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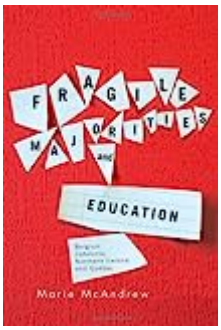

Marie McAndrew. *Fragile Majorities and Education: Belgium, Catalonia, Northern Ireland, and Quebec.* Translated by Michael O'Hearn. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012. 280 pp. $100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-4090-3; $34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-4091-0.

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Published on H-Nationalism (September, 2013)

Commissioned by Eric H. Limbach (University of Rochester (from Fall 2015))

Beatty on McAndrew

Marie McAndrewâs *Fragile Majorities and Education* starts with a basic problem and a basic observation about recent studies of ethnicity. Over the last thirty years, McAndrew argues, while the field of ethnic studies has itself become more sophisticated, it has simultaneously moved away from the study of education as an institutional force for the âmaintenanceâ of minority identity. Instead, where educationâs links with national identity have been studied, the focus has been on how it helps in the drawing of boundaries between different ethnic groups. Rectifying this large gap in scholarship is McAndrewâs main concern in *Fragile Majorities and Education.* While it is worth asking how much of a distinction there actually is between studying the internal maintenance of a ethnic identity and the drawing of boundaries *between* ethnic groups (when an ethnic group draws a boundary are they not, by definition, also working to define their own identity?), she does have a salient point about an understudied aspect of ethnic identity. McAndrewâs book is based on ten yearsâ of research in Northern Ireland, Flanders, Catalonia, and Quebec, although she openly confesses that her real interest is her own society of Quebec. Certainly her discussions of Quebec tend to be more sophisticated than those of her other case studies, but this is still to give an overly modest picture of what is, in fact, a more expansive comparative study.

Chapter 1 is a history of education in the four national contexts, which focuses on three different models of educationâs linkages with ethnic identity: Quebec and Belgium, which have communal schools; Northern Ireland, which has both communal and integrated education; and Catalonia, which has a model of common schooling for both Spanish- and Catalan-speaking students. McAndrew is here placing the three case studies on a âseparate schooling/common schooling continuumâ (pp. 15-16). And while she is rightly cautious about cultural relativism, she suggests that what these four cases show is that societies should adopt the schooling model most suitable for their particular ethnic makeup and politics. She also observes that integrated schooling does not seem to weaken ethnic identity, suggesting, perhaps, that it is not primarily schooling that maintains identity

in pluralist societies, but familial and non-institutional societal factors.

Chapter 2, which seems to be written for policymakers as much as for academics, focuses on âcrossing school boundaries,â the phenomenon of students from one community attending the educational institution of another community or attending integrated schools. McAndrew offers a number of possible reasons for why students and their parents would do this: economic betterment, cultural curiosity, and a desire for personal transformation. However, the major underlying problem of her work surfaces here: McAndrewâs tendency to view ethnic identity as static and perhaps even as total. She tends to see Catholics and Protesants, for instance, as being defined by their religious beliefs and thus when they act out of this character it is something anomalous and in need of explanation. Northern Irish Protestants, however, much like francophone Canadians or Catalans, are not reified actors limited by their religion or âethnicity,â but are complex social actors capable of aspiring toward any number of political or cultural goals, or holding to any number of different identities. McAndrewâs analysis here is based on contact theory, a body of thought that grew out of analyses of interracial tension in the United States in the 1950s. It is worth asking, though, if this is really the best body of thought to carry over to her case studies. Is the linguistic divide in Belgium really comparable to the lived experience of the American South, with its cultural memories of slavery, lynching and Jim Crow? Indeed she later says that the ârelationship dynamicsâ in Brussels and Montreal are âquite unlike the American situation, where contact theory was elaboratedâ (p. 54).

Chapter 3 looks at the teaching of history, always a central element in maintaining a shared view of the past and thus of a shared ethnic identity. She looks first at the teaching of history in Northern Ireland, which is standardized across the educational system and is also closely bound up with a postconflict program of civic education. In Belgium the history curricula are decided upon at a community level, with francophone and Dutch-speaking schools differing greatly, something McAndrew labels âschizophreniaâ (p. 88). The teaching of history in Catalonia has followed a path similar to that of the rest of Spain since the fall of Franco: experimentation at first, before a more ordered system was reached, in which âproblematicâ themes such as working-class history, the Second Republic, and the Dictatorship could be openly taught. Spanish regionalism was another âproblemâ area that began to be taught in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Conversely, in Quebec, there is a shared curriculum, and though francophones have more weight, anglophone concerns have also to be respected, as do the concerns and narratives of immigrants and of Native Canadians. History is here taught âusing a concentric circles approach fairly similar to that of Northern Irelandâ (p. 92) and this seems to be the method most favored by McAndrew, allowing, as it does, for ethnic identity to be incorporated into broader global, multicultural, and cosmopolitan histories and identities.

Chapter 4, the first chapter of the second part of the book, focuses on the integration of immigrants into Flanders, Catalonia, and Quebec, where the problems of linguistic assimilation can become a source of tension both for the immigrants and for the host society. The Quebecois provincial government has sought to have a strong influence on immigrant selection/recruitment and absorption, to a greater degree than other Canadian provinces have done, with the rationale of channeling these people into the francophone sector and thus maintaining a separate sense of French-speaking Quebecois identity, a project in which schools play an obvious role. Conversely, Catalonia has not always practiced an official set of immigration policies different from those of Spain in general. Immigration is controlled at a national level, under the terms of the Spanish constitution and thus immigrant recruitment focuses on Spanish-speaking Latin American immigrants. This has obvious ramifications for the status of the Catalan language. Since the 2003 election, however, the pro-independence lâEsquerra Republicana have been in power in Catalonia. Their control of the ministries for education, immigration, and social welfare has allowed lâEsquerra Republicana to put greater emphasis on the learning of Catalan by immigrants. In the Belgian case, immigrants tend to be poorer than the general population and Dutch-speaking and francophone schools have attracted an equal amount of immigrants, with both languages being seen equally in terms of economic opportunity.

The last chapter, which covers much of the same ground as chapter 4, is an extended discussion of the manner in which educational institutions in âfragile majorityâ states can, and should, adapt to the new types of cultural diversity caused by immigration. McAndrew, though, only discusses Quebec, Flanders, and Catalonia, since she claims immigration has not affected Northern Ireland to the point that any significant discourse has yet emerged. McAndrew argues that in framing education policy for immigrant-absorbing societies, the âculture of origin [of immigrants] should not be treated as a thing unto itself, nor considered a static realityâ (p. 150) and

suggests that adapting education to the needs of immigrants would allow for a more solid form of integration, something that would benefit the host society as well as the immigrants.

Throughout this work, McAndrew also takes aim at what she feels, with much justice, is the at times problematic use of terms like *minority* and *majority*. Such terms, and the studies that uncritically rely on them, tend toward reinforcing neat binary distinctions between majority and minority ethnicities that bear little relation to more messy realities. McAndrew herself defines these terms as they relate to access to political power and thus argues that, in many cases, it is more useful to speak of the eponymous âfragile majorities,â the dominant groups in societies where the minorities also have considerable political influence and thus the identity of the âmajorityâ is often defined by a sense of being threatened or a fear of losing power. There is much to this. McAndrewâs analysis, however, is handicapped by a different kind of problematic binary–the idea that oppositional identities (such as Catholic vs. Protestant in Northern Ireland, francophone vs. anglophone in Quebec, or Catalans vs. Spanish-speakers in Catalonia) are static and rigid, rather than themselves being messy and complex. Her analysis of Northern Ireland is perhaps the area of her book where this is most blatant; she slips back and forth from speaking of the two communities as âBritish and Irishâ (in the introduction) but Protestant and Catholic elsewhere. Both are problematic binaries. For sure, some Northern Irish Protestants do see themselves as British, but others see themselves as Scottish (a distinction on which many would put great weight), whilst probably a majority see themselves as holding a specifically Northern Irish identity. Nor are these categories hermetically sealed; there is nothing to prevent a resident of, say, the Shankill Road in Belfast, from seeing him- or herself as, simultaneously, Protestant, Northern Irish, Ulster Scottish, and British. McAndrew tends to view ethnicity from the high-up vantage point of the state, rather than the street-level view of a messy lived reality. Like any other form of ethnic identity, Northern Irishness (or Catalanness, or Flemishness) is a dynamic thing, and McAndrew does herself a disservice by seeing it in stable and monolithic terms. She also fails to tease out the ways in which class often cuts across these categories. Given how much class plays a part in her analysis of Quebec, and how she puts forward a more sophisticated understanding of francophone and anglophone Quebecois identities, of which she presumably has more intimate knowledge, these are obvious blind spots.

Thus, as a programmatic work that sets up some possible future research questions, McAndrewâs work has much to commend it. But as some of her workâs shortfalls show, that research still has much ground to cover, not only in terms of coming to a better understanding of the lived experience of ethnic identity, but also in terms of a closer pinpointing of educationâs role in maintaining ethnic identity and in terms of placing education in the larger picture of familial, societal, and individual influences on identity formation.

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Citation: Aidan Beatty. Review of McAndrew, Marie, *Fragile Majorities and Education: Belgium, Catalonia, Northern Ireland, and Quebec*. H-Nationalism, H-Net Reviews. September, 2013.

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