

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Gérin-Lajoie, Diane.** *Negotiating Identities: Anglophones Teaching and Living in Quebec*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. 215 pp., \$60.00 hardcover (9781442648531)

**D**iane Gérin-Lajoie's book, *Negotiating Identities: Anglophones Teaching and Living in Quebec*, examines the complexity of anglophone teacher identities through a postmodern approach that considers identity as socially constructed, fluid, and negotiated. Gérin-Lajoie, a critical sociologist of education, fills in knowledge gaps about how anglophone teachers working in English minority-language schools make sense of their professional identities as "agents of linguistic and cultural reproduction" (161).

The introduction to the book includes a detailed account of the study methodology, which provides great insight for any researcher wanting to study identity. Gérin-Lajoie divides her study into two parts: a survey to understand the linguistic practices of over 800 teachers from two anglophone teacher associations, the details of which are found in the extensive Appendix section; from the survey, a smaller group of participants was selected for the qualitative part of the study, which is the main focus of the book. Gérin-Lajoie has only eight participants in her study, but she makes up for the small number of participants with in-depth life history interviews. Each participant was interviewed six times, twice a year for three years, and in addition to the participant interviews, Gérin-Lajoie also conducted group interviews with the teachers' families and friends.

Chapter Two provides important context for the reader, with a brief account of the history of the power struggles between the French majority and the English minority in Quebec and the impact that language legislation, notably Bill 22 and Bill 101, has had on the life of the anglophones in Quebec.

Gérin-Lajoie dedicates the entirety of Chapters 3 and 4 to the teachers' reflections on their identity and sense of belonging as anglophones living and working in Quebec. In these chapters, Gérin-Lajoie explores her participant's "*rapport to*" identity, language and culture, a term she borrows from the French expression, "*rapport à*" which she defines as "an individual's position regarding identity, language, culture" (5). In these accounts, Gérin-Lajoie reinforces her non-essentialist approach to

researching identity as she deconstructs the notion that anglophones are a homogenous group. Instead, she points out that they are diverse and that each participant has his or her own experience of negotiating identity as a linguistic-minority in Quebec. Gérin-Lajoie notes that identity and belonging for linguistic-minorities in Quebec is complex, and language becomes an important mediator in this process, a theme that she explores throughout the remainder of the book.

Readers new to identity studies may find the introduction to Chapter Five insightful as Gérin-Lajoie provides a detailed discussion of the study's theoretical perspective. In order to explore the "grey zone" of identity, she makes reference to Stuart Hall's postmodern, non-essentialist approach to identity as something that is socially constructed, historically situated, and constantly in flux. Gérin-Lajoie argues that a post-modern approach is essential for researching identity as "nothing is black or white when it comes to positioning oneself on the issues of identity and belonging" (112). According to Gérin-Lajoie, language "position[s] people in different ways" (128), and her participants choose their words carefully to identify themselves as members of Quebec society. For example, her participants do not call themselves, *Québécois*, a word that belongs to the francophones and is associated with the separatist movement or "*les Anglais*", a term that describes them as a "homogenous group with money and power" (163); instead, they choose other terms such as "Anglo-Quebecer" or "Quebecer" to identify themselves as anglophones, especially for those living in the Montréal area.

In Chapter Six, Gérin-Lajoie examines the politics of language in Quebec in relation to the "inclusion-exclusion divide" (141), where she claims knowing French is the most important inclusion factor in Quebec society. However, anglophones who speak French are still excluded because they don't know the "in-group code", a phenomenon in which the "majority group is reluctant to share its language with others, even when they are able to speak it" (143). For many anglophones who have learned to speak the French language, this does not guarantee belonging to Quebec society since speaking a 'standard' French may "clash with the vernacular French [or *joual*] in daily use" (143).

In Chapter Seven, Gérin-Lajoie examines the complex role of the teacher and school in the maintenance of the English minority language and culture in Quebec. In order to prevent an overgeneralization about the role of minority-language education from just one perspective, Gérin-Lajoie compares the mandate of the English minority-language school in Quebec with her study of the French minority-language schools in Ontario. The mandate of the French minority-language schools in Ontario is the protection and transmission of the French language and culture. The

role of the English minority-language school system in Quebec is *not* the preservation of English language and culture; instead, French must be taught to ensure that the students have a high degree of fluency so they can be competitive in Quebec's labour market. Similarly, the participants feel their role is to be learning facilitators or to help students succeed, not to maintain the English language as it is not at risk of disappearing. However, the English minority-language schools themselves are at risk of disappearing as language legislation, such as Bill 101, has an impact on enrollment. For example, new immigrants are required by law to attend French majority-language schools. For anglophones, the loss of the school means the loss of an institution that can "support their continued existence as a minority group" (33).

In her conclusion, Gérin-Lajoie acknowledges that the same study could be done with allophones (Quebec citizens who are not English or French) to compare their experiences of identity and belonging with that of the anglophones. This insight ties-in with my critique of the study where more participant diversity could provide a broader representation of teachers' experiences. Only one participant, Serafina, provides insight as an allophone; she negotiates her identity from "different angles" because "her identity is intertwined with her Italian culture, the [three] languages she speaks... and her profession" (67). Gérin-Lajoie's anglophone participants claim they do not feel oppressed in Quebec society because they belong to a linguistic minority, but how does this experience compare with that of allophones who are visible minorities? How do visible minorities negotiate identity and belonging when they are discriminated against in the Quebec school system? For example, according to Bakali (2015), some Muslim teachers face discrimination based on images of Muslims "present in the media and political discourses, which simultaneously exist... within the Quebec nationalist imagination" (52). Future studies could provide insight on how visible minority allophones negotiate Quebec's "inclusion/exclusion" divide in light of legislation such as the Quebec Charter of Values which proposed the banning of religious symbols such as the hijab in public institutions such as the school.

Gérin-Lajoie's three-year study on anglophone teacher identity in Quebec would be an excellent resource for anyone wanting to know more about how to research identity. Even if the reader's research interests did not focus on teachers or linguistic minorities, her skillful treatment of identity using a postmodern approach would be an essential guide to avoid the pitfalls of researching identity from a rigid and essentialist perspective. Although the research includes a small sample of anglophones, the reader will have an appreciation for the complexity of

researching linguistic minorities and how they negotiate their identity and belonging in their professional and personal lives.

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#### REFERENCES

- Bakali, N. (2015). Muslim teachers' experiences with race and racism in Quebec secondary schools. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education/Revue canadienne des jeunes chercheurs et chercheurs en éducation*, 6(1), 45-54.

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