentarity helped them analyze normative boundaries as devices of power that affect marginalized youth, especially when they cross normative lines at non-socially sanctioned crossing points. The authors also use the concept of “micropolitics” to uncover how marginalized youth deviate, resist and engage politically. They suggest that public servants and academics tend

to analyze and discuss youth's life trajectory like a tree, with a normative hierarchical representation of the world with roots, branches, and a trunk. Deleuze and Guattari suggest an arborescent schema using a rhizome with "a grass-like form that is characterized by an elaborate root structure. Instead of a single, dominant trunk, the rhizome has an underground, horizontal, tuber-like root system, which spreads and grows and develops entirely new plants (19)." The authors propose that the concept of "rhizome" enables a better understanding of youth trajectories that acknowledges the complexity and non-linear pathways of their lives.

Foster and Spencer provide glimpses of their participants' experiences with the school system and family members through the incorporation of interviews' excerpts. This is followed by a discussion of the youth's narratives of their job search, first job experience, and treatment in the workplace. Drawing on interview excerpts, the authors highlight how *Ontario Works*' eligibility requirements are disconnected from marginalized youth's needs and realities. They also argue that delivery agents, whom they characterize as "petty sovereigns" (100), exercise discretionary power, with decisions influenced predominantly by conservative discourses (97, 99, 104). Participants' narratives are used to discuss the theoretical concept of abjection, which refers to how abandonment, disrespect, neglect, rejection, abuse and mistreatment transform bodies, in this case marginalized youth's bodies, into abject bodies. In chapter 7, the reader will also find participant's narratives about their pastimes, drug use, and consumption patterns. One can only be moved by these marginalized youth's aspirations, hopes and doubts.

Overall, Foster and Spencer's writing style is accessible and their main ideas are well synthesized throughout the text. The study provides a window into the diverse and complex biographies of marginalized youth in their families, in the education system and at work. Throughout the book, the authors interpret their participants' narratives to demonstrate the political purpose of intervention using a wide range of theoretical concepts drawn from post-structuralism.

While a political analysis of youth intervention is welcome, some assertions about social statistics in the book can be questioned. Foster and Spencer often reiterate that quantitative data could not explain nor predict certain facts in their participants' life trajectories. They argue that intervention is informed by deterministic quantitative data or statistical at risk factors, which attempt to predict and establish causality (39, 84, 139, 141). However, social scientists trained in statistical methods study relationships and associations in a population and they do not seek to predict the life trajectory of each individual in a population. In many ways, quantitative and qualitative data complement each other because

they pose different questions, they provide different answers, and can be used on different scales (individual, social group vs. population). Foster and Spencer present relevant criticisms of psychological-developmental concepts and are original when they utilize the rhizome as a metaphor to analyze youth's life trajectories. However, new forms of assessments, or alternative interventions that derive from the rhizome were not provided in the book. In other words, the rhizome, a promising tool of analysis, seems to describe a state of mind or a worldview with no concrete work instruments for public servants.

Foster and Spencer invite scholars, professionals and community members to re-examine intervention with marginalized youth. This book can appeal to students in anthropology, and sociology courses related to youth or social problems.

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