

**Assessing Urban Citizenship in the Context of Municipal  
Restructuring: The Case of Women in London and Toronto**

ABSTRACT: This paper is among the first to assess the urban citizenship implications of disparate metropolitan governance changes. Using the concept of citizen representation as its main conceptual anchor, the study examines longitudinal patterns in London and Toronto, two cities that underwent divergent institutional and political leadership experiences during the late 1990s and following. The empirical analysis addresses three dimensions of citizen representation in each location: the election of women to urban public office, the status of city "femocracies," and the inclusion of feminist discourse in official spatial plans. It reports women's citizenship status according to all three measures was considerably more robust under the GLA arrangement in London than the amalgamation scheme in Toronto. Within cities, representation on two of the three measures declined over time in both London and Toronto. The study concludes that institutional and leadership shifts can hold immediate and meaningful consequences for urban citizenship.

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## **Assessing Urban Citizenship in the Context of Municipal Restructuring: The Case of Women in London and Toronto\***

### **Introduction**

Social scientists are rarely able to conduct their research under such laboratory-like experimental conditions. Two large cities evolve in stable, Westminster-style, parliamentary systems. Each metropolitan area holds roughly 15 percent of the respective country's total population, and receives annually about half of its new immigrants (Buck et al., 2002: 141; Anisef and Lanphier, 2003: 3). Both serve as homes for powerful central governments that control cities -- the British national regime in London and the Ontario provincial government in Toronto.

The history of social mobilization in one city, London, is coloured from time to time by militant protest, often directed against the highly concentrated power of the British unitary state. In the other context, Toronto, civic engagement is for the most part moderate and measured, targeted at multiple levels of Canada's decentralized federal political scheme.

During a few short years, institutional and leadership arrangements change fairly dramatically in both locations. In 1997, British voters elect a centre-left New Labour government with a solid

urban base. Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour manifesto promises to renew local democracy, including in Britain's largest city, as part of a commitment to end the excessive centralization of the Thatcher/Major years. In 1995, Ontario voters select a hard right Conservative regime with a predominantly outer suburban, small-town and rural base. Premier Mike Harris' Tory campaign platform promises to cut government waste, bureaucratic duplication and tax rates, in part by asserting a firm grip on central government authority.

Each regime develops an ambitious plan for major municipal governance changes. New Labour holds a referendum on the creation of a new strategic coordinating authority for London, which is endorsed by 72 percent of the voters who participate (Pimlott and Rao, 2002: 70). New Labour retains the existing boroughs of London local government after establishing the Greater London Authority in 2000. Ontario Conservatives ignore a municipal referendum on their scheme to amalgamate six existing Toronto boroughs into a single megacity government, which is opposed by 76 percent of the voters who participate (Boudreau, 2000: 14). Conservatives eliminate all borough governments in downtown and inner suburban Toronto once the amalgamated municipality is created in 1998.

Londoners elect their first mayor and 25 members of the new Greater London Assembly in 2000. Fourteen of the London Assembly

Members (LAMs) represent geographically bounded zones and are elected using single member plurality rules, while eleven are London-wide members from party lists who are chosen under proportionality rules. Torontonians watch the unfolding of a massive game of musical chairs. From more than 100 council seats at the metropolitan and borough levels before amalgamation, Toronto's municipal seat count shrinks to fewer than 50 by 2000. Local elections continue to operate under single member plurality rules, and political parties remain only partially visible to Toronto voters.<sup>1</sup>

In London, central government elites orchestrate a highly contentious mayoral nomination process. They effectively deny the official Labour candidacy to Ken Livingstone, an urban new left veteran who led the Greater London Council (GLC) from 1981 until 1986, when it was shut down by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. Despite these machinations, Livingstone runs as an independent candidate and wins the London mayoralty in 2000 (D'Arcy and MacLean, 2000). In Toronto, central government elites endorse the 1997 mayoral candidacy of Mel Lastman, a suburban conservative. Lastman defeats downtown progressive Barbara Hall, whose leadership of the old City of Toronto had infuriated provincial Conservatives to the point that, according to some sources, they saw no choice but to

eliminate the downtown unit just as Thatcher eliminated the GLC (Boudreau, 2000; Ibbitson, 1997: 216, 243).

How would these disparate institutional and political leadership scenarios play out? Was the emergence of a left populist mayor pushing back against a moderate central government that promised to enhance local democracy, versus a conservative mayor allied with a hard right central government that sought to eliminate wasteful local boroughs, likely to hold meaningful implications for Londoners and Torontonians? Would a new London Assembly elected under partial proportionality rules make much difference? How much time would need to elapse before the consequences of these changes could be identified?

The citizenship implications of contemporary metropolitan restructuring, in its varied designs and locations, remain largely unknown. One stream of theorizing portrays urban reconfiguration as a damaging consequence of broader globalization pressures. According to this pessimistic line of thought, the fallout from supra-national developments directly threatens urban democracy; over time, citizen interests become marginalized by a hollowing out of traditional channels of public engagement. The shift from elected municipal governments to mixed models of public/private governance, for example, undermines progressive voices by reinforcing the clout of

local, conservative and propertied interests (Andrew and Goldsmith, 1998). As markets surge and states retrench, a privileging of demands for competitiveness and efficiency works to constrain communities of interest other than large business ones (Andrew, 1997: 139-41). In the words of urban theorist Engin Isin, reconfigured metropolises become *“empty shell[s] whose territory marks out the once-meaningful boundaries of the political”* (Isin, 2000: 157; italics in the original).

A contrasting view holds that as opportunities narrow for citizen engagement at international and national levels, contemporary cities offer welcoming and, indeed, fruitful spaces for social mobilization (Magnusson, 1996). According to this relatively optimistic view, progressive local action may be enhanced by ongoing shifts associated with globalization and neo-liberalism. For example, the same integrative processes that tend to weaken nation-states might serve to assist trans-national social groups with strong grassroots networks.

Building on the work of political theorist Rian Voet, this study begins the task of plotting the consequences of disparate municipal restructuring experiences for democratic citizenship. According to Voet, citizenship embraces far more than simply “membership in a state” as signified by the holding of a passport (Voet 1998: 9). In Voet’s words,

Citizenship can, in principle, be both the relationships between a state and an individual citizen and the political relationships between citizens themselves. Citizenship might just refer to rights, but it can also refer to the duties, actions, virtues and opinions that follow from the above-mentioned relationships. (Voet, 1998: 9)

Like other scholars in this field, she acknowledges that numerous and often contentious understandings of citizenship as status or rights, and as agency or outcome, exist across a variety of philosophical traditions (see also Lister, 2003; Siim, 2000). These concepts tend to converge at a practical level around a single focal point – namely, membership and engagement in a human community. For the purposes of this discussion, citizenship “represents an expression of human agency in the political arena,” and is defined as the civic and political participation of women in decision-making activities (Lister, 2003: 37).

Debates over the decline of the nation-state, the rise of supra-national institutions and the multiplication of diverse gender, ethno-cultural and other identities during the contemporary period have focused particular attention on the varied spaces of citizenship. Among scholars of cities, the concept of urban citizenship has been proposed as a way to make the normative case for closer ties “between the users of cities and the public realm of cities” (Beauregard and Bounds,

2000: 243). In terms of research directions, focusing on urban engagement helps to illuminate how struggles for recognition and voice within cities continue, within “spaces where the very meaning, content and extent of citizenship are being made and transformed” (Isin, 2000a: 6).

At an empirical level, how can we measure this concept? In Westminster-style political systems, citizenship claims are often framed with reference to the theme of political representation for both individuals and groups. Representational ideas infused nineteenth-century British arguments for female suffrage, for instance, that said women needed to carry or defend their interests in the political realm, so as to ensure all social talents were put to good use (see Voet 1998: 101). More recently, second-wave feminist theories have laid out three main propositions that address political representation. First, according to their liberal or humanist variant, improving the formal political representation of women is a precondition for equality; wider representation not only engages more human talents in a society, but also reinforces the value of democratic participation among citizens of a polity. As Voet notes, this stream of thought emphasizes the importance of increasing numbers of female candidates and office-holders, as a route toward enhancing women’s presence in politics (*ibid.*: 103).

Second, difference or woman-centred feminists maintain women hold distinctive talents from those of men. Therefore, including more women in public life will make governments more responsive to women and will ensure the inclusion of "different and better values in politics" (*ibid.*: 104) Among the real-world strategies advocated by difference feminists are the establishment of specific women's units, known as femocracies, in government bureaucracies (*ibid.*). Third, in the view of post-structural feminists, political representation occurs through the crucial vehicle of language or discourse, and not simply in the formal institutions of public office and public administration. By analyzing linguistic representations, post-structural analysts reveal the power of multiple interests in spoken as well as written text or, conversely, their lack of influence. In Voet's words, this third variant endorses the opening up of public discourse toward "an inclusive politics that listens to the voices of groups for whom policy-making is intended" (*ibid.*: 105).

This paper is among the first to subject Voet's three-pronged vision of citizen representation to empirical testing. It assesses women's citizenship and, in particular, their political representation in pre- and post-restructuring London and Toronto -- two cities characterized by divergent institutional and leadership experiences during recent years. The article focuses on three measures of urban

citizenship, each of which is drawn from a specific strand of representational theory. First, we examine office-holding on municipal councils as an indicator of liberal political representation. Second, we explore the development of municipal femocracies as a measure of difference representation. Third, the discussion evaluates official spatial planning texts in order to reveal a discursive dimension of representation that emerges from post-structural approaches. The article concludes with a speculative discussion of the implications of our findings for arguments about municipal restructuring, and with a look at future citizenship prospects in a reconfigured London and Toronto.

The main propositions that guide the empirical analysis can be summarized as follows. First, if the pessimistic view noted above is empirically correct, then we expect to find minimal evidence of women's electoral, bureaucratic or discursive representation in either London or Toronto during the contemporary period, and predict no increases over time in any of these measures. We refer to this proposition as the erosion thesis, because it suggests globalization pressures would weaken or extinguish democratic citizenship in contemporary cities. Second, if optimists are correct, then women's representation on all three levels will be similarly robust in London and Toronto, and will tend to rise over time. We term this the buoyancy

thesis, since it predicts integrative pressures will create universal opportunities or openings for urban public engagement.

Finally, if specific institutional and leadership contexts make a difference, then we expect to find systematic variations across cities. In particular, we predict women's contemporary representation in London given a New Labour central government, left-of-centre mayor and renewed local democracy under the GLA design, would be considerably more promising than it was in Toronto with a right-wing Conservative provincial government, right-of-centre mayor and municipal amalgamation (including borough elimination) scheme. In terms of longitudinal variation within a single location, this approach suggests citizen representation would be enhanced over time in London, but diminished in Toronto. We call this the contextual thesis, because it maps democratic citizenship against the backdrop of particular urban institutional and leadership circumstances.

Overall, results reported below provide sustained confirmation of the contextual thesis. Women's citizenship on elective, bureaucratic and discursive levels varied systematically across locations, such that it was considerably more robust under the GLA arrangement in London than the amalgamation scenario in Toronto, and tended to improve markedly over time in terms of liberal representation in the former. With at least 40% women, the first two London assemblies were

exceptional for any elected body in the Anglo-American world, and surpassed the roughly 30% level on the amalgamated Toronto council. The presence of an effective, albeit small, femocracy in the Greater London Authority compared with the absence of any such unit in the megacity. Feminist claims for improved public transit, affordable housing, childcare and employment provisions were reflected to a far greater extent in discussions of future spatial development in London than Toronto where, in fact, the word women never appeared in the text of the 2002 official plan.

In addition to using multiple indicators of citizenship, this study employs varied empirical sources. Data on public office-holding are drawn from published accounts. The discussions of femocracy and planning texts rely on official municipal documents, including archival sources that lay out the historical record, as well as 35 confidential interviews with contemporary experts and participants in London, and 22 in Toronto. The author conducted in-person interviews with respondents in both cities between October 2001 and June 2004.

### **Election to public office**

Historical research indicates fairly similar proportions of women were elected to local office in Britain and Canada. In Britain, Nirmala Rao's work showed that 12% of local councilors were female in 1965,

compared with 25% in 1993 (Rao, 1999: 296). In Canada, Linda Trimble's study reported that from a base of 15% of local council seats in major cities in 1984, women's numerical representation grew to 24% by 1993 (Trimble, 1995: 94).

-- TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE --

At the local council level, data from London and Toronto also indicate close similarities. In 1994, women were about 27% of London's local borough councilors, a figure that rose to 29% by 2002.<sup>2</sup> As shown in Table 1, considerable variation existed across boroughs. In inner London, female numerical representation in 2002 ranged widely from a low of 17.6% in Tower Hamlets to a high of 43.8% in Islington. In outer London, women's representation was lowest in Redbridge (20.6%) and highest in Croydon (35.7%).

-- TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE --

In pre-amalgamation Toronto, women held about 27% of borough council seats in 1991 and 24% in 1996. As reported in Table 2, these levels varied widely, from a low of 11.1% in East York to a high of 33.3% in North York in 1991, and from a low of 12.5% in East York to a high of 41.7% in Etobicoke in 1996. It is notable that through the mid-1990s, the total number of council seats tended to decline across the six Toronto boroughs. In three of the four boroughs where cuts in council size were especially large, declines in

percentages of women elected were also quite dramatic. Between 1991 and 1996, as shown in Table 2, the percentage of women on the North York, Scarborough and Toronto city councils dropped significantly, by an average of 11%.

At the municipal level, women's representation on the Greater London Council was generally below 20%. In 1984-5, for example, females held 17 of 92 seats (18.5%), with Labour women claiming the bulk of those positions (9/17 or 53%; see Greater London Council, 1984). In Toronto, metropolitan-wide governance during the period prior to amalgamation rested in the hands of a 34-member Metro council, which included 28 directly elected ward members and six borough mayors, all drawn from older downtown and inner suburban districts. In 1996, women held approximately one-third of Metro council seats, including 9 of the 28 directly elected ward positions and two of the 6 local mayoral slots (Kovensky, 2001: 11). This one-third level was approximately ten percent higher than the average representation of women on local Toronto borough councils in the same year.

In 2000, women won 40% of the positions on the new 25-member Greater London Assembly, where they constituted 75% of the Liberal Democratic, 44% of the Labour, 33% of the Green and 22% of the Conservative party groups (Gill, 2000: 27). In contrast to single

member plurality electoral arrangements that prevailed in Toronto, the scheme in place for the first London Assembly elections offered voters two choices, one for a constituency member selected on the basis of first-past-the-post, and the second for a London-wide party list.

The list scheme, under which 11 of the 25 assembly members were elected, ensured some measure of proportionality and, as expected, tended to benefit smaller parties (notably the Liberal Democrats and Greens) as well as female candidates. Of the 11 members elected to the GLA in 2000 via party lists, five or 45.5% were women. Moreover, when vacancies opened up during subsequent years in Labour list positions, two women including the GLA's only black female member (Jennette Arnold) moved into these posts and brought women's numerical representation to 54.5% (6/11) of list positions and 44% (11/25) on the GLA overall.<sup>3</sup>

In the June 2004 London Assembly elections, women again won ten of the 25 seats, or 40%, including five constituency and five list positions. As of 2004, women held 60% of the Liberal Democratic, 57% of Labour, half of the Green and 22% of the Conservative seats on the assembly.<sup>4</sup>

Once the province of Ontario imposed its amalgamation plans on Toronto, the total number of elective offices was more than halved, from over 100 positions in 1996 (34 Metro councilors and mayors plus

73 borough councilors) to only 45 in 2000 (44 megacity councilors and one mayor).<sup>5</sup> As Myer Siemiatycki and Anver Saloojee posit with reference to ethnic and racial minority groups, fewer opportunities for "diverse representation" were available once amalgamation occurred, in part because the increasing geographical size and population of metropolitan wards created difficult obstacles for candidates with limited financial resources (Siemiatycki and Saloojee, 2002: 257).

In the 1997 elections, women won about 28% of megacity council seats. In 2000, after that body was reduced by provincial fiat from 58 to 44 members, women held 29.5% of council seats (Kovensky, 2001: 9). This figure rose slightly to 31.8% in 2003 (*Globe and Mail*, 2004: A11). Parallel with Jeannette Arnold's status on the London Assembly, only one female member of the first three megacity councils – Olivia Chow – was from a visible minority background.

The approximately 30% of seats claimed by women on early megacity councils diverged little from their one-third share of 1996 Metro council seats. Yet this small quantitative gap likely masqued important qualitative differences in political influence. For example, the executive clout of women under pre-amalgamation arrangements was considerable, given that two borough mayors out of six were female, including downtown mayor Barbara Hall.

Given that women held about 25% of local council posts and fewer than 20% of House of Commons seats in Britain during this period, the Greater London Assembly results are notable. Moreover, they stand as an unusually high watermark for numerical representation in any Anglo-American deliberative body, and are likely related to the introduction of partial proportionality arrangements.<sup>6</sup> As well, the GLA's creation alongside the boroughs, as a new institution without incumbents and without a musical chairs competition like the one that unfolded in Toronto, probably assisted women's chances of securing seats.

In short, one dimension of restructuring in Britain's largest city established a new high watermark for female representation. Proportions of women elected to the newly created London assembly were considerably above those in other deliberative bodies in the British capital, including borough councils and the House of Commons. In Toronto, by way of contrast, female representation on municipal councils tended to decline slightly or plateau with amalgamation, although they remained above levels in the federal and Ontario legislatures.

These results are inconsistent with the main prediction of the erosion thesis, that contemporary urban citizenship would be weak in both locations, as well as the buoyancy thesis, that it would be robust

in both places. Instead, recent data tend to support a contextual argument to the effect that specific political circumstances in post-GLA London, notably an opening up of new assembly seats under partial proportionality rules, tended to assist female candidates in ways that were not available in Toronto. In London as well, increases in women's municipal representation over time support a buoyancy argument, by showing how the creation of a new body with new electoral arrangements can enhance female involvement.

We now turn to a second dimension of citizen representation, involving municipal bureaucracies.

### **Femocracies in London and Toronto**

During the 1970s and following, a variety of women's committees, equality departments and other agencies were created in urban bureaucracies. The Greater London Council Women's Committee, founded in 1982 and disbanded four years later when the entire GLC was dismantled, was one of the world's best-known and most generously funded experiments in municipal feminism. At its peak, the committee's support staff numbered about 100 and its annual budget was roughly £7 to 8 million -- much of which was spent on day care for the children of GLC employees, women's resource centres, and

feminist issue campaigns in such areas as violence and reproductive health (Coote and Campbell, 1987: 106-7).

Femocracy in pre-amalgamation Toronto never reached the staffing or budgetary heights of the GLC committee. The unit with the strongest municipal feminist presence, the downtown City of Toronto, created separate bodies to address the treatment of local government employees (the Equal Opportunities division in the personnel department), and the safety of women in public spaces (the Safe City Committee in the planning and Healthy City bureaus). At its peak during the mid-1990s, Equal Opportunities had about 30 full-time staff and an annual budget of \$1.5 million, which went toward addressing the internal employment status of women, racial minorities, aboriginals and people with disabilities. Safe City had one employee during its ten-year existence, and an annual grants budget to external groups of \$500,000 (Whitzman, 2002: 104).

Once elected as the first GLA mayor, Ken Livingstone named Anni Marjoram as the mayor's policy advisor on women's issues. In this position, Marjoram became the public face of a much smaller, more modestly resourced municipal feminist presence than the GLC version. In fact, Marjoram's control over one half-time secretary, one full-time policy assistant and no funds for grants to campaigning or service organizations revealed her lead role in a strategic femocracy, a

tightly focused, coordinating unit that mirrored the overall strategic orientation of the entire GLA (see Pimlott and Rao, 2002; Travers, 2004).

After her appointment in 2000, Marjoram attempted to spread a women's equality agenda throughout the mayor's remit. In part, she pursued this goal via Livingstone's control over police, fire, transport and economic development agencies in London – using the personnel and budgets of other GLA units to finance initiatives in each area. As well, Marjoram worked to lever the mayor's longstanding links with feminist campaigning and service groups in a way that pressed each GLA agency to respond to women's needs.

One of her best-known public activities was convening Capitalwoman, a one-day conference held annually during the week of International Women's Day. Each event permitted Livingstone to publicize his initiatives, gather feedback from women's groups and individual London women, and build a crucial support base among female voters (see Mayor of London, March 2001, March 2002, March 2003, March 2004b). Sponsored by the GLA mayor and subsidized by a variety of unions, GLA agencies and corporate donors, Capitalwoman attracted more registrants every year, growing from just 270 participants in 2001 to more than 2500 in 2004 (interview sources).

In internal terms, Marjoram and her staff focused on the hiring and promotion of women to positions either inside the GLA or regulated by that body -- including as black cab drivers, London Underground drivers and firefighters (see Mayor of London, March 2004a). At an external level, her strategic femocracy undertook a series of high-profile campaigns, under the mayor's public leadership, that affected millions of Londoners who were not GLA employees. For example, Livingstone and Marjoram helped to craft the terms of a registration and licensing system for what had been illegal minicabs, in which hundreds of sexual assaults took place each year (see Mayor of London, March 2004b: 2). The GLA launched a Domestic Violence Strategy, designed to bring together the dozens of different organizations working on this issue across the inner and outer boroughs (see Mayor of London, November 2002).

During his first term as mayor, Livingstone introduced newer buses, lower bus fares, better lighting and signage at stops, more frequent night buses and additional bus lanes. These changes helped to improve the mobility of lower-income, often elderly women as well as young mothers who traveled with small children and bulky parcels (see Mayor of London, March 2004b: 27). He leveraged control over the London Development Agency to commit more than £3.1 million toward the creation of about 1700 affordable childcare spaces in

Britain's capital city (see *ibid.*: 2). Moving beyond the GLA's formal remit, the mayor funded a skills audit of refugee women who arrived in Britain with professional qualifications, in order to ascertain how London's schools and hospitals might benefit from their employment (see Mayor of London, December 2002).

The active, visible role of the GLA's strategic femocracy had no parallel in post-amalgamation Toronto. Although the first megacity council created a task force on community access and equity, and later on an advisory committee on the status of women, these bodies were largely unknown and ineffective (see City of Toronto, March 2002). According to respondents who were interviewed for this study, including close observers of both bodies, neither the task force nor the committee exerted meaningful influence on the mayor's agenda or the work of city council.

In organizational terms, the equal opportunity unit in the City of Toronto personnel department was transferred following amalgamation to the office of the chief administrative officer (CAO), a mayoral appointee whose surveillance over employees was described by one respondent as "deeply distressing." The status of women committee held eight meetings at which a quorum was present between the 2000 and 2003 municipal elections, and is most remembered for releasing a fall 2001 report card on childcare in Toronto (see City of Toronto,

2003a, 2003b). Unlike municipal feminist activities in London during this same period, the Toronto childcare approach was highly reactive, and did not involve mayoral leadership.

Toronto's Safe City Committee also fell off the radar screens after amalgamation. Megacity councilors created a new Task Force on Community Safety, which was folded into the CAO's office in 1999 along with the rest of what had been the Healthy City office. Prior to amalgamation, the latter housed downtown planners and committee coordinators who worked on aging, community and race relations, and women's safety issues. Not only did the new task force draw most of its members from groups other than women's organizations, but also it had a neutered mandate in which the safety of women was but one small item (Whitzman, 2002: 105).

Over time, then, municipal feminism in Toronto faded from view, and nearly disappeared entirely within six years of megacity creation. No proactive urban transportation, safety, childcare, employment or other policy initiative that held particular relevance to women citizens was announced during the first half-decade after amalgamation. This disappointing pattern through the Mel Lastman years contrasted quite sharply with the far more effective representational record of the GLA femocracy during Ken Livingstone's first mayoral term.

Once again, the data seem to disconfirm expectations that follow from an erosion thesis regarding minimal contemporary representation in both locations, and from a buoyancy thesis regarding robust patterns in both places. Rather, the differences between post-restructuring developments in London and Toronto tend to support a contextual interpretation. That is, the presence of an effective strategic femocracy in the GLA reflected the impact of a progressive mayor who appointed its members, and who devoted both fiscal resources and political legitimacy toward fulfilling their mandate. By way of contrast, the absence of any such presence in Toronto mirrored the conservative orientation of the first megacity mayor, who seemed far more concerned with controlling than enhancing citizen representation at a bureaucratic level.

From a longitudinal perspective, municipal feminism clearly declined in both cities. The extremely well-resourced GLC Women's Committee did not re-emerge in the GLA bureaucracy, although the strategic femocracy in the GLA mayor's office was, given its size, remarkably effective. The modest municipal feminist presence that existed in the downtown City of Toronto prior to amalgamation seemed to be re-organized out of existence in the new megacity. By showing a common pattern of decline over time, albeit from vastly

divergent starting points toward different conclusions, these patterns offer some support for erosion arguments.

### **Representation in official plans**

One offshoot of the Greater London Council Women's Committee, the Women and Planning Working Group, drew community activists and GLC employees together in "an attempt to bridge the wide gap between the autonomous women's movement and the local state." (Taylor, 1985: 4) The group convened an open meeting to discuss the 1983 draft GLC spatial development plan, which was attended by more than 250 participants. As well, it distributed a postage-free questionnaire attached to a "Women Plan London" leaflet, which generated more than 600 responses (*ibid.*: 5). Working group efforts helped to ensure the last GLC plan included not only a section titled "Women in London" in a larger chapter called "Equality in London," but also frequent mention of challenges facing women throughout the text. The final GLC spatial development document included 212 pages of text, of which about seven were devoted to the stand-alone discussion of women (see Greater London Council, September 1984).

The last GLC plan explained the inclusion of a section about women as follows: "Women in London live in a city designed by men for men and have had little opportunity to influence or shape the

urban environment. Planning policies, in regulating the use of land in the public interest and recognising that women form the majority of this public, can go a long way towards changing this." (*ibid.*: 87) The discussion argued that spatial development plans must take account of women's specific urban experiences – notably low paid, segregated and often insecure employment; burdensome responsibilities for unpaid care work; limited access to housing, particularly for poor women, older women, Afro-Caribbean families and women fleeing violence at home; and heavy reliance on deteriorating public services – especially bus service. It also noted the limited availability in London of childcare facilities and public spaces for women to meet (*ibid.*: 88-93).

Obviously, Margaret Thatcher's 1983 promise to shut down the GLC cast a long, dark shadow. This commitment led many feminists who commented on the last GLC plan to recommend that responsibility for implementing its provisions be given to the boroughs (Taylor, 1985: 6). As a result, borough councils were charged in the final GLC plan with identifying local women's needs and developing responses to them, in areas including employment, childcare, personal safety, community facilities and future planning consultations (Greater London Council, September 1984: 89-93).

The Women Plan London project inspired mirror activities in Toronto, and led to the founding in 1985 of a voluntary group known as Women Plan Toronto (WPT; see Wekerle 1999: 112-14). Yet efforts to represent women in official plans, even during the pre-amalgamation period, produced relatively modest results. In the most progressive unit that existed before megacity creation, the downtown City of Toronto, a May 1989 forum sponsored by the planning department listed Women Plan Toronto as one of the "special interest groups" in attendance (City of Toronto, June 1991: 532).<sup>7</sup> In December of that year, WPT held a seminar titled "Official Plan Reviews and Women," which attracted 12 participants (City of Toronto, January 1990). As part of a community consultation exercise, Toronto's planning department distributed 190,000 questionnaires across the inner city, but only broke down the responses (about 2600 in all) by postal code (*ibid.*).

Downtown Toronto's last draft plan, released in 1991, was 527 pages in length. It opened with a commitment to intensified urban development, focused overwhelmingly on the natural landscape and built form of the city, and contained no equality section. Women were mentioned in detailed explanations of specific safety and violence recommendations, but not in the provisions themselves. For example, recommendation 244 stated "it is the goal of Council to promote a safe

city, where all people can safely use public spaces, day or night, without fear of violence, and where people are safe from violence" (City of Toronto, June 1991a: 51). The detailed text referred to survey data showing women were more afraid than men to walk in their neighbourhoods at night (City of Toronto, June 1991b: 314).

The specific relevance of other recommendations to women also remained, at best, implicit. On the childcare issue, the plan encouraged licensed, nonprofit facilities as well as subsidies from senior levels of government "for all eligible families" (City of Toronto, June 1991a: 52). Shelters for battered women were not mentioned by name, but rather by reference to "provisions of residential care facilities and crisis care facilities" (*ibid.*: 48). Captions accompanying a series of photographs of women referred to them as "seniors" or "people with disabilities" (City of Toronto, June 1991b: 317, 287).

Following sustained pressure from Women Plan Toronto, the Safe City Committee and other interests, the final text mentioned "women, children and persons with special needs" in a section about ensuring "that public safety and security are important considerations in City approvals of buildings, streetscaping, parks and other public and private open spaces."<sup>8</sup> Yet other passages in the document continued the practice of referring to a generic category called

"everyone" or "all people" in Toronto (see City of Toronto, September 1992: sections 1.11, 1.13, 7.20).

Women's representational voice was apparent in the text of post-restructuring spatial development documents in London. The Greater London Authority Act, passed by the House of Commons in 1999, identified sustainable development, urban health and equality of opportunity as the main themes guiding the next metropolitan plan (see Mayor of London, June 2002: s.4C.1). Mayor Ken Livingstone's subsequent vision statement, released in June 2002, reinforced the notion of "London as an exemplary sustainable world city," but advanced a potentially more interventionist view of "three interwoven themes:

- Strong, diverse long term economic growth
- Social inclusivity to give all Londoners the opportunity to share in London's future success
- Fundamental improvements in London's environment and use of resources" (Ken Livingstone, My vision for London, in *ibid.*: xi).

In total, the 2002 draft London plan was 419 pages in length.

Especially compared with the Toronto document of the same year, London's plan was quite detailed, directive and equity-oriented. On housing, for example, it established a goal of 23,000 new homes per year, with half of them targeted for low-income families and

essential workers (including nurses, police officers and school teachers; see Mayor of London, June 2002: s.3A.13, 3A.63). In the field of transit, the London plan recommended "massively improved public transport infrastructure," including two new cross-London rail lines as well as a 40 percent increase in bus capacity by 2011 (*ibid.*). In order to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality, the document mapped out a central London zone in which congestion charges of £5 per day per vehicle would be imposed as of February 2003 (Mayor of London, June 2002: s. 3C.44).

Women received frequent and explicit recognition in the draft plan, as one category within a larger group of disadvantaged "communities of interest and identity" (*ibid.*: s. 3A.90). According to the text, "the Mayor recognises that there are particular groups of Londoners for whom equality of opportunity has more resonance than for others. This relates to those people who suffer discrimination, or have particular needs, as a result of their race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or religion" (*ibid.*: s. 4C.12). With reference to employment, women were described in the 2002 plan as disproportionately low-wage, less skilled workers, often holding public sector jobs, who confronted specific impediments to economic participation including limited childcare provision and concerns about safety on public transit (*ibid.*: s. 3A.94). Teachers and nurses received

particular attention as essential workers who faced an affordability crisis in London's high-cost housing market, and who relied heavily on public transportation to access job opportunities.

In early 2004, the GLA released a 317-page final plan, plus 85 pages of appendices, that built on the draft document and a series of public consultations. The 2004 plan reiterated the broad themes of the draft version, and explicitly acknowledged the limits of treating all Londoners in an undifferentiated way. According to the GLA document, "facilities that are provided for 'everyone' fail to recognise their particular needs" (Mayor of London, *The London plan*: 74). For example, *The London plan* proposed "to promote social inclusion and tackle deprivation and discrimination" through employment and training policies targeted at "those women and young people and minority ethnic groups most in need" (*ibid.*: 9).

Unlike the last GLC plan, the final GLA text included one stand-alone paragraph and no explicit policies about women. The paragraph identified many of the same patterns noted in the GLC document, including lower earnings, reliance on public sector employment and public services (notably transport), and care responsibilities as central to women's lived experiences in London:

In the domestic arena, women still have the main responsibility for supporting children, elderly people and those with limiting illness. They are more likely to do the shopping and transport children alongside working, mainly part-time. Because of the inadequacy of public transport and because women often make a range of complex local journeys, they feel obliged to acquire cars. Those that cannot afford to are further restricted in job opportunities. Women need convenient, affordable and safe public transport and access to affordable childcare provision (*ibid.*: 72).

The text stated the mayor's intention to hold community consultations to ascertain how these equity goals would be fulfilled (see *ibid.*: 74).

The first official plan of the amalgamated Toronto was a relatively brief, 99-page text. It articulated four broad principles to guide future urban development, namely "diversity and opportunity, beauty, connectivity, and leadership and stewardship." (Dill and Bedford, 2002: 2) The stated purpose of the Toronto plan was to stimulate future economic growth and, at the same time, ensure social and environmental well-being. In the words of the 2002 vision statement, Toronto should be "an attractive and safe city that evokes pride, passion and a sense of belonging -- a city where everybody cares about the quality of life" (*ibid.*). The use of the term everybody

in this passage reflects the generally undifferentiated treatment of Toronto residents in the 2002 plan; human beings were consistently referred to as homogeneous "people" or, in the vision statement, "everybody," even though such crucial concepts as public safety and community belonging arguably resonated differently among particular sub-sets of the urban population (see *ibid.*: 5).

Rare exceptions to this pattern occurred in short passages dealing with the transportation of "people with disabilities," "the elderly" or "people with special needs" (*ibid.*: 30). The particular characteristics of individuals in these categories were not discussed; for example, elderly persons in Toronto in 2002 were disproportionately female, as were adult users of public transportation (see Murdie and Teixeira, 2000: 220-1; Miller, 2000: 184). Overall, the text of the Toronto plan focused overwhelmingly on the city's built environment – intensified land use at particular nodes, for example, rather than the human consequences (for better or worse) of urban development.

In terms of approaches to municipal governance, the Toronto plan adopted a hands-off orientation that privileged market forces. At no point did the text recommend aggressive intervention by public officials in such sectors as housing, transit, safety or childcare. Instead, the language of choice and opportunity dominated, including

in the title of Chapter 1, "Making Choices." In discussing Toronto's limited supply of affordable housing, for example, the plan prioritized the need to "stimulate production of new private-sector rental housing," rather than to invest in direct or indirect public provision (Dill and Bedford 2002: 8, 44). Moreover, the 2002 Toronto plan defined affordable rental costs as those equal to or less than average rents across an already expensive city, and not with reference to low-wage incomes.<sup>9</sup>

A parallel orientation appeared in discussions of Toronto's human capital and transit futures. The 2002 plan stressed the importance of attracting trained people to Toronto, rather than devoting resources to upgrading the skills of existing city residents (see *ibid.*: 9). Human diversity and multiculturalism were assumed to be established characteristics of Toronto; these features were celebrated in the official plan, rather than interrogated as categories in need of further exploration or analysis. The plan did not probe, for example, whether the limited supply of affordable housing held particular consequences for specific groups, including low-income women. Similarly, the 2002 document proposed no major improvements to public transit infrastructure, and no concerted interventions to reduce reliance on automobiles. Instead, the text referred to "incremental expansion" of

transit, and made few specific suggestions about discouraging the use of cars (*Ibid.*: 10).

Overall, the 2002 Toronto plan made not a sole reference to women. It acknowledged the role of voluntary community action in a brief illustrative section on the Task Force to Bring Back the Don [River] and the Tree Advocacy Program, two local environmental campaigns. The photograph accompanying the discussion of these groups showed five women planting trees, but the text described them as citizen volunteers (*ibid.*: 96). Childcare received no substantive treatment in the 2002 Toronto plan. Passing reference was made to a day care facility as one example of a local community institution, and as one allowable basis on which Toronto planners could grant increased densities to property developers (*ibid.*: 65, 83).

The contrast between GLA and megacity plans could hardly have been more stark. While the Toronto document referred not once to women, the London text offered multiple references to low-wage women workers, teachers, nurses, childcare provision as a barrier to employment, and so on. The extent to which the documents laid out aggressive plans to increase the supply of affordable housing, or improve public transportation systems, also differed widely, with the London text consistently more expansive and interventionist in its approach. Finally, the discussion in the English plan of urban diversity

and equality was far more analytic and interrogative than in the Canadian one; the latter simply asserted Toronto was a diverse, multicultural city, apparently assuming that skills, jobs, housing, income and other attributes were distributed in an unproblematic manner among urban residents.

These results parallel those reported in earlier sections, in that they demonstrate limited support for a uniform pattern of either erosion or buoyancy in women's representation. Instead, by revealing considerably more discursive voice for women in the first GLA plan than the first megacity one, the data confirm contextual predictions that are grounded in specific post-reconfiguration circumstances. The gap between contemporary London and Toronto documents is revealed in an explicit post-structural statement from the 2004 GLA plan, identifying the limitations of a discourse of 'everyone.' Ironically, this undifferentiated approach dominated Toronto's 2002 plan.

In longitudinal terms, women's presence in the text of the last GLC plan was more visible than in the first GLA one, while the lone mention of women in the last City of Toronto plan was absent from the first megacity document. It is difficult to generalize about this decline in representation, however, since the difference between a lengthy stand-alone section on women in the GLC plan and no presence whatsoever in the megacity document is enormous. Yet the pattern of

declining textual representation over time is common to both cities, and offers some support for an erosion argument.

## **Conclusion**

As a study of citizenship in the context of municipal restructuring, this discussion reveals women's representation along three distinct measures was consistently more robust in post-GLA London than post-amalgamation Toronto. The election of at least 40% women to the Greater London Assembly, the existence of an effective strategic femocracy in the Greater London Authority, and sustained attention to women's lived experiences of urban space in the text of the GLA official plan contrasted with lower levels of elected representation, no visible femocracy and no official plan presence for women in megacity Toronto.

By demonstrating systematic cross-city variations, these results appear to support contextual arguments that highlight the relevance of specific institutional and political leadership factors for contemporary urban citizenship. At the same time, they tend to disconfirm the expectations of the erosion and buoyancy theses, which proposed representation would either be uniformly weak or, conversely, strong in cities that underwent reconfiguration. Among the most striking generalizations that can be drawn from this finding is that institutional

and leadership shifts can hold varied and meaningful consequences for urban citizenship – in this case, within a few years of the official restructuring date.

Data presented in this article also permit us to evaluate trends over time within cities. Comparing longitudinal patterns, we find that women's representation in bureaucratic and spatial planning terms indeed declined between the late GLC and early GLA years in London, and between the late City of Toronto and early megacity periods in Toronto. On the liberal citizenship measure, election to municipal office, longitudinal comparisons showed a significant increase in proportions of women from the late GLC to early GLA era, and a slight decline or plateau from pre-amalgamation Metro council to initial megacity council figures. Data on two of the three empirical yardsticks we use, the bureaucratic and spatial plan measures, thus confirm expectations that urban citizenship would decline over time within cities. Yet this view may gloss over more than it illuminates; that is, the approach obscures the degree to which femocracy and spatial planning discourse were unusually robust in late GLC London, and remained visible in post-GLA London, as well as the extent to which both phenomena were quite modest even at their height in pre-amalgamation Toronto, and virtually extinct during the megacity years.

If institutional and political leadership contexts played a crucial role in shaping representational patterns in London and Toronto, then how would changes at these levels affect urban citizenship? In purely speculative terms, it is worth considering the possible effects of recent elections in both locations. In London, the June 2004 elections returned Ken Livingstone to mayoral office, but weakened Labour's grip on the assembly by reducing that party's seat count from nine to seven (of 25). London Conservatives became the largest bloc on the assembly in 2004, by winning nine positions. Moreover, although Livingstone gained more votes in the 2004 first round than he did in 2000, his eventual win over Steven Norris was more narrow than in their initial contest.<sup>10</sup>

Would these GLA results affect women's municipal representation? London Tories and Liberal Democrats criticized the size of the GLA staff, as well as the mayor's taxation and spending records (Lydall 2004). Two assembly members elected in 2004 came from the UK Independence Party, a formation committed to closing down that body. Whether Livingstone could gain the support of the two Green party representatives on the assembly, to counter these other interests, remained to be seen. What remained obvious was Livingstone's longstanding record as a cagey left populist; he had survived many earlier political reversals and, dating from his GLC

years, had consistently treated women's citizenship as an integral part of urban belonging.

In Canada, elections in fall 2003 produced a Liberal majority government in Ontario, followed by a left-of-centre mayor in Toronto. Some observers viewed the ascent of Dalton McGuinty as Ontario premier, David Miller (who defeated former downtown mayor Barbara Hall) as megacity mayor, and then Paul Martin as federal Liberal leader and prime minister as extremely promising from the perspective of metropolitan citizenship. Unlike the political executives who preceded them, McGuinty and Martin both represented urban constituencies, in Ottawa and Montreal respectively, and were seen as likely to support Miller and other mayors who demanded a "new deal" for Canada's cities (see Barber, 2004).

From the perspective of women's citizenship, however, the initial evidence was far from promising. Once elected, David Miller asked for a review of all existing advisory bodies in Toronto, and unilaterally announced which units would remain and which would end. 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.<sup>11</sup> At the provincial level, the McGuinty government claimed it could not address urban issues such as transport or childcare in the immediate future, given serious fiscal problems inherited from the Conservative years. Moreover, during their first six months in office, neither the mayor nor the premier showed any interest in pursuing institutional changes that would renew local democracy in Toronto.

By focusing on three dimensions of civic engagement in pre- and initial post-reconfiguration London and Toronto, this study has ignored crucial questions about policy outcomes. Would elected women, municipal femocrats or planning documents make much difference to the lived experiences of citizens in either location? In particular, how were multiple social citizenship challenges facing low-income, often immigrant and refugee women, addressed in London and Toronto, given the larger context of welfare reform politics in both places? Clearly, the data presented above cannot answer these queries, but they will hopefully stimulate research on women's social citizenship in contemporary cities.

In conclusion, by probing cross-city and cross-time variations in urban engagement, this account can be interpreted in both optimistic and pessimistic terms. As of mid-2004, there were reasonable grounds for hopefulness regarding representation in the global age -- if

observers focused on the specific example of the Greater London Authority. At the same time, evidence from post-amalgamation Toronto, and from two of three longitudinal measures in London as well as Toronto, reinforced the case for pessimism, since they demonstrated the degree to which urban citizenship could stagnate or weaken.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Left-of-centre New Democrats contesting municipal office in Toronto generally identified themselves as such, and were referred to in the media as NDP nominees. Candidates for local office who had run provincially or federally for the Liberal or Conservative parties, and were closely associated with those parties, did not use party labels on their signs or literature at the municipal level.

<sup>2</sup> Data from 1994 are drawn from Barry et al., 1998: 65. The 2002 figures were kindly provided by Pauline McMahon of the Association of London Government.

<sup>3</sup> One woman Liberal Democrat among the initial GLA list members, Louise Bloom, resigned and was replaced by a man in 2002.

<sup>4</sup> These data were posted immediately after the 10 June 2004 elections on the GLA website at [www.london.gov.uk/assembly/lams\\_facts\\_cont.jsp](http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/lams_facts_cont.jsp)

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<sup>5</sup> In the first megacity council elections in 1997, 58 seats were available.

<sup>6</sup> Among the only other results in this same range were those for the Scottish and Welsh assemblies, both of which also operated using partial proportionality schemes. See Mackay, 2001: chap. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Among the other groups in attendance were the Toronto Board of Trade and the Toronto Home Builders Association.

<sup>8</sup> Toronto City Council approved the final text on 20 July 1993. The paragraph on safety occurs in a section titled "The Pedestrian Environment" in City of Toronto, September 1992: s. 3.19.

<sup>9</sup> Although low wage incomes were obviously affected by earnings gaps between men and women workers, this pattern was ignored in the Toronto document. See Dill and Bedford, 2002: 47.

<sup>10</sup> Livingstone won 667,877 first round votes in 2000, compared with 685,541 in 2004. He claimed 57.9 percent on the second count against Norris in 2000, versus 55.4 percent in 2004. See D'Arcy and MacLean, 2000: 268; and 2004 results posted at [www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/londonelections/articles/](http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/news/londonelections/articles/).

<sup>11</sup> Material on this organization can be found at

<http://ca.groups.yahoo.com/groups/torontowomen>

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**TABLE 1**  
**WOMEN ON INNER AND OUTER LONDON BOROUGH COUNCILS,**  
**2002\***

<u>Inner London</u>	<u>Proportion</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Camden	20/54	37.0
Greenwich	11/51	21.6
Hackney	18/57	31.6
Hammersmith & Fulham	11/46	23.9
Islington	21/48	43.8
Kensington & Chelsea	16/54	29.6
Lambeth	23/66	34.8
Lewisham	14/54	25.9
Southwark	19/63	30.2
Tower Hamlets	9/51	17.6
Wandsworth	15/60	25.0
Westminster	18/60	30.0
Inner London average		29.3
<u>Outer London</u>	<u>Proportion</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Barking	17/51	33.3
Barnet	20/63	31.7
Bexley	16/63	25.4

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Brent	11/45	24.4
Bromley	16/60	26.7
Croydon	25/70	35.7
Ealing	16/69	23.2
Enfield	16/63	25.4
Haringey	15/57	26.3
Harrow	17/63	27.0
Havering	14/54	25.9
Hillingdon	15/65	23.1
Hounslow	16/60	26.7
Kingston	14/48	29.2
Merton	20/60	33.3
Newham	16/57	28.1
Redbridge	13/63	20.6
Richmond	18/54	33.3
Sutton	19/54	35.2
Waltham Forest	17/60	28.3
Outer London average		28.1

\*Source: Data were kindly provided by Pauline McMahon, Association of London Government, October 2002.

**TABLE 2**

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**WOMEN ON PRE-AMALGAMATION BOROUGH COUNCILS,  
TORONTO, 1991-1996\***

Borough	Year	Percent (N)
East York	1991	11.1 (1/9)
	1996	12.5 (1/8)
Etobicoke	1991	31.3 (5/16)
	1996	41.7 (5/12)
North York	1991	33.3 (7/21)
	1996	21.4 (3/14)
Scarborough	1991	25.0 (5/20)
	1996	14.3 (2/14)
Toronto	1991	29.2 (7/24)
	1996	18.8 (3/16)
York	1991	30.0 (3/10)
	1996	33.3 (3/9)
Overall averages	1991	26.7
	1996	23.7

\*Sources: Data for 1991 are drawn from Trimble, Politics where we live, 95-6. Data for 1996 are drawn from Kovensky, A case study examining representation of women, Table 1.