Gender, Poverty and the Rescaling of Welfare Regimes: Toronto/Canada and Mexico City/Mexico

Rianne Mahon and Laura Macdonald

Through the second half of the 20th century, feminist movements throughout the world tended to target the national state as the site at which useful social reforms could be delivered, supporting the construction of a strong welfare state (Cohen and Brodie, 2008: 2). In this paper, we argue that the changes in the welfare state associated with neoliberalism require a rethinking of the politics of scale associated with social provision and conceptions of citizenship.[1] On the one hand, inter- and supra-national bodies have become increasingly important sources of policy guidance, introducing new elements to national policy debates. On the other, sub-national sites warrant increased attention because the restructuring of welfare regimes involves an important element of decentralisation. Such decentralisation schemes are often undertaken to facilitate the construction of local partnerships, enlisting business, NGOs and (municipal, provincial, national) state agencies to "empower" the poor. Much comparative research, however, continues to take for granted the centrality of the national scale. Comparative research on welfare regimes thus needs to incorporate insights from the literature on rescaling in its very research design. This enables reflection on the ways in which the supra- and the sub-national are implicated in the restructuring/redesign of welfare regimes, without losing sight of the national. In this way too, it becomes possible to see how national path dependencies may be (partially or radically) disrupted, as alternative models are introduced from "below" as well as from "above."

It is increasingly recognized that welfare restructuring involves not just cutbacks but also welfare redesign in response to social risks that existing regimes inadequately addressed. One of these is poverty, which has re-emerged as an issue not just in the global south but also in the north (Craig and Porter, 2004; Noel, 2006). While poverty may be an "old" problem, it is seen to require new solutions. Some see these new discourses, and the solutions associated therewith, as another ("roll-out") phase of neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002). We argue however for a more nuanced view that can discern the differences between what we call "intrusive" and "inclusive" liberalism. While both stress the need for "social investments" to develop individual capacities, the former takes a sharp generational and gender focus, targeting the role of "parents" (read mothers') in promoting the development of their children, while the second recognizes that children are poor because their parents (especially their mothers) are poor. It also opens a discursive space for the reassertion of social citizenship rights.

The first sections of the paper weave together these theoretical strands. The first section brings in the global dimension, focusing on the global rediscovery of poverty and, more broadly a new "social investment" role for social policy. The next section looks at rescaling within national states and provides a brief overview of federal policies in Canada and Mexico. The final sections introduce the two examples – Toronto/Canada and Mexico City/Mexico – showing how a multi-scalar research design reveals the complex dynamics of national-subnational contestations over poverty policy. In both Toronto and Mexico City, women make up a disproportionate number of the poor, and thus contests over anti-poverty policy are inevitably gendered. Our study thus also raises questions about an appropriate model for addressing gender inequities in the delivery of social provision.

---

[1] The concept of "scale" as used here to refer to "the focal setting at which spatial boundaries are defined for a specific social claim, activity or behavior" (Agnew, 1997, 100), originated from important contemporary work in human geography. Key contributions include Marston (2000), Brenner (2001) and Peck (2002).

Why Toronto and Mexico City? Certainly within Canadian federalism, the provincial scale has been and remains the key site for social policy development. Nevertheless, with a population of 2.5 million people,[2] Toronto is Canada's largest city, the "financial, industrial, services and cultural capital of Canada" (Courchene, 2001:174) and the capital of Canada's most populous province, Ontario, noted for its harsh neoliberal experiments under the Conservative government led by Mike Harris. In Ontario, moreover, municipalities have long had a role in delivering social assistance and this became even more pronounced with changes introduced by the Harris government. Economic restructuring, combined with downloading by the federal and provincial governments, have contributed to the rise of poverty in Toronto. As a recent study showed, "on every measure, Toronto families fared worse than the nation as a whole..[and} they are also falling behind the rest of the province and even the rest of the Toronto area: (United Way, 2006: 1). As a result, the municipal government, along with community organisations, have engaged in efforts to tackle this. Finally, Toronto is home to numerous anti-poverty organizations operating at the national and provincial as well as local scales. What happens in Toronto can thus hold implications for what happens in Ontario and in Canada as a whole.

Mexico City is also Mexico's largest city, with a huge population of over 20 million people that has been expanding exponentially over the last few decades. Extreme poverty is largely a rural phenomenon in Mexico, but the wide prevalence of poverty, growing levels of social and economic inequality and Mexico City's sheer size mean that the country cannot tackle poverty adequately without addressing poverty in this megalopolis. Historically, social policy (like all other policy in Mexico) was heavily centralized in the hands of federal authorities. Yet, democratization and neoliberal policies together have led to increased decentralization of social policy in recent years. In contrast with Canada, municipal politics are heavily partisan. The dominance of the center-right PAN (National Action Party) in federal politics since democratization in 2000 has been challenged by the dominance of the centre-left PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party) in Mexico City politics, and anti-poverty policy has emerged as a key point of contention between the Left and Right, resulting in significant federal-municipal tensions. Both cities are located in the North American region, a region that has retained a strong neo-liberal character, in contrast with "Social Europe". As we argue elsewhere (Mahon and Macdonald forthcoming), however, poverty policies in both Canada and Mexico have not entirely converged with the U.S. neo-liberal "workfare" model, but contain important inclusive neoliberal elements.

Globalisation and Welfare Redesign

Contemporary developments, captured in the term "globalisation", have thrown into question the appropriateness of a singular focus on the national scale. The capacity of national governments to manage economies rendered increasingly open to global flows of goods and capital has been undermined, as has their ability (and willingness) to finance social policies. Such openness has become "constitutionalised" (Clarkson, 2002) through multilateral agreements, from regional arrangements to those with a global reach. Globalisation is not just about pressures for fiscal austerity generated by the increasing mobility of capital, however. It includes "policy guidance" provided by international organisations (Deacon et al, 1997). The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) "advice" may enjoy a particular force in the vulnerable countries of the Global South, but the latter are by no means alone in being pressured to "learn" from international organisations. Thus, new ideas and practices are being injected into national discourses as a result of the development of more intense connections between supra-national and national scales.

Similarly, ideas about gender have also been internationalised and subject to increased global scrutiny, both in developed but particularly in developing countries. Governments, international organisations and civil society actors have become increasingly aware of the limitations of the neo-liberal economic model, not just in terms of delivering growth or mitigating poverty, but also in terms of the increased burden neo-liberal policies have placed on the lives of women. While the policies of neo-liberalism were superficially gender-blind, in practice the transfer of the responsibilities of social reproduction from the public to the private sphere entailed

---

[2] Figure for the amalgamated City of Toronto. The population of the Greater Toronto Area was 5.3 million in 2000.

the increase of the burden on women (Elson 1995). In contrast, and at times in direct response to feminist critiques, post-neoliberal policies are often explicitly gender-conscious (Bedford 2007). Nevertheless, this new attention to the role of women, the family, and the community, in social reproduction, does not necessarily have liberatory implications for those involved.

While international organisations have been active in pushing neoliberal globalisation, they do not function solely to reinforce neo-liberal nostrums. Thus Noel has highlighted the role played by UN agencies – UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund), the UN Development Programme and the UN Research Institute for Social Development – in the global rediscovery of poverty in the early 1990s (2006:313).[3] The debates thus generated, given added force by the Asian and Latin American financial crises, in turn prompted neoliberal standard-bearers, like the World Bank and the IMF, to introduce poverty reduction strategies. Porter and Craig (2004) take this further: as part of a broader (Polanyian) move to re-embed market societies, a new variant of liberalism – "inclusive liberalism" - has emerged across North and South. Inclusion here focuses on inclusion in the labour market: the state's role is not only to induce participation but also to provide opportunities for the development of individual capabilities. Jenson and Saint Martin's (2003) analysis of these changes, utilising the concept of the "social investment", highlights an important generational dimension of this discourse, which focuses especially on children and youth. Yet as Graefe points out, "different forms of social investment …may have different potentials for leading to transformative projects and indeed even generic ideas such as activation may have quite different political connotations depending on programme design and national context" (2006a: 201).

For Craig and Porter, the new social policy discourses largely represent a new phase of neoliberalism, whereas for Noel, the rediscovery of poverty has placed "the social" back on the agenda, creating a new space for contestation between Right and Left. Similarly, Deacon's analysis led him to conclude that the narrow focus on "safety nets" promoted by the IMF and World Bank now has to contend with a "renewed emphasis on universalism", from various UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) (2007:172). We argue that there are at least three broad alternatives to "roll-back" neoliberalism: "intrusive liberalism;"[4] inclusive liberalism, and a renewed version of social citizenship.

Both inclusive and intrusive liberalism actively seek to extend the reach of markets and are concerned to "activate" the excluded through a mix of carrots (emphasized by the first) and sticks (favoured by the second). While intrusive liberalism emphasizes sticks (cuts in benefit rates; tightened eligibility requirements; including lifetime limits; short term "employability" programs), inclusive liberalism places greater emphasis on carrots – phase out of benefits with entry into employment; wage subsidies, training and education.[5] Neither, however, challenges neoliberal labour market flexibility that has greatly contributed to the polarised incomes that constitute the "new" face of poverty, especially in the North. Both emphasize investment in the next generation(s) and both have clearly gendered agendas Nevertheless, there are important differences. While "intrusive" liberalism can be seen as a form of neoliberalism, "inclusive liberalism" sees a role for the state in providing 'flanking mechanisms' "shoring up a neoliberal policy paradigm by addressing its dysfunctions with non-market solutions" (Graefe, 2006a:201).

Intrusive liberalism targets children "at risk," and focuses on changing the behaviours of their families (i.e. mothers). It has much in common with the older practices of social assistance as moral regulation, now buttressed by "scientific" research informed by the "social paediatrics" model. As McKeen argues, it sanctions the following kinds of practices:

> Local program workers are assumed to provide guidance, emotional support, counselling, referral….The practice of surveillance and monitoring of clients continues under the new programs, but the innovation is that clients themselves are expected to participate in self-monitoring. Program tools are designed and used to draw clients into practices wherein

---

[3] For a more detailed analysis, see Deacon (2007).

[4] Thanks to Pertti Alasuutari who suggested this term at a workshop on the OECD, Carleton, January 2007.

[5] See Peck and Theodore (2000) for a more extensive discussion of the differences. As we suggest below, inclusive liberalism, with its concerns for fiscal restraint, does not go as far as the social citizenship alternative but it can include the "flexicurity"option, as the OECD's "revised Jobs Strategy" indicates (Noaksson and Jacobsson, 2007).

they are continually reminded of their need to address their supposed weaknesses, to achieve their personal goals and to continually assess their own progress (2007:167)

As Roelvink and Craig note, the combination of workfare and "parenting" places incommensurate demands on women as "partner for the state in the core inclusive business of preparing a new generation of skilled workers, while at the same time, being rudely included in the workforce herself" (2005:116).   It is perhaps in these "gendered and generational" areas that the contrast between intrusive and inclusive liberalism is greatest. Thus whereas intrusive liberalism focuses on lone mothers' labour market participation, inclusive liberalism seeks to promote the participation of <u>all</u> adult women in the labour market and advocates provision of public measures to support the reconciliation of work and family. Second, whereas intrusive liberalism targets children "at risk", inclusive liberalism recognises that all children can benefit from early learning and care.

Inclusive liberalism is nicely illustrated by the OECD's major study of "family friendly" policies, Babies and Bosses. The OECD's Directorate on Employment Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA) has embraced the adult worker family. Lone parents are considered employable and thus to be included in workfare programs. Yet lone parents are not the only focus. Support for the adult worker family norm in the form of "family friendly policies" is considered especially important for a number of reasons. As *Babies and Bosses* (2007) argues, "getting family-friendly policies right will help reduce poverty, promote child development, enhance equity between men and women and stem the fall in birth-rates." Such policies also make it possible to redesign social insurance programs originally built to sustain the male breadwinner in his role, as pensions and unemployment insurance schemes can be fully individualised. DELSA's inclusive liberalism thus assigns the state an important role in the "reconciliation of work and family life" so that all adult women can work. This includes access to affordable and quality childcare, shared parental leave, and greater flexibility in work arrangements and training opportunities (OECD, 2007).

In contrast to both, the renewed social citizenship model aims to countervail the effects of neoliberalism. This does not mean turning the clock back to the postwar models of provision. Rather, it "could involve new attempts to democratize the state and policy through meaningful channels of popular participation and control, to re-regulate labour markets or to transform the value assigned to different forms of paid and unpaid work and care" (Graefe, 2006a:201-2). The example of a countervailing strategy picked by Graefe was the Quebec Women's March Against Poverty, expanded to the global scale with the World March of Women (Conway, 2008). Yet social movements are not the only voices calling for a renewal of social citizenship.

The OECD's *Starting Strong* – the thematic study of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) carried out under its Education Directorate – provides another example, which highlights the differences between inclusive liberalism and social citizenship. Whereas *Babies and Bosses* tended to view child care as a support for working mothers and an investment in human capital, for *Starting Strong*, it was the interests and rights of the child in the here-and-now, which took a central place. This means programs based on "social pedagogy" rather than the "social paediatrics" of intrusive liberalism. In fact, for *Starting Strong,* child poverty is understood to be rooted not in the welfare dependency of their parents, but in their underemployment, income inequalities and insufficient transfer payments – in other words, in the flexibilised labour markets and restructured welfare states that are the product of neoliberal restructuring. While *Babies and Bosses* ultimately acknowledged gender inequality, for *Starting Strong* gender equality was always central: women's right to equal access to work, equal pay for work of equal value, equal opportunity for advancement and the equal sharing of child care and domestic work. Consistent with its rights-centred discourse, *Starting Strong* was also critical of the low pay and poor working conditions experienced by many ECEC workers. Accordingly it called for fair wages, appropriate training and good working conditions of this largely feminised occupation.

The "global rediscovery of poverty" and the broader debate it has sparked constitute an important part of the context for national and subnational policy experiments. We by no means wish to suggest, however, that the flow of policy ideas is unidirectional, from the "top" down. Rather as Noel (2006) rightly suggests, and as we hope to show in the next sections, it is multi-directional, involving a range of actors operating at different scales.

Rescaling National Welfare Regimes: Canada and Mexico

The centrality the national scale enjoyed for much of the last century is not only being challenged by "globalisation." The last few decades have also witnessed important changes to inter-scalar arrangements within countries and these changes have shaped, and been influenced by, the restructuring of national welfare regimes (Ferrera, 2005). Such "territorial experimentation" has at times been used by states to undermine forces blocking change at the national level (Peck, 2001). At the same time, local initiatives inspired by inclusive liberalism - or even those favouring the renewal of social citizenship - have sought to mitigate the destructive impacts of neo-liberal projects at the national scale. While in federal countries like Canada and Mexico, much of the attention has been focused on the rescaling of national-provincial arrangements (Graefe, 2006b; Lightman, Herd and Mitchell, 2006), Holston suggests that, as sites particularly exposed to the manifold aspects of globalisation, cities become veritable laboratories of experimentation as urban denizens struggle to fill gaps in existing arrangements made all the more obvious by their encounters with the novel. In the process, new rights claims may lead to the emergence of urban citizenships at odds with, and potentially challenging, the national welfare regime.

In what follows, we briefly describe post-war inter-scalar arrangements in Canada and Mexico, focusing on the way these contributed to their respective welfare regimes. While both have federal state structures, Mexico's state system was far more centralised. In Canada, post-war arrangements allowed the federal government to play an agenda setting role, while supporting provincial diversity. This permitted the entrenchment of marked inter-provincial differences. For the most part, municipalities lacked an official role in social policy design or implementation. In Mexico, the politics of political exclusion meant that the country's formal federal structure was largely eclipsed. At the same time that power was extremely centralised, large and growing regional inequalities meant that a huge gap in levels of inequality emerged between the federal entities. Both state governments and municipalities lacked a meaningful role in social provision. The struggles for democratisation in the late 20th century began to challenge this centralisation of power, however, giving rise to new forms of social provision toward the end of the PRI regime.

In Canada, the British North America Act of 1867 gave the provinces jurisdiction over social policy. In the post-war period, however, the federal government used its spending powers to establish a pan-Canadian welfare regime. Thus, the federal government created universal, flat rate family allowances and old age security benefits and initiated social insurance programs like unemployment insurance, health and earnings-related pensions. Yet the provinces continued to play an important role. Thus, the development of the Canadian welfare regime occurred through the formation of an increasingly dense web of federal-provincial arrangements (Banting, 1987). The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), through which federal funds became available for social assistance and a variety of related community services, is a good example of such arrangements.

CAP provided federal funds, on an open-ended 50-50 basis, for all categories of social assistance recipients (including, for the first time, lone parents), as well as rehabilitation, counselling, homemakers' services, community development and child care. One of CAP's aims was to ensure that all provinces developed the capacity to support such services, but it imposed few pan-Canadian[6] rules on the patchwork of provincial programs. Programs were means-tested, but no province could impose residency requirements; an arms length appeal procedure had to be established by each province; and provinces were not allowed to impose workfare requirements. Social assistance recipients could be helped to make the transition to employment, but they could not be forced to do so. With these minimal conditions. CAP did thus did little to eliminate the substantial variation in provincial social assistance programs (Boychuk, 1998).

In these arrangements, cities, which along with local charities had previously provided much of what help was available to the poor, were marginalised. In the early 20th century, a number of municipalities had begun to play a more active role in the social field, under pressure from Progressive reformers. In the 1930s, however, it became clear that municipalities lacked the

---

[6] Quebec was allowed to opt out, provided that it followed the basic rules. It received compensatory financing through the Established Programs (Interim Arrangements) Act (Finkel, 2005:260).

resources to handle growing social needs. In the postwar intergovernmental arrangements designed to address this problem, however, cities had no place at the table (Bradford, 2002). This is exemplified by CAP, which explicitly encouraged the centralisation of responsibility for social assistance and related services at the provincial scale. Ontario is one of the few provinces where municipalities officially retained an official role, albeit one whose scope was very much determined by provincial priorities.[7]

The Canadian Keynesian-welfare variety reached its apogee in the 1970s, in a context marked by the mobilisation of old and new social movement – feminist, anti-poverty, Aboriginal, left nationalist and trade union – activism. In subsequent decades, the social liberalism that had inspired the postwar expansion of the welfare state did not completely disappear, but it increasingly yielded place to other varieties of liberalism – neoliberal retrenchment, then, as the century came to a close, programs bearing the stamp of intrusive liberalism, followed by tentative moves in an "inclusive" direction. Welfare state restructuring brought with it changes to interscalar arrangements. As Graefe (2006b) argues, this did not eliminate the federal government's agenda-setting role but it did encourage provincial experiments, and later, even began to bring the municipalities in, especially in Canada's largest cities.

Perhaps the first signal that the Keynesian paradigm was losing support was that unemployment was allowed to rise, and with it the polarisation in market incomes that would ultimately fuel the rediscovery of poverty. In social policy terms, neo-liberalism was initially evident not only in cuts to social spending, but also in the pattern of the cuts, as governments resorted to increased targeting (Myles and Pierson, 1997). As the decade wore on, social programs faced increasing criticism from the Right as an impediment to labour force adjustment. It was not just the Right, however, that was concerned to "activate" social assistance recipients. The Liberals also become concerned to reduce "welfare walls." This resulted in reforms to unemployment insurance, culminating in the renaming of the program "Employment Insurance" (EI), which reduced those eligible from 80 to 40 percent of those out of work (TCSA, 2006: 21). The earnings replacement rate was cut and the income level at which the benefits clawback was introduced was lowered. Voluntary quits and those fired became ineligible, the number of required weeks worked was raised and the duration of benefits was cut. The gender gap also widened (Battle et al, 2006: 18). EI included an activation dimension, but its rich array of programs was now only available to "core" workers.

Limits to EI eligibility forced many to turn to provincial social assistance, but cuts to social assistance further eroded state capacity to mitigate market income polarisation. In 1990, the Conservative government put a cap on CAP transfers to the three largest provinces, including Ontario, where federal contributions to social assistance fell from 50% in 1998-90 to 28% in 1992-93 (Marquardt, 2007:210). In 1996 the Liberal government eliminated CAP, replacing it with a new (substantially reduced) block transfer, the Canada Health and Social Transfer fund (CHST). In response, most provinces cut their social assistance rates and tightened eligibility requirements. In Ontario a neo-liberal government, elected in 1995, cut social assistance rates by more than 20 percent for all but the disabled and seniors. It also reintroduced the "man in the house" rule[8] and established a "welfare fraud" hotline (Herd, Mitchell and Lightman, 2005). Even today, benefit rates in most provinces are at the lowest since the 1980s (National Council of Welfare, 2005). The CHST also marked an important turn in interscalar arrangements. Not only did it shift from conditional to block funding, but with its passage, the federal government promised to forego unilateral use of its spending power, so central to the construction of a pan-Canadian welfare regime.

Ending CAP also eliminated the modest rules it upheld, including the ban on compulsory workfare. The federal government also actively encouraged workfare experiments through a number of initiatives, including the Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA), through which administration of labour market programs was decentralised to the provincial scale. These

---

[7] Initially the Alberta government also allowed municipalities considerable scope but this was sharply curtailed by the Conservative government of the late 1970s. In Nova Scotia too, municipalities remained involved in the administration of social assistance (Lord, 2008). Outside of Ontario's major cities, these are the exception to the rule.

[8] That is, lone mothers are cut off social assistance if welfare workers find a "man in the house".

agreements, which support a "work first" approach, maintain federal influence (Graefe, 2006b:12). Although the Ontario government was the only province not to conclude such an agreement, the neoliberal Harris government was the first to make participation in its new workfare program, Ontario Works, mandatory for receipt of social assistance. Applicants were required to undergo intrusive drug-dependency and literacy tests, with sanctions imposed for refusal to participate in remedial programs. Lone mothers, ruled "employable" once their children had entered school (or earlier), were required to participate in one of the Employment Assistance programs.[9]

Ontario's workfare program is a good example of intrusive liberalism at work. As Herd et al document, Ontario Works entails "a plethora of administrative responses focusing upon close supervision, individual job plans, and the overall micro-regulation of job-search and personal behaviour" (2005:75). A related program – Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) – focused on young mothers, with participation mandatory for 16-17 year old parents. Through it, "young parents (read: young mothers) must participate in a minimum of 35 hours of parenting programs in order to maintain their eligibility for assistance" (Luccisano and Romagnoli, 2007: 733). Ontario's workfare reforms went hand in hand with a rescaling of provincial-municipal relations. While devolving important managerial (and financial) responsibilities to the municipalities, "provincial rules and strategies have effectively constrained the ability of municipalities to develop truly local solutions" (Lightman, Herd and Mitchell, 2006:124).

This is not to suggest that growing poverty was ignored. Yet, whereas concerns in the 1980s had focused on the "feminization of poverty" (lone mothers), during the 1990s, the focus turned exclusively to child poverty. This may have been encouraged by the unanimous endorsement by the House of Commons of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1989, but anti-poverty activists also embraced this focus, perhaps judging that, in the harsh political climate in which governments of both stripes sought to marginalise "special interests" (feminists, environmentalists, trade unionists and the like),[10] the only acceptable figure was the innocent child. At the federal scale, activation and child poverty came together in the 1998 National Child Benefit (NCB), which inaugurated a new set of interprovincial arrangements.

The NCB is composed of several elements. The first is an income tested supplement that reaches approximately 80 percent of families with children under 18.[11] The second, the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS), reflects a blend of intrusive and inclusive liberalism. The "inclusive" element is reflected in measures to "lower the welfare wall" by "making work pay." Thus the NCB goes to all low income families with children under 18, *irrespective of whether their income derives from earnings or social assistance*. In addition, however, the provinces were invited to "clawback" an amount equivalent to the federal contribution to social assistance and "reinvest" it in related programs. Many provinces used these funds to offer inducements (carrots) to leave social assistance in the form of benefits and earned income supplements.[12]

The "intrusive" side is reflected in child development programs targeting the parents of children deemed to be "at risk", supported by the NCBS clawback and the subsequent federal-provincial Early Child Development initiative. Such parent-focused programs "seek to enhance the child's development indirectly by changing parental behaviour and enhancing the home environment; they provide parents with information about child development and effective parenting strategies and teach them how to engage in educational activities with their children. The service is usually delivered through home visits but may be provided through group or individual parents meetings in an agency's office" (Doherty, 2007: 7). Doherty, who has done a thorough review and assessment of such programs, concluded that they have negligible positive effects on child development, compared to quality, universal ECEC. McKeen's (2007) analysis of

---

[9] These included community participation (unpaid placements in non-profit or public agencies), employment placement for the "job ready" and employment supports (job search, basic education, or job-specific training).

[10] See Phillips and Jenson (1996) for a good analysis of this turn.

[11] There is an additional supplement for those not claiming the Child Care Expense Deduction, i.e. for families not relying on official (receipted) child care. Thus it would go to families with a stay at home parent as well as those forced to rely on informal child care arrangements.

[12] See Jenson and Thompson , 1999, for more detail, especially page 28.

Nova Scotia's "Healthy Beginnings" is even more critical of such highly gendered and intrusive programs.

This is not to suggest that all such programs reflect the workings of intrusive liberalism. Thus Ontario's "Better Beginnings" program, launched before the election of the Harris government, devolved to the local community decisions as to the type and mix of services on offer and at least a few instances, local authorities have chosen to focus on developing quality ECEC (Doherty, 2007:22). At the federal scale, there were also signs of an inclusive liberal turn, through the Multi-lateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (2003), followed by the 2005 bilateral agreements with all ten provinces on an ECEC system based on the "QUAD" principles (quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental).[13] While Quebec, with its "$5 a day"[14] universal child care program was well ahead of the other provinces, Ontario, now under a Liberal government, was quick to launch its "Best Start" program structured along QUAD lines.

Inclusive liberalism was also reflected the (previous) federal government's "new deal for cities" (2004-2005). As Bradford notes, the "new deal" had three basic components: "predictable longer term funding for all municipalities; more tri-level collaboration for area-based policy making; and an urban (and community) policy lens to assess and improve the impacts of federal policies in municipalities" (2006:7-8). While the first (the "gas tax") was narrowly targeted at the development of physical infrastructure, the second and third aimed to contribute to anti-poverty initiatives and the development of more "inclusive" communities (Bradford, 2006). These programs also recognized the importance of bringing cities into the interscalar arrangements governing social policy development and implementation.

In contrast with the high level of decentralization that has evolved in the Canadian federation, until recently Mexico, despite its constitutional status as a federation, has displayed in practice one of the highest levels of concentration of power in the world. One of the main tools of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in maintaining its grip on power for so many years was this fusion between the federal government, the party and the bureaucracy (Edmunds 2000). While state governors played an important role as power brokers after the revolution, the consolidation of the PRI as a hegemonic- or dominant-party system in the 1940s led to the concentration of power in the hands of the federal government, more specifically those of the president (*presidencialismo*). Presidents controlled PRI nominations for governorships and sometimes even municipal presidencies, and could determine the adoption of specific projects undertaken in each state (Diaz-Cayeros, date? 26). Power has also been heavily centralised at lower scales, since while both the federal congress and state congresses have law making functions, the municipality has none (Ward and Rodriguez 1999: p.??).

While the degree to which federalism was entirely fictional has been somewhat exaggerated (Diaz-Cayeros, date?1), the Mexican post-war corporatist state thus relied heavily on centralised mechanisms of delivery of resources and services. Such centralisation was facilitated by the federal government's gradual monopolisation of almost all sources of fiscal revenue. In the second half of the 20th century, the federal government declared its exclusive power to levy almost all forms of taxes. States were theoretically capable of levying an income tax, payroll taxes, sales taxes, and other taxes not explicitly listed in the constitution, but in practice no state actually exercises this authority, apart from payroll taxes. Local politicians agreed to this delegation of financial power to the present, in exchange for patronage channelled through federal bureaucracies, and access to jobs in the federal legislature and bureaucratic bodies (Diaz-Cayeros, date?). This centralisation of power undoubtedly contributed to the success of import substituting industrialisation (ISI) policies adopted between the 1940s and 1970s, which resulted in high levels of economic growth and created the conditions necessary for higher levels of social spending.

In contrast with the liberal form of the Canadian welfare state, the post-war Mexican system followed Esping-Andersen's conservative Bismarckian pattern. The state welfare system became a key source of patronage within the clientelistic system controlled by the president and

---

[13] The election of a neoliberal federal government in January 2006 led to the cancellation of these agreements.

[14] Now $7. See Jenson 2002 and 2006 for more detail.

the dominant party. During the 1960s, the Mexican welfare state grew in size and scope. Levels of extreme poverty declined from the 1960s to 1981, and moderate poverty increased, although at decreasing rates (Trejo and Jones 1998: 70). During this period, policies were couched in a developmentalist agenda, influenced both by the ideals of the revolution, and by the Keynesian theories promoted by the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC). Intervention by the federal government in many spheres of the economy acted to alter the basic conditions that created poverty – particularly through agrarian reform, credit, health services, social security and education. The government also reduced poverty by influencing the prices of goods and services purchased by the poor, and by providing price guarantees and subsidies for basic goods like tortillas, as well as by intervening in increasing minimum and public real wages (Boltvinik 2003, 387-8). Social programs, especially education, were largely universalistic in character and free, although workers in the public sector received a much higher level of provision than others. There were obvious gender implications of this model as well, since male workers were heavily concentrated in the formal sector. With the economic crisis that broke out with the onset of the debt crisis in 1981, the limits of this model for social cooptation and legitimacy became apparent.

The effects of the debt crisis and the subsequent neoliberal adjustment policies adopted under IMF tutelage were devastating for the poor, for women, and for social provision in Mexico. In this period, Mexico underwent a serious roll-back of its social programs. Poverty and inequality were subsequently aggravated even further by the peso crisis of 1994. In 1994, poverty and extreme poverty rates were similar to 1980 levels. Even government officials recognised that inequality worsened during the 1984-1994 period (Moctezuma Barragán 1998, cited in Dussel Peters 2000: 152). Between 1984 and 1994, the wealthiest 10% of Mexicans' share of real national income rose from around 34% to more than 41%, while all other groups suffered a decline (Pastor and Wise 1997: 426). Social development spending as a percentage of expenditure actually declined under President De la Madrid (1982-88); by 1986-88, real per capita expenditure on social programs had fallen 30 percent compared to 1971-1981 base levels (Bruhn 1996: 154).

During this period, as in other Latin American countries, there was a dramatic shift in the design and execution of social program, toward a "minimalist" model. This involved a shift in responsibility for social provision away from the state toward the market, while responsibility for social reproduction shifted toward families, and in particular, toward women (Arriagada 2006: 9-10). The first phase of structural adjustment was the most minimalist, and primarily involved brutal cuts to social services, while in the second phase states and international organizations attempted to deal with the political and social fall-out of these reforms through the creation of social investment funds and other mechanisms to "target" resources to the extreme poor. In accordance with this "new poverty agenda" promoted by the World Bank and other international actors, government interventions are designed to promote, not alter, market signals. According to Mexican scholar Julio Boltvinik, in this new poverty agenda:

> Growth should be subject to the free play of the market; the state's only role is to help those who cannot participate in the "market game" on their own – that is, the extremely poor. This new agenda does not consider poverty other than extreme poverty to be a problem that merits state intervention. Indeed, it recommends against directing social expenditures to the population that is not in extreme poverty; instead, it concentrates resources in targeted programs that benefit only the extremely poor (2003: 386).

The new emphasis on targeting opened the door to much more intrusive forms of state policy.

As in Canada, neo-liberal poverty reduction programs in Mexico also entailed dramatic changes in interscalar arrangements. These processes were acclelerated by the escalating pressures for democratization that were coming from both Left and Right, as both the PAN and PRD became increasingly competitive in state and municipal elections. Victoria Rodriguez argues that the last three PRI presidents, de la Madrid (1982-1988), Salinas (1988-1994) and Zedillo (1994-2000), in different ways, all pursued decentralization as a means of retaining their party's control over power. De la Madrid's Municipal Reform of 1983, she argues, resulted primarily in deconcentration rather than full devolution of power. With this reform, the federal government began to shift some state responsibilities back to states and municipalities. Under

Salinas, devolution of power to the local level occurred specifically within the context of an attempt to address growing poverty levels, through the *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* (PRONASOL). Solidarity had a strong decentralizing appearance, since the program was designed to bypass traditional federal bureaucracies and corporatist structures, and channel social welfare funds to local communities, and to increase local participation. In practice, however, the program was extremely centralizing in its effects. By 1992 Salinas had removed almost half of the country's 31 governors from office, manipulating his "metaconstitutional" powers (Rodriguez 1998: 243-6). Solidarity also bypassed municipal and state power toward local community groups (Rodriguez 1998: 251).

The fragmentation of the Mexican political class and the decline in the traditional authority of the presidency, created the opening for Zedillo's project of New Federalism. The backlash against Salinas, and specifically against the politicisation of the Solidarity programme, meant that democratic forces and especially non-PRI governors, pushed heavily for greater transparency in center—local budgetary relations (World Bank 2006: 16-17) The New Federalism involved a substantial shift in state power away from the presidency toward the state and municipal scales, as well as to the legislature and judiciary. In 1998 the federal government created a special budgetary item (*Ramo 33 aportaciones* – budget item 33 contributions) in order to streamline and make more transparent federal transfers to local governments. States thus became responsible for education, health care, and social infrastructure spending, however state and municipal governments remained extremely financially dependent on federal transfers (Diaz-Cayeros, date? 12-13).

In this period, the shift toward both inclusive and intrusive liberalism became most apparent. Under Zedillo, the federal government eliminated both universal and targeted food subsidy programs, arguing that subsidies encouraged a culture of state dependency, as well as widespread corruption, clientelism, and partisan manipulation (Luccisano and Romagnoli 2007: 734). Since Solidarity had been widely criticised as politically manipulated, Zedillo pledged to make his new anti-poverty program, *Progresa*, launched in 1997, free from political manipulation. As part of this commitment to transparency and decentralisation, in 1996 Zedillo agreed to transfer two-thirds of PRONASOL's resources to state and municipal governments (Trejo and Jones 1998: 77). Zedillo's strategy, continued by President Fox in his poverty program, *Oportunidades*, represented a real shift away from neoliberalism toward principles of "inclusive" liberalism.

In contrast to Solidarity, *Progresa* was a highly targeted program of social benefits, focused exclusively on families living in extreme poverty. The main element of the program is a system of conditional cash transfers, in which money is delivered directly to households (specifically mothers) living in extreme poverty. As in Canada, children have been the main focus of this inclusive liberal strategy. *Progresa/Oportunidades* is primarily targeted not at poverty alleviation of the current poor, but at the development of human capital of children through conditional cash transfers to mothers, who in return must ensure the school attendance and participation in health check-ups. This emphasis on human capital development creates the basis for the intrusive elements of the program.

As in Canada, receipt of welfare transfers is accompanied by increased conditions, regulations, and sanctions on mothers (Lucissano and Romagnoli 2007: 738). The program is thus explicitly gendered. The government claims that one of the priorities of *Oportunidade*s is to "strengthen the position of women in the family and within the community. For this reason, it is the mothers of the family who are named as the beneficiaries of the program and who receive the corresponding monetary transfers". (*Oportunidades* n.d.: 1). Molyneux (2006) notes that, in this sense, this program represents a return to the maternalism that characterised much of social policy in Latin America in the past, since it reinforces traditional conceptions of the role of women in the family, without any clear strategy for women's empowerment. The prevalence of the maternalist frame in the Mexican women's movement may thus have indirectly encouraged this direction. While the program has thus been evaluated as largely successful in its own terms of poverty reduction, increased child enrolment in school and reduced child labour, it entrenches familiar patterns of hierarchy within Mexican society, and its contribution to social development in the long term is questionable (Mahon and Macdonald forthcoming).

Challenging from "Below": Toronto and Mexico City

As we have seen, in the 1980s and 1990s, both the Canadian and Mexican welfare regimes began to erode under the influence of neoliberalism. Yet there were also efforts to redesign their respective regimes along intrusive and even inclusive liberal lines. Welfare retrenchment and redesign went hand in hand with rescaling. This involved increased emphasis on local implementation, though the federal (and in Canada, also the provincial) governments continued to set the policy agenda. In other words, decentralisation was intended to enlist local governments and community groups in putting activation programs designed from above, not to devolve power to the local scale. Yet, in some instances at least, local actors were not without their own alternative designs and, as we shall see, in Toronto and Mexico City, the determination to realize them. These cities thus have become spaces for organizing a challenge to the dominant regimes and social paradigms in both countries.

Toronto played an important role in the postwar Canadian economy, first as home to many of the branch plants central to Canadian Fordism, and later as headquarters to key financial and business services and cultural institutions. As a result of the federal equalization program, Toronto was an important contributor to the pan-Canadian welfare state. At the provincial scale, Toronto was more than a source of funding for the welfare state as the Ontario government required municipalities to play a part in administering General Welfare Assistance and community services. Later, as the federal government strove to support multiculturalism, Toronto, which even now attracts one in four immigrants, became the delivery site for many of these (Donald, 2002:2140).

Yet Toronto was not simply a site for the administration of programs designed elsewhere. Under pressure from middle-class urban reformers and a range of social movements, both the old City of Toronto and the Metropolitan government, set up to handle overarching policies for the six municipalities that comprised it, developed their own social and economic plans and the capacity to administer these (Magnusson, 1980; Donald, 2002; Keil and Kipfer, 2002). Toronto's ability to meet new social challenges, however, became increasingly stretched in the 1990s as its economy was hit hard by the recession and welfare state redesign and rescaling in the 1990s. The economic crisis accelerated the deindustrialisation of Toronto, and with it the destruction of well-paying Fordist jobs. The latter were increasingly replaced by precarious employment offering low wages and insecure jobs, many of which were filled by women, visible minorities and recent immigrants. Between 1997 and 2005, precarious employment increased by 68% in Toronto (United Way, 2007).

The provincial government's freeze on minimum wage levels meant many of these workers were driven into poverty. Unemployment rose and has remained at a rate higher than that of Ontario and Canada. Yet, due to the reforms to unemployment insurance, under one-third of Toronto's unemployed were eligible for EI. At the same time, the Conservative provincial governments of 1995-2004 cut, then froze, social assistance rates and tightened eligibility requirements. As the United Way's *Decade of Decline* (2002) documented, families on social assistance suffered substantial cuts to their monthly cheques. A later study documented growing gap between residents of the City of Toronto and Canadians as a whole in terms of median incomes and the percentage of low income families. Low income families make up more than one quarter of Toronto's families with children (United Way, 2007: 27). Poverty is especially concentrated in lone mother families, visible minorities and recent immigrants.

While poverty rose in Toronto, downloading and restructuring by the federal and provincial governments made it more difficult for the City to respond. The Province's realignment of responsibilities gave the forcibly amalgamated "mega city"[15] new responsibilities in administering social assistance and related programs, adding to the burden imposed by the earlier downloading of social housing. The Province required municipalities to manage Ontario Works, with substantial fiscal penalties for failure to comply. The Harris government's assumption

---

[15] In 1998 the province amalgamated the 6 municipalities into the new City of Toronto, now one of the largest in North America. It did little, however, to deal with the growing gaps between the City and the remaining municipalities which make up the Greater Toronto Area, with a total population of over 5 million.

of control over education also made it difficult for one of the City's important social partners, the Toronto District School Board, to support non-profit child care centres and other community services. The elimination of core funding to community groups by the federal and provincial governments undermined the capacities of another of the City's partners.[16]

Nevertheless, Toronto was and remains a key site of political mobilisation around poverty on multiple scales. In other words, Canada's multi-scalar state structure and Toronto's place therein, offer opportunities not only for policy action at the municipal scale, but also for "jumping across scales"[17] to challenge and change provincial and federal policies. First, the City has and utilises the capacity to create its own social development plans and to pursue these in areas such as social assistance, social housing, recreation, child care and other community services. Here it has continued to be innovative. For instance it has well-worked out child and youth strategy, including child care as a citizen right (Mahon, 2005), which is supported by an ongoing Child and Youth Action Committee and the issuing of "report cards" to document successes and ongoing challenges. The Mayoral Task Force on homelessness did much to publicise the problems low families face in Canada's most expensive city. Here too regular report cards are used to keep the issue on the public agenda.

More broadly, one of the new city's first acts was the striking of a Task Force to elaborate a Social Development strategy.[18] The task force's report reflected not only the City's commitment to five core principles - equity, equality, fair and equitable access, social cohesion and the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the city - but also its awareness of its larger political mission. Thus the City "must take the lead in reminding other governments of their responsibilities for social infrastructure and social equity….In its advocacy, the city must encourage citizens to speak on their own behalf and consistently involve the voices of affected individuals…" (2002:18). Toronto is indeed home to many active community organisations and advocacy groups, from faith-based groups and ethno-cultural organisations to the very active Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) and the Workers Action Centre, which have helped to focus attention on the destruction of good jobs/expansion of precarious work. The City has fostered links with many of these, from its role in purchasing services to providing access to meeting spaces. In a sense, then, the City can be seen as a spider weaving together a dense network of agencies and activists not only to deliver social programs but also to challenge the provincial and federal governments. While the rights of children, the homeless and the poor have received increasing attention, Bashevkin (2005) found that there was less interest in gender equality. As she notes, the election of a progressive mayor, David Miller, did little to change this: "As of mid-2004, his office continued to reserve judgment on the future of a city council advisory committee on the status of women. Miller delayed meeting with Toronto Women's Call to Action, a group formed in February 2004 to press for an effective advisory committee, a gender-based city budgeting process, and the inclusion of women's concerns in local planning activities" (2005:23)

As seat of the provincial government and home of many province-wide anti-poverty organisations, it is easy for Toronto and Toronto-based anti-poverty advocates to "jump scale" to the province. The City has received support from organisations like the TYRLC in its campaign for

---

[16] See Clutterbuck and Howarth (2007) for a detailed assessment of the current state of Ontario's important nonprofit community service sector.

[17] Smith (1992) originally proposed the concept of "jumping scales" to draw attention to the way that social movements can cross scales of action in order to advance their cause(s) and it has been developed by others. See for example Miller (199), Masson (2006), Conway (2008) and Wekerle et al (forthcoming).

[18] The report reflects a consciousness of the global, as well as national, provincial, municipal and neighbourhood scales. Thus for example it anchors its conception of social development in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration of the United Nations summit on social development. The statement offered a conception of social development centred on the development of "the capacities and opportunities of all people, especially those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable, to enhance their own economic and social development, to establish and maintain organizations representing their interests and to be involved in the planning and implementation of government policies and programs by which they will be directly affected" (City of Toronto, 2002: 11).

a "fair deal" from the province[19] and, in turn, has worked with advocates on a range of antipoverty issues. In addition, when the Province is in the hands of an unfriendly government, as it was from 1995-2004, provincial actors may turn to the city as a base for action. Thus, Frances Lankin, a minister in the previous social democratic government (1991-1995), became the chief executive officer for the United Way of Greater Toronto, which has publicised the growing poverty and inequality there and pointed out the political and economic causes thereof. Another "refugee" from an earlier era of when the Ontario government was contemplating reforms to social assistance along "renewed social citizenship lines",[20] David Pecaut, has been instrumental in forming the Toronto City Summit Allliance (TCSA), which brought together business, unions, and community groups.

As Canada's largest city, Toronto is also represented by a sizeable (23) group of members of the federal parliament (MPs). Although the current Conservative government was shut out of Toronto in the last election, Torontonians have often held important cabinet posts and former mayors (e.g. Art Eggleton in the 1980s) and councillors (e.g. Jack Layton, current leader of the New Democratic Party, and his wife, Olivia Chow, who had helped craft the new mega city's social development strategy) have moved from city to federal politics. Toronto is also home to the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), certain key pan-Canadian antipoverty groups, like Campaign 2000, and progressive foundations, such as the Atkinson and Maytree foundations.[21] These links facilitate jumping to the federal scale. In this sense, anti-poverty politics in Toronto can influence the debate at the pan-Canadian scale.

Two key campaigns – the Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults (MISWAA), initiated by the TCSA and St Christopher House, a major Toronto neighbourhood service organisation, and the most recent campaign, "25 in 5" – reflect this kind of multi-scalar politics. They also support Noel's argument that the rediscovery of poverty has opened up a space for contestation in which various conceptions – from inclusive liberalism to the renewal of social citizenship – are on offer. MISWAA was launched when the Liberals, with strong representation from Toronto, constituted the federal government and had just taken office in Ontario. "25 in 5" was launched in 2007, with a hostile Conservative government in office federally, but a somewhat more sympathetic Liberal government in office in Ontario. In both periods, David Miller, a progressive, held the position of Mayor of Toronto.

The MISWAA task force brought together representatives of the business community, labour and social justice groups, policy research institutes and academics from across scales. Toronto-centred representatives included the TYRLC, the Daily Bread Food Bank, the Workers Action Centre and Regent's Park Community Council, with the City enjoying ex officio status. At the provincial scale, there was representation from the Income Security Advocacy Centre and the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrant Communities, with Deb Matthews, then Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister for Community and Social Services (now head of the provincial inter-ministerial cabinet committee on poverty reduction), enjoying ex officio status. From the pan-Canadian scale, the task force included representatives from Canadian Labour Congress and several important policy institutes such as the pro-business Conference Board of Canada, the centrist Caledon Institute and the Canadian Council on Social Development. Major

---

[19] See "A Fair Deal for our City!" available at www.labourcouncil.ca. The Executive Board came out in support of the Mayor and progressive councilors – and in opposition to the Right on Council, who had the support of key staff of the provincial Conservative party in their resistance to the Mayor's attempt to develop new revenue tools. The Labour Council joined with other social justice groups in support of the City's broader campaign for a better revenue sharing deal with the Province and the federal government.

[20] See Graefe, 2006b and Marquardt, 2007 for more detail on the kind of reforms that were being considered during the Liberal-NDP Accord of 1985. As both suggest, the federal government's imposition of a cap on CAP did much to derail these reforms.

[21] Unlike the United States, Canada does not have many foundations. Atkinson and Maytree, in fact, are among the few that support progressive organizations. Maytree has provided critical financial support for groups like the Workers Action Centre, which has done so much to raise the issue of precarious work in Toronto while Atkinson has strong connections with Campaign 2000 (national and provincial organizations).

corporations, such as two of Canada's major banks (with global reach), the George Weston food empire and a major multinational mining company, were also involved.

MISWAA's recommendations were also multi-scalar in their reach, with detailed recommendations for changes to federal and provincial policies and programs. The report focused attention on poverty of working adults, which represented an important breakthrough, as for much of the previous decade, this had been rendered invisible by the emphasis on child poverty. MISWAA began by noting that "today nearly a third of Canada's low wage workers do not earn sufficient income to meet their costs of living" and went on to warn of "a smouldering crisis for Toronto, the rest of Ontario and indeed for many parts of Canada" (2006:12). It called for the modernisation of income security, to address the "dramatic" changes in the labour market that had taken place over the last 40 years (2006:12). While it raised a range of issues, the report focused on a work income supplement for low income earners, preferably at the federal scale.[22] This emphasis was not uncontested, as several of the minority views contained in an appendix show. Aware that the main problem was the growth of precarious work, several called instead for improving the minimum wage, tougher enforcement of employment standards, and raising the benchmark liveable income level. Susan Eagle, a City Councillor from London, Ontario, put the criticism succinctly: "If employers paid workers a decent wage, instead of relying on government top-up, as MISWAA recommends, the public money thus saved could be used to take us much further…" (2006: 49).

"25 in 5"[23] is also multiscalar in its composition and its demand for action. The steering committee includes key local organisations, Toronto City Council and City staff; provincial associations and national organisations, including KAIROS, an ecumenical social justice group and it has received support from over 100 groups, again, operating at various scales. Not surprisingly, in recognition of the federal Conservative government's neoliberal orientation, its focus is on the province, though it urges the Province to press the federal government to restore unemployment insurance coverage, enrich the Working Income Tax Benefit and reinvest in social housing and ECEC. It differs from the MISWAA task force, moreover, in that it is composed entirely of social justice groups, and this is reflected in the nature of its demands. Its three priorities are:

1. sustaining employment: poverty-proof the minimum wage for full time earners; update and enforce labour standards; create strong employment and pay equity programs; expand access to health benefits; provide meaningful and accessible training and education;
2. livable incomes: raise social assistance; enrich the Ontario child Benefit and end the NCBS clawback; tighten regulation of "payday lending" and make it easier for people with disabilities to access Ontario Disability Support;
3. strong and supportive communities: reinvest in social housing; make ECEC universal and affordable and develop an equitable education system support public and community transit and fund community based programs.

In contrast to MISWAA's inclusive liberalism, these priorities bear the strong imprint of what we have called "renewal of social citizenship" model, focused on the rights of all to a decent standard of living. For "25 in 5", poverty reduction "is not simply about those who are poor. It is about bolstering the opportunities for all Ontarians".

"25 in 5" has called for a provincial strategy that embraces its target (25 in 5). In many respects it is looking for something akin to Quebec's framework law on poverty (2002) and the process that attended the passage. At a minimum, this entails meaningful consultation with the community, including low income people themselves; the setting of clear targets and timetables; establishment of appropriate poverty indicators; and a comprehensive strategy along the lines indicated above.[24] The spring 2008 budget suggests it has had some success in getting the Province to take on the issue: the Province has established an inter-ministerial Cabinet

---

[22] The Liberal government did initiate work on this, and a new tax credit was subsequently introduced by the federal Conservative government.

[23] This refers to the objective of reducing poverty by 25 percent in five years, 50 % in ten.

[24] See Noel (2002), Ninacs et al (2003), and Collin (2007) for more on the Quebec legislation and process.

Committee on Poverty Reduction, under Deb Matthews, Minister for Children and Family Services, also responsible for Women's Issues, which is to report later this year.

While MISWAA's inclusive liberal approach to poverty differs in important ways from "25 in 5"'s reassertion of social citizenship, both reports reassert the importance of addressing adult poverty. Both bring (back) to light the gendered and racialised character of that poverty, although "25 in 5"'s solutions would do much more to address this. And both testify to Toronto as an important site for the mobilisation of actors at multiple scales and recognise the importance of a multiscalar strategy.

The political engagement of the Mexico City government has been quite distinct from that of Toronto, but this example also illustrates the ways in which the municipal scale has become an increasingly important element in the multiscalar politics of poverty in the North American region. Like Canadian cities, Mexican cities lack any formal constitutional recognition. Mexico City is a federal district (like Washington D.C.), and thus lacked independent political representation in the Mexican legislature. Historically, the head of the federal district was designated by the Mexican president. This situation changed in 1997, when residents of the area were given the right to directly elect the head of the government of the Federal District and the representatives within the city's Legislative Assembly by popular vote. From the beginning of this democratic period, Mexico City has been headed by a series of representatives of the centre-left PRD, and the Legislative Assembly has been dominated by representatives of that party. The emergence of the district's greater political autonomy during the height of struggles to democratise the Mexican polity meant that it became the crucible for political struggles and a site of contestation. The partisan character of the political system of the municipality distinguishes it from the formally non-partisan Toronto government, and helps explain the politicised and oppositional character of municipal governance in Mexico City.

During the ISI period, Mexico City was not just the political, but also the economic centre of Mexico. By 1970 almost half of national manufacturing production occurred in Mexico City (Garza 2003: 488). The economic restructuring that began in the 1980s involved in part the territorial restructuring of the political economy of the country, as the traditional manufacturing centre based in the capital of the country declined as a result of NAFTA, and economic power and resources shifted northward toward the states on the U.S. border. At the same time, the economic crisis Mexico experienced, particularly in the rural areas as a result of liberalisation of agriculture, led to rapid urbanisation (as well as migration). In the 1980s as well, civil society organisations became more active, particularly in Mexico City. The 1985 earthquake that devastated much of the downtown area led to the rapid mobilisation of citizen action, since the central government seemed inefficacious in the light of the crisis (Grindle 2007: 35). The result was the emergence of a dynamic urban citizens' movement that began to break away from the traditional logic of state corporatism. As well, political pluralism emerged at both the state and municipal level; the victories of opposition candidates in various elections were the first nails in the coffin of PRI hegemony. While much of the decentralisation activity that occurred through the 1980s and 1990s was directed at state governments, municipalities took on greater oversight and responsibility for municipalities. The monies that were decentralised from federal coffers often flowed to states first (Grindle: 35-41), although as a federal district, Mexico City was in a special category and does receive federal funds directly.

The tradition of centralization of political power in federal control meant that Mexico City, like other local governments, did not play an important role in the design or even implementation of poverty programs until recently. Poverty levels are much higher in rural, southern, and indigenous regions of the country than in Mexico City, but the crises of the 1980s, followed by the peso crisis of 1995, led to deepening inequalities between rich and poor, and a rising discontent with the prevailing neoliberal model. This popular discontent, as well as the rich history of popular organising in the city proved a powerful base for the political aspirations of the PRD. The PRD was born out of a split within the ruling PRI, as leaders like Cuauhtémoc Cardenas left the party in disgust with its unwillingness to engage in political reform and democratisation.

From the beginnings of the party, Mexico City has served as a base for "jumping across scales" to challenge the roots of poverty and social exclusion in the country. After his unsuccessful campaign for president (which was lost in a widely-recognised electoral fraud), Cardenas became the first mayor of Mexico City in 1997, in a victory engineered by the party's

first president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). AMLO later became a wildly popular mayor of the city, elected in 2000, with popularity figures hovering around 80 per cent. Part of the more radical current of the PRD, AMLO is widely associated with the label of "populist" by his critics, as a result of the social programs he enacted in the city, as well as his clientelistic politics (Hilgers 2005). He is quoted as saying "anything that isn't in the recipes given to all the countries is immediately labelled populism. It's populism when there are programs of support for the poor, but saving the bankers is called progress" (Hilgers 2005: 5). AMLO used this popular base of support as the basis for his own unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 2006, in which the main line of cleavage between the PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón, and Lopez Obrador, was the latter's attack on the ruling party's failure to address poverty under the Fox regime.

While in the mayor's office in Mexico City, AMLO continued the program of social reforms implemented by his PRD predecessors. About 50 per cent of the city's population lacks access to social security (Hilgers 2005: 6). The *Oportunidades* program has minimal presence in the capital, since levels of extreme poverty are not high, although "moderate poverty" is widespread. This institutional absence creates a political vacuum that the Mexico City government has filled, creating the base for a discursive engagement with federal government poverty policies. The city's government, which is closely tied to the PRD, has implemented a series of programs such as subsidies to seniors, single mothers, schoolchildren, and the disabled (Hilgers 2005: 5 In contrast, successive PRD governments have adopted principles of social policy guided by the concept of social rights, with an aspiration toward universalism, with an initial territorial targeting of poorer areas of the city. The city also aspires to progressive income redistribution and widespread access to social benefits for the uninsured. Territorial targeting has been a major principle adopted by the city in order to achieve objective criteria for delivery of services while avoiding individual means-testing to reduce the stigma as well as the administrative costs associated with targeted programs (Laurell 2007: 3)

The most prominent example of the municipality's approach to social policy is the Integrated Territorial Social Program that includes housing and neighbourhood renewal, scholarships for children of single mothers, breakfasts in public school, compensation for increased prices of milk, economic assistance for the disabled, scholarships for job training, micro credits for household production, funds to peasants to protect remaining rural areas in the district, and a pension and health care program for social citizens In 2005, close to one million people were receiving benefits under this program, with a budget of $580 million U.S. (Laurell 2007: 4) Most components of this program are delivered on the basis of the incidence of poverty in each part of the city, in contrast with the "intrusive" techniques associated with *Oportunidades*; Mexico City's programs also lack the surveillance and reporting programs associated with *Oportunidades*, that encourage citizens to report on their neighbours if they are observed violating the program's requirements. One of the most controversial programs has been a nutrition subsidy to seniors, which provides free medical care, drugs, and public transport, as well as a monthly nutritional subsidy.

The discourse of the city government is based on a direct challenge to the principles underlying federal approaches to poverty reduction. The 2007-2012 Program of Social Development thus states:

> A social policy of equity and social inclusion, like that of the Government of the Federal District, is based on a perspective of rights of social citizenship, or if preferred, to develop the social dimension of citizenship. For that reason it is assumed that rights are universal and must be enforceable. They are not services that are acquired in the market, but rights that are accessed through public institutions financed by contributions, proportionate to income, paid for by citizens. Therefore, the policy of social rights of the Government of the City of Mexico has the goal of social guarantor and demarketization in the access and enjoyment of rights and social services (Distrito Federal 2007: 56).

Further, the Program states:

> The Government of the Federal District, in contrast with federal policies, assumes that social policy has as its goal to guarantee, recognize, widen, deepen, and make enforceable the rights established in the General Constitution of the Republic, in different international agreements signed by the country and in legislation regarding the social

agenda that has been approved by the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District. It is not, hence, a policy of opportunities, but of rights. It is not a program targeted and conditional on the improvement of extreme poverty, but at combating inequality, promoting equality and social inclusion through universalist, territorialised policies that stretch from the attention to immediate needs and the creation of the family patrimony, to the solid formation of capacities with a policy of respect for access to education and the improvement of educational quality, with actions without precedent in the rest of the country and with redistributive goals toward social groups, families, people, and territorial ambits in conditions of poverty, exclusion or discrimination. (Distrito Federal, 2007: 56).

Like Toronto's, Mexico City poverty policies thus support Noel's claim that despite the apparent hegemony of neoliberalism, various models of social policy are in contention, and champions a social liberal policy designed to critique the federal government's intrusive liberal policies. Multiscalar politics thus opens up space for contestation. In contrast to the federal policies, Mexico City's poverty policies are not explicitly gendered (although the city has adopted progressive social policies such as the decriminalisation of abortion). It could be argued, however, that these policies are ultimately more women-friendly than the targeted conditional cash transfers that supposedly are designed to promote women's empowerment, but bring with them additional responsibilities for women and that identify child poverty as women's problem.

Of course, particularly in a still highly centralised system like Mexico's, politics located at the municipal scale cannot adequately address poverty even within the municipality because of the lack of capacity to engage in broader macroeconomic and industrial policies, and the lack of an adequate tax base. The federal government has attempted to sap the city's independence by reducing its budget. As well, the current Mexican president, Calderón, in recognition of the potency of the politics of poverty, has recently announced a new strategy, "Vivir Mejor" (Live Better),which would include a food program for marginalized zones, and would particularly aim at reaching areas that are currently excluded from *Oportunidades* because they lack health facilities and schools. In a clear reference to Mexico City programs, Calderón stated that the federal government's social policy goes well beyond mere charity, in contrast with "populist or paternalist public policies that centre their action on poverty reduction and sometimes end by exacerbating the effects of poverty, Viviri Mejor seeks to attack its real causes, not just its effects" (Enciso 2008). Despite the failure of the PRD to win the presidency, it clearly is able to place poverty at the front of the national agenda and has thus had some success in successfully straddling the federal and municipal scales to present an alternative social agenda.

Conclusion

As we have argued, it is essential for feminist scholars concerned with the politics of poverty to move beyond the traditional focus on the nation-state. As globalisation has brought with it increased levels of inequality, and growing levels of poverty in many locations, much of which has been feminised, it has also brought about a transformation of the nation-state, and the displacement of power both "upward" toward the transnational, and "downward" toward the local. Anti-poverty activists are able to take advantage of this shifting politics of scale to contest both neo-liberal policies and long-established state paternalism. In the North American region, with the rise of neo-liberalism, both Canadian and Mexican federal actors have shifted away from traditional welfare state policies based on universalist approaches toward more targeted and intrusive liberal policies.

In this context, Toronto and Mexico City present fascinating examples of political action by municipal politicians and activists to contest federal restructuring of poverty programs, and to shift poverty away from the margins toward the centre of political activity. Interestingly, while neo-liberal programs have been explicitly gendered in some ways, municipal authorities have resisted some of the maternalist assumptions underlying this targeting of poverty as a women's concern, and have returned to a concern with the broader structural causes of poverty. It is an important topic of future research to what extent women's movements have been able to take advantage of this new poverty politics at the municipal level, or whether the shift back to universalist approaches has marginalized women's voices, as appears to be the case in Toronto.

References

Bashevkin, Sylvia (2005) "Urban citizenship: women in London and Toronto" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25:1 [[9-25

Battle, Ken, Sherri Torjman and Michael Mendelson (2006) *Towards a New Architecture for Canada's Adult Benefits* Caledon Institute of Social Policy

Boychuk, Gerald (1998) *Patchworks of purpose: the development of social assistance in Canada* McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal/Kingston

Bradford, Neil (2002) *Why cities matter: policy research perspectives for Canada* CPRN, Ottawa

Bradford, Neil (2006) "Placing Social Polcy?Reflections on Canada's New Deal for Cities and Communities" Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, York University, Toronto, June 3

Brenner, Neil (2001) "The limits of scale? Methodological reflections on scalar structuration" P*rogress in Human Geography* 24 591–614

City of Toronto, (2001) *A Social Development Strategy for the City of Toronto*

Clarkson, Stephen (2002) *Uncle Sam and Us: globalization, neoconservatism and the Canadian state* University of Toronto Press

Clutterbuck, Peter and Rob Howarth (nd) *Heads Up Ontario! Current Conditions and Promising Reforms to Strengthen Ontario's Nonprofit Community Services Sector* Final Report to the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto in support of the Community Social Services Campaign.

Collin, Chantal (2007) *Poverty Reduction Strategies in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador* Library of Parliament, PRV 07-23E

Conway, Janet (2008) "Geographies of transnational feminism: the politics of place and scal in the World March of Women" *Social Politics* 15:2

Courchene, Thomas (2001) "Ontario as a North American region-state, Toronto as a global city-region: responding to the NAFTA challenge". In A.J. Scott (ed.), *Global cityregions: trends, theory, policy* , Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Craig, David and Porter, Doug (2004) "The third way and the third world: poverty reduction and social inclusion in the rise of 'inclusive' liberalism" *Review of International Political Economy 11:2 pp 387-423*

Deacon, Bob (2007) *Global Social Policy and Governance* Sage
Doherty, Gillian *(2007)* "Ensuring the Best Start in Life: Targeting versus Universality in Early Childhood Development" *IRPP Choices* 13:8 pp 3-47

Donald, Betsy (2002) "Spinning Toronto's golden age: the making of a 'city that worked'" *Environment and Planning A 34, pp 2127-2154*

Ferrera, Maurizio (2005) *The Boundaries of Welfare: European Integration and the new Spatial Politics of Social Protection* Oxford University Press

Graefe, Peter (2006a) "The Social Economy and the American Model: Relating New Social Policy Directions to the Old" *Global Social Policy* 6, p 197 - 219

Graefe, Peter (2006b) "State Restructuring, Social Assistance and Canadian Intergovernmental Relations" *Studies in Political Economy* 78

Herd, Dean, Andrew Mitchell and Ernie Lightman (2005) "Rituals of Degradation: Administration as Policy in the Ontario Works Programme" *Social Policy and Administration* 39:1 pp 65-79
Holston, James (2001) "Urban Citizenship and Globalization" *Global City Regions* Allen J. Scott, ed. Oxford

Jacobsson, Kerstin and Niklas Noaksson (2007) From Deregulation to Flexicurity? The Makeover of the OECD Jobs Strategy" Presented at Workshop on The Mechanisms of OECD Governance, University of Bremen, 21-22 September

Jenson, Jane (2002) "Against the current: child care and family policy in Quebec" in *Child care policy at the crossroads: gender and welfare state restructuring* Sonya Michel and Rianne Mahon, eds. New York: Routledge

Jenson, Jane **(**2006) "Rolling out of backtracking on Quebec's child care system? Ideology matters" Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Canadian Political Science Association, York University 1 June

Jenson, Jane and Denis Saint Martin (2003) "New routes to social cohesion: citizenship and the social investment state" *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 28 77–100

Jenson, Jane with Sherry Thompson (1999) *Comparative Family Policy: Six Provincial Stories* CPRN Study N. F08

Kipfer, Stefan and Roger Keil **(**2002) "Toronto Inc? Planning the competitive city in the new Toronto" *Antipode* 34 227–64

Lightman, Ernie, Dean Herd and Andrew Mitchell "Exploring the Local Implementation of Ontario Works" *Studies in Political Economy* 78 pp 119-144

Lord, Stella (2008) *Shifting the Nova Scotia Gender Regime from Dependency to Employability: Politics and Process of Social Assistance Restructuring 1977-2001* Ph.D. thesis (soon to be defended, Carleton Sociology)

Luccisano, Lucy and Amy Romagnoli (2007) "Comparing Public social Provision and Citizenship in the United States, Canada and Mexico: Are There Implications for a North American Space?" *Politics and Policy* 35:4 pp 716-751

Magnusson, Warren. 1983. "Toronto." In *City Politics in Canada*, ed. W. Magnusson and A. Sancton. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Mahon, Rianne **(**2005) "Child care as citizenship right: Toronto in the 1970s and 1980s" *Canadian Historical Review* 86 285–316

Mahon, rianne (forthcoming) "Babies and Bosses: The Gendering of the OECD's Social Policy Discourse" in *The OECD and Transnational Governance* R. Mahon and S. McBride, eds. University of British Columbia Press

Marquardt, Richard (2007) *The Progressive Potential of Municipal Social Policy: A Case Study of Struggle over Welfare Reform in Ottawa During the Common Sense Revolution* PhD dissertation, Carleton University

Marston, Sallie **(**2000) "The social construction of scale" *Progress in Human Geography* 24 219–42

Masson, Dominique (2006) "Constructing scale/contesting scale: the women's movement and rescaling politics in Quebec" *Social Politics* 13:4

McKeen, Wendy. 2004. *Money in Their Own Name: The Feminist Voice in Poverty Debates in Canada, 1970–1995.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

McKeen, Wendy (2007) "The National Children's Agenda: A Neoliberal Wolf in Lamb's Clothing" *Studies in Political Economy* 80 pp 151-176

Miller, Byron **(**1997) "Political action and the geography of defense investment: geographical scale and the representation of the Massachusetts miracle" *Political Geography* 16 393–406

National Council of Welfare (2005) National Incomes 2004 National Council of Welfare Reports, Vol 123.

Ninacs, William with Anne-Marie Béliveau and Francine Gareau, *The collective for a Poverty-Free Québec: A Case Study* Caledon Institute of Social Policy, September

Noel, Alain (2006) "the new Global Politics of Poverty" *Global Social Policy* 6:3 pp 304-333

Noel, Alain (2002) *A Law Against Poverty: Quebec's new Approach to Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion* Canadian Policy Research Networks Background Paper – Family Network

Peck, Jamie and Nikolas Theodore, (2000) "Beyond 'employability" *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 24

Peck, Jamie **(**2001) *Workfare states* Guildford, New York

Peck, Jamie **(**2002) "Political economies of scale: fast policy, interscalar relations and neoliberal workfare" *Economic Geography* 78

Peck, Jamie and Adam Tickell (2002) "Neoliberalizing Space" *Antipode* pp 380-404

Phillips, Susan and Jane Jenson (1996) "Regime Shift: New Citizenship Practices in Canada" *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 14 fall p 111-136

OECD (2007) *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life: Final Report* Paris: OECD

Roelvink, Gerda and David Craig (2005) The Man in the Partnering State" *Studies in Political Economy* 75pp103-126

Smith, Neil **(**1992) "Geography, difference and the politics of scale" in Doherty J, Graham E and Mallek M eds *Postmodernism and the social sciences* Macmillan, New York 57–79

TCSA, (2006) *Time for a Fair Deal: Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults* Toronto City Summit Alliance and St Christopher House

Toronto and York Regional Labour Council (2007) "A Fair Deal for our City!" www.labourcouncil.ca

United Way of the Greater Toronto (2002) *Decade of Decline: Poverty and Income Inequality in the City of Toronto in the 1990s* www.uwgt.org/whoWeHelp/reports/decadeOfDecline.php

United Way of Greater Toront (2007) *Losing Ground: The Persistent Growth of Family Poverty in Canada's Largest City* United Way of Greater Toronto www.uwgt.org/whoWeHelp/reports/pdf/LosingGround-fullReport.pdf

Wekerle, Gerda, Anders Sandberg and Liette Gilbert (forthcoming) "Regional resistance in an exurban region: intersections of the politics of place and the politics of scale" *Leviathan Undone? Towards a Political Economy of Scale* Roger Keil and Rianne Mahon, eds. University of British Columbia Press