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## Intergovernmental Relations and Polyscalar Social Mobilization: The Cases of Montreal and Toronto

*Julie-Anne Boudreau*

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*Les années 1990 ont vu l'ascension de mouvements d'autonomie locale qui résistaient aux fusions municipales ou qui les réclamaient. La recrudescence des réformes territoriales durant cette décennie a permis aux mouvements sociaux de déployer des stratégies de mobilisation territoriale. En opposition aux stratégies sectorielles, qui se concentrent sur des secteurs politiques précis (le logement, la santé, etc.), les stratégies territoriales instrumentalisent les espaces à plusieurs échelons dans le but d'influencer la gouvernance. En observant les modèles des défenseurs des droits des anglophones de Montréal et des réformistes de Toronto, ce document explore l'évolution des stratégies de mobilisation, à partir du lobbying sectoriel au partitionnement, la résistance aux fusions et la sécessionnisme. Les litiges engagés par les amalgamations à Montréal et Toronto sont considérés dans un contexte plus large, qui est respectivement celui des droits linguistiques et celui du réformisme municipal. La conclusion entraîne la réflexion suivante : est-ce que la tendance vers des stratégies de mobilisation territoriale et d'action polyscalaires au Canada et ailleurs est un indicatif d'une réorientation non seulement des compétences de réglementation, mais aussi du processus politique complet, comprenant la légitimité, l'autorité et l'allégeance.*

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Beginning in the mid-1990s, municipal amalgamations were implemented by provincial legislation in Montreal, Toronto, and many other Canadian cities. Interesting work has been written in trying to understand the motivation behind these institutional and territorial reforms (see Sancton in this volume for a critical synthesis). This paper seeks to analyse the mobilizing strategies developed by local autonomy movements that reacted against these municipal reforms.

Resistance to municipal consolidation is certainly not a new phenomenon. At the turn of the twentieth century, residents reacted to the wave of annexations that swept North America. Similarly, suburbanites on Montreal Island were adamantly opposed to Mayor Drapeau's dream of "One Island, One City" in the 1960s. With the new wave of city-regionalism that began in the 1990s, we are witnessing the resurgence of local autonomy movements throughout North America after two decades of relative quietness. These movements take the form of resistance to mergers, or calls for a reorganization of intergovernmental relations, or for local secession. They have now increased in number and have seemingly been more successful in capturing the political agenda than previous attempts were.<sup>1</sup> While resistance to consolidation in Montreal and Toronto did not ultimately prevent mergers, local autonomy movements have had a significant impact on the political process, particularly in influencing agenda setting. In thinking about Canadian intergovernmental relations, it is thus important to understand how and why these local autonomy movements contribute to a continued redefinition of political autonomy.

In both Montreal and Toronto, opponents to mergers and coalitions advocating a general reform of intergovernmental relations in Canada have developed a series of mobilizing strategies on different scales, forming alliances with various levels of government and pitting them against one another. While rarely discussed directly in intergovernmental relations studies, this polyscalar approach exploited by civil-society actors has had an important impact on the kinds of institutional and territorial reorganization undertaken by state actors, particularly in a context where the decision-making process has been opened to a variety of non-state actors.

In the past decade, states have undergone important territorial and institutional restructurings that have emphasized the importance of the city-regional and supranational levels more than the national level (Marks 1996; Brenner 1997; Clarke and Gaile 1998; Keating 1998; Keil 1998; Le Galès and Harding 1998). Brenner argues that a new scalar division of regulatory capacities is being implemented as state functions are pushed upward towards the supranational level, downward towards regional and local levels, and outward towards private or semi-private agencies. This has led to an increase in policy responsibilities at these governmental levels, the proliferation of city-regional and supranational institutions, and a number of bilateral and multilateral initiatives coming directly from these levels of government without passing through the national government.

The hypothesis put forward by Brenner is that the rise of neoliberal policies in the 1980s has created what Soja would call a "restructuring-generated crisis" (Soja 2000). In this context, a complex set of actors, including policymakers and elected representatives, are (sometimes explicitly but very often unintentionally) redefining authority and policy at different territorial scales. This is what Brenner calls a process of "rescaling." Indeed, the end

result of this chaotic, unplanned process may be some rather important overall changes in the scales at which governance and policymaking now work.

These changing intergovernmental relations are particularly striking in the European Union. A number of research projects have demonstrated the proliferation of new institutions and political mobilization at the European level on the one hand and at the subnational level on the other.<sup>2</sup> While this development is becoming very important in Europe, similar trends are also observable in North America. The two most obvious are the devolution of responsibilities to the subnational level and the increasingly proactive role of city-regional institutions in local and regional economic development, as demonstrated by Clarke and Gaile for the United States (Clarke and Gaile 1998). At the supranational level, NAFTA institutions do not have the same political weight on national sovereignty as European institutions do. Nevertheless, Keating, for example, has shown how Canadian provinces and U.S. states have developed bilateral cooperative agreements without passing through their respective federal governments. For instance, in the 1980s alone, Ontario and U.S. states signed 25 agreements, and Quebec negotiated 101 agreements with U.S. states between 1980 and 1993 (Keating 1996). With the ratification of NAFTA in 1994, these trends were reinforced.

The question that arises from this empirical literature is, to what degree is there not only proliferation of institutions at the supranational and subnational levels but also a rescaling of the exercise of power. There is no definite answer, for rescaling processes involve diverse actors interacting in complex ways. Yet, it is worth exploring whether demands for political autonomy at various territorial levels may be signs of a substantive rescaling of political power.

This hypothesis rests on the conception of territory as a malleable rather than static element. The literature on the restructuring of territory is particularly enlightening in pointing to the fact that the spatial and institutional organization of the polity is determined by a political process, by what Jones calls a process of "spatial selectivity," whereby specific functions are secured spatially and provide differential privileges to actors in their access to state power (Jones 1997; Keating 1998). Because control over territory is, as Sack reminds us, a "means to power," this territorial and institutional restructuring has profound implications on who makes decisions and where decisions are made, what kinds of policies are implemented and through what channels, and what access citizens have to institutions at various scales (Sack 1986; Mann 1997).

One of the hypotheses explored in this research is that there has been a strategic territorialization of citizen mobilization in the past decade and that this has explicitly politicized state reform processes. It is suggested that the intensification of intergovernmental reform processes has created a situation of territorial flux, which has opened opportunities for citizens to develop their own territorial mobilization strategies, thus challenging the state's monopoly over decisions on the territorial organization of the polity. Claims for local

autonomy could be conceptualized as one manifestation of this strategic territorialization of civil-society movements. Another characteristic of this territorial flux is that civil-society actors adopt polyscalar mobilization strategies – that is, they act at multiple scales of governance simultaneously.

While local autonomy movements in Montreal and Toronto were shaped by their respective local and provincial contexts, and thus differ in important ways, analysing them in relation to one another sheds light on important processes occurring in different city-regions. Moreover, these relations are based on empirically observable networking practices between activists. This is not to downplay the specific “political opportunity structures” favouring the resurgence of local autonomy movements in each city-region (Tarrow 1998). But it is useful to recognize this general trend towards a rescaling of sociopolitical mobilization, which in turn interacts with reforms in intergovernmental relations.

This field of research on the changing scales of political practices, while familiar to students of intergovernmental relations and federalism, is also rapidly evolving in many other disciplines (geography, sociology, political science, urban planning). As mentioned by Sancton in this volume, more research on the policymaking and decision-making process that leads state functions to be pushed to supranational and subnational levels would help clarify how reforms of intergovernmental relations actually happen. Most crucially for this paper, this field would gain enormously by looking at rescaling as more than state-centred and seeing it as a transformation of political autonomy and of the scales of political struggles more generally.

The analytical lens proposed here to understand local autonomy movements requires going beyond the literature on metropolitan fragmentation versus consolidation that has developed since the beginning of the twentieth century (for excellent overviews, see Keating 1995; Stephens and Wikstrom 2000; Brenner 2002). By comparing two separate cases in great detail and situating them in the broader context of an increase in the number of similar claims, I suggest that the strengthening of local autonomy movements in the 1990s is due to a much more complex set of factors, both structural and contextual, than that suggested by the metropolitan consolidation vs fragmentation literature. These coalitions are related to a general redefinition of supranational and federal-provincial-municipal relations in Canada and elsewhere.

Hence, two interrelated research questions are at the root of this paper:

- 1 Do local autonomy movements in many North American city-regions today represent an overall trend that tends to redefine relations between different scales of government?
- 2 Do claims for political autonomy at the local level, expressed in the form of secessionist movements or resistance to mergers, represent a more general phenomenon of the rescaling of political authority in the contemporary world?

Below is a brief historical overview of the two broad coalitions studied: Montreal's anglophone rights activists and Toronto's reformists. The paper then turns to specific examples of territorial and jurisdictional strategies of mobilization.

## JURISDICTIONAL AND TERRITORIAL STRATEGIES OF MOBILIZATION IN MONTREAL AND TORONTO

Toronto is wealthy, hard-working, and creative – the entrepreneurial engine of the country. Our resources are essential to the rest of Ontario and indeed the nation – reportedly \$3 billion in taxes goes out of the city annually. A fair share from this city to help equalize opportunities and support our common life as Canadians is a reasonable demand from federal and provincial governments. But all around us in the city we see ugly unmet needs – homelessness, lack of affordable housing, the highest child poverty rate in the country. These unmet needs underline the fact that the present structures and division of powers are unsustainable. We cannot go on lacking the means and the powers to tackle our grave problems. (Creighton 2000)

When reading the Quebec Government's Bill 170 [merger bill], I began feeling physically ill. Nervous flutters, a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach ... symptoms I recognized from the weeks prior to the 1995 Quebec referendum. The feeling I had when I felt that I might lose my country was one that I will never forget. Now I feel that the PQ Government wants to take away my town, my home, my community and my way of life. (Housefather, 2000)

In these two statements, activists in Toronto and Montreal express how they envision political autonomy as nested in intergovernmental relations, and how they sense the need to mobilize using these various levels of governments strategically. The point here is not to argue that this polyscalar outlook on sociopolitical mobilization is a new phenomenon. Strategically, forming alliances with various levels of government has long been common practice. The objective of this paper is to highlight these often unnoticed polyscalar strategies and to examine their influence on reforms of intergovernmental relations in a context in which such reorganizations occur (in various forms) in many different countries. If we accept the premises of the work on rescaling discussed above, it is important to open up the argument to a non-state-centred analysis and thus to explore rescaling processes from the standpoint of civil society as well. The interaction between intergovernmental reforms and polyscalar sociopolitical mobilization strategies point towards what could perhaps be termed a rescaling of political struggles.

The starting point is that these general (yet locally specific) processes of state jurisdictional reorganization have created a situation of territorial flux

that has provided opportunities for civil-society actors to develop their own competing territorial and jurisdictional strategies. In the case of Montreal and Toronto, claims for local autonomy are not the ultimate aim; but rather they can be understood as instruments developed to affirm cultural differences in the case of Anglo-Montrealers, and to sustain a specific vision of urban life, in the case of reformist Torontonians. In other words, these local autonomy movements are not simply ad hoc reactions to municipal mergers; the reason they were able to mobilize effectively was that they were part of a broader struggle specific to each city. Although the immediate threat of municipal amalgamation was taken as a rallying point, one has to place this mobilization in the wider context of the struggle for cultural affirmation in Montreal and for a reformist view of urban life in Toronto. Significant here is that, from the perspective of these wider sociopolitical struggles, resistance to the mergers does not represent two independent new movements; rather, it represents a mobilizing strategy embedded in larger struggles. In this sense, resistance to mergers can be interpreted as a territorial and jurisdictional strategy for the anglophone rights and the reformist movements.<sup>3</sup>

An analysis of the mobilizing strategies developed by these coalitions in Toronto and Montreal reveals a trend towards an increase of jurisdictional and territorial strategies compared with sectoral strategies.<sup>4</sup> Sectoral strategies of political claims channel efforts into specific policy sectors (housing, language, health, education, etc.). Jurisdictional and territorial strategies of political claims are attempts by civil society to use one level of government against another or to create a new level of government altogether by asking for a remapping of political and administrative boundaries.

In what follows, examples of mobilizing strategies in the anglophone rights coalition in Montreal and reformist coalition in Toronto are discussed with the goal of examining civil society's use of jurisdictional and territorial strategies and their relation to intergovernmental reorganization. But first it is useful to present a brief historical overview of these two coalitions and their role in each city's amalgamation debate.

#### ANGLO-MONTREALERS' STRUGGLES: FROM BILL 22 TO PARTITIONISM AND RESISTANCE TO MERGERS

Throughout the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, Anglo-Montrealers were engaged in organizing economic development in the city and in the whole St Lawrence basin. Their influence thus radiated beyond the city throughout Canada. In creating municipalities with a majority of middle and upper-class anglophone residents concentrated on the West Island, they did not think in terms of local autonomy. This residential pattern was the result of elite separation based on language more than a claim for local autonomy. By the 1970s, a significant shift of power affected Anglo-Montrealers. First

with Bill 22, declaring French the only official language of the Province of Quebec (1974), and then with Bill 101 (1977), which regulated access to anglophone schools, workplace language use, and public signs, the anglophones began to see themselves as a minority within Quebec. From a situation in which they did not need to claim political autonomy because of their economic and cultural influence, they found themselves wanting to mark their territory and to gain power over it. This situation was further exacerbated by the gains Toronto was making over Montreal as Canada's economic engine, as well as by the departure of many Anglo-Montrealers to other provinces. Since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, Quebec had gained more power over social policy (transferred from both the churches and the federal government), and Anglo-Montrealers had become more isolated from their compatriots in the rest of Canada. They had become active in securing services in English, asserting their rights as a minority, fighting discrimination against them, and protecting a good quality of life in their local environment.

When they first began to act as an organized political force, the anglophones turned to the Quebec Liberal Party (PLQ) as their natural allies against French nationalism. But when the PLQ was unable to prevent the adoption of many linguistic policies, its hold on Anglo-Montreal loyalties was seriously challenged. Seeking other ways of securing their rights, many turned to Alliance Quebec, a lobby organization created in 1981 and funded by the federal government to protect minorities. Tired of Alliance Quebec's conciliatory lobbying strategies, the Equality Party was created in 1989. It gained four seats in the provincial legislative assembly, but the momentum faded away. Anglophone rights activists then retrenched to their local communities, developing strategies of conflict avoidance. The rule of the thumb was "to avoid language politics" and focus instead on local volunteerism and community activities.

With the 1995 referendum, partitionism came forcefully on the agenda, starting a chain of jurisdictional and territorial mobilizing strategies. The goal of securing services in English, fighting language discrimination and protecting a good quality of life remained. But the strategies to achieve them evolved. Many anglophone leaders have reduced their involvement in professional lobbying, party politics, and even community development, and have chosen to emphasize territorial autonomy. They perceive the territory as a tool with which to exert political pressure on the Quebec government for more political power. Municipalities are used to pass motions on partition or demerger in the name of local autonomy but are clearly aiming at cultural affirmation. This is well illustrated in the argument for the legal challenge to the merger bill developed by partitionist lawyer Guy Bertrand: "The existence of a non-sovereign local government in Baie d'Urfé has served and must serve again as a rampart against an important reduction of the Anglophone minority rights, if not against its pure and simple assimilation to the francophone majority of Quebec" (Guy Bertrand et Associés 2001, 48).

The anglophone rights movement was certainly not the only one active in resisting mergers and pushing for demergers, but it was one of the most vocal elements of this local autonomy coalition on Montreal Island. Similarly, cultural affirmation was not the only issue at stake in the struggle against mergers. More traditional fears easily identifiable in the consolidation-versus-fragmentation debate, such as the will to protect suburban lifestyles, a fear of decreasing service levels, or a fear of higher taxes, were also involved. Nevertheless, the question this paper asks is, Why did the anglophone rights movement get involved in this struggle against mergers? A response is that it was a logical continuation of the trend towards territorial and jurisdictional mobilizing strategies that began in the 1990s.

TORONTO'S REFORMISTS: FROM THE SPADINA EXPRESSWAY  
TO C4LD AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Aided by a remapping of the City of Toronto's ward boundaries in 1968, a loose alliance of reformists won the 1972 municipal elections. Reformists came from more conservative and more radical backgrounds and introduced a new planning ideology in the central city, exacerbating tensions with pro-development suburbs. They rejected the "growth at any cost" philosophy that was prevailing at the time. Reformists fought inner-city expressways such as the Spadina Expressway, car dependence, private apartment redevelopment, urban renewal and housing segregation. They also resented the increasing pressure of office space in central neighbourhoods; between 1962 and 1973 office space had more than doubled.<sup>5</sup> Reformists rejected low-density suburbs and favoured medium-density and mixed-use planning. They did not like high-rise buildings, advocating instead the conversion of houses into apartments, and they promoted outlying office centres (such as those in North York) in order to protect central neighbourhoods.

While these reformists never formed a municipal party, they voted together on certain common issues. Their main concern was to encourage recognition that planning is a political exercise and that citizens ought to have a say (Lorimer 1970; Sewell 1972; Harris 1987; Caulfield 1988b; Sewell 1993; Caulfield 1994; Allen 1997). They created citizen advisory boards and decentralized some city employees moving them to site offices. With a higher proportion of renters in the City of Toronto than in the rest of the region, they were able to focus attention on issues other than property values. Yet young urban professionals and newly gentrified homeowners were still very concerned about property values. For one stream of reformists, it was not development per se that was a problem but its pace and style; as well, they were concerned about the preservation of lively (middle-class) neighbourhoods in the city core. As Caulfield notes, "It is not accidental that the principal early hotbeds of middle-class reform were gentrifying neighbourhoods"

(Caulfield 1988a). Other reformists were more concerned about the distributive consequences of housing development, the lack of affordable housing, the profits made, and the control exercised by development mega corporations.

This reformist planning ideology came to be integrated in City of Toronto practices and formed the basis of an urban progressive middle-class regime. As Caulfield noted in 1988, “Concerns of middle-class reform, have, today, been sufficiently absorbed into municipal orthodoxy that there is no imminent danger of another uprising of restless bourgeois” (1988a, 482). When amalgamation was imposed on Metro Toronto, the reformists felt threatened.<sup>6</sup> They coalesced in a movement called Citizens for Local Democracy (C4LD), which was led by the former reformist mayor, John Sewell (1978–80). In the first five months of the struggle to defeat Bill 103, which was imposing amalgamation on Toronto, many other groups gravitated around the coalition. C4LD saw its role as a catalyst to attract energy and to mobilize support for maintaining a reformist regime in Toronto.<sup>7</sup> Its meetings attracted more than a thousand people in peak times. With local autonomy threatened, reformists had to turn to jurisdictional and territorial strategies of mobilization.

C4LD was not successful in preventing amalgamation, but its territorial and jurisdiction mobilizing strategies continued. In the first years of the new city, C4LD acted as a watchdog of the new council and became involved in a number of other issues. Even though the immediate purpose of the coalition (resisting amalgamation) was no longer relevant and the appellation C4LD gradually faded, the reformist movement – as a loosely defined network – remained active. Secession was probably the first important issue that many C4LDers embarked on. They did so in coalition with some municipal bureaucrats and politicians, a number of philanthropic business leaders and academics, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Toronto Board of Trade, and the Toronto Environmental Alliance (Keil and Young 2001).

A variety of secessionist activities emerged at much the same time in different circles. Perhaps the most colourful was a declaration by mayor Mel Lastman, at a meeting in Florida in the fall of 1999, that Toronto should be its own province. He later pulled back from his statement, but it had already unleashed waves of ironic (and also serious) comments back in Toronto (Gwyn 1999; Sewell 1999; Benzie 2000d, 2000b, 2000c, 2000a, 2000e; Comeau 2000; Gollom 2000; Sewell 2000b; Welsh 2000). Most observers knew that, constitutionally, the creation of a new city-province would be virtually impossible. But Jane Jacobs had already toyed with the idea, especially during a conference held in her honour in October 1997, and also in her deputation to the committee hearing on Bill 103 (Hume 1997c, 1997a, 1997b, 1997d; Jacobs 1997). The proposals varied from the creation of a Province of Southern Ontario to the creation of a new designation for city-states which could include Montreal and Vancouver.

Some C4LDers formed the Committee for the Province of Toronto a “community group committed to achieving Provincial Status for Toronto under Canada’s Constitution” (Vallance 2000). The committee supported a notice of motion to City Council, presented by Councillor Michael Walker on 9 December 1999 and officially deposited in February 2000. Building on the widespread opposition to amalgamation in 1997 and the widespread discontent with downloading policies, the motion demanded that the City of Toronto (1) “hold a public referendum as part of the 2000 municipal election to determine public support for proceeding with separation from the Province” and (2) “develop an extensive communications package outlining the argument (financial, social) for and against separation and a plan to provoke full participation and debate on the part of the citizens prior to the referendum” (Walker 1999). This movement, which included members of City Council and other citizens, eventually faded, and mobilization focused on securing a charter for the city.

These various citizen activities show continuity with the 1970s reform movement, both in the people involved and in the political ideas. But there is an important difference: the evolution of mobilization strategies. Reformists had been in power in the former City of Toronto for three decades, but the threats posed by amalgamation forced these activists and municipal politicians to craft territorialized strategies in order to maintain a progressive political regime in place.

#### EXAMPLES OF POLYSCALAR MOBILIZATION IN MONTREAL AND TORONTO

In both city-regions, other coalitions have also been territorializing their mobilization strategies as a result of amalgamation. A good example can be found by looking at how grassroots organizations have been mobilizing at the borough level in what were the neighbourhoods of the former City of Montreal. With amalgamation, the City of Montreal was subdivided into boroughs to complement the boroughs created out of former local municipalities. This new territorial structure provided grassroots organizations with a framework for mobilization.<sup>8</sup> Space constraints do not permit expansion here on all of the examples of territorialization. However, in this last section, three examples of jurisdictional and territorial strategies deployed by the anglophone and reformist coalitions are discussed in order to illustrate further the interaction between intergovernmental reorganization policies and polyscalar sociopolitical mobilization.

Strategic territorialization occurs on various scales, from the neighbourhood to the borough to the municipality to the metropolitan level. The focus here is on Toronto reformists’ strategies at the metropolitan scale (secession,

charter) and on Anglo-Montrealers' focus on the local municipal scale (partition, demerger).<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the scalar focus of these examples, civil society's territorial strategies of mobilization usually necessitate incorporating negotiation between levels of governments.

#### PUTTING URBAN AFFAIRS BACK ON THE FEDERAL AGENDA

Although municipal affairs are under provincial jurisdiction, the coalitions in Toronto and Montreal, in their struggle against amalgamation, attempted to influence federal electoral outcomes in order to pressure their respective provincial governments. This is a typical jurisdictional mobilizing strategy. The 2000 federal election resulted in a significant loss of votes for the Bloc Québécois (BQ) when the federal Liberal Party publicly exhorted Quebecers to vote Liberal in order to make a statement against the provincial Parti Québécois (PQ). The election supervisor later warned the Liberals to be careful, as anti-merger expenses in Montreal might be tallied as campaign expenses for the federal party. When C4LD in Toronto attempted to put "local democracy" on the agenda during the federal election of 1997, federal parties refused to get involved. The cultural stakes were obviously different. But this renewed openness towards municipal affairs at the federal level is related to the strategies of mobilization on multiple scales developed in the 1990s by local autonomy movements across Canada, and particularly in Montreal and Toronto.<sup>10</sup>

This urban pressure at the federal level is slowly making its way as a legitimate federal issue, resulting in a rescaling of the level at which political autonomy is claimed by civil-society actors. For Anglo-Montrealers, it makes sense to support these municipal-federal alliances, for they decrease the autonomy of the francophone-controlled Quebec government. These jurisdictional strategies can be traced back at least to the constitutional negotiations leading to the 1987 Meech Lake Accord.<sup>11</sup> At the time, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) was pushing to have municipalities recognized as a third order to government. Aboriginal people were also calling for self-government. If these measures had been enshrined in the accord, they would have rescaled autonomy profoundly in Canada, taking away some provincial powers. However, the two proposals were not fully integrated in the amendments unanimously approved by all provincial premiers back in June 1987, and the concessions made in the 1992 Charlottetown Accord were ultimately rejected by Canadian citizens. But these ideas made their way, and many civil-society actors, including reformists and Anglo-Montrealers, were mobilizing in order to change the locus of political autonomy in Canada. The 2002 election of the reformist Toronto councillor and former FCM president, Jack Layton as the New Democratic Party's leader is a sign of the advances made by this polyscalar mobilization.<sup>12</sup>

PARTITIONISM AND DE-MERGERS:  
MUNICIPAL RESOLUTIONS AND FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL POLICIES

Although neither a recognition of municipalities as a third order of government nor Aboriginal self-government was fully incorporated in the Meech Lake Accord, the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society was. Anglophone leaders in Quebec then developed their own competing territorial strategy. As Scowen wrote, "A territorial approach brings important psychological benefits. It will allow the English to see themselves as exercising some real influence in at least a part of the province. It permits and encourages all kinds of local initiatives, a strengthening of local institutions, and political action ... A territorial approach to the English community in Quebec does not involve a denial of individual rights. It is the logical extension of these rights into practical collective action. It does not mean that English Quebec is creating a ghetto for itself, any more than Quebec is a ghetto within Canada or North America" (Scowen 1991, 111).

It was in this climate, in 1995, that the PQ launched a referendum campaign on Quebec sovereignty. Reacting to the referendum's very close results, many anglophones rallied for partition. The Equality Party and Alliance Quebec, as well as most anglophone municipalities on Montreal Island worked with this territorial strategy in two ways. First, a number of partitionist motions were adopted by local municipal councils stating their will to remain part of Canada if Quebec unilaterally declared its independence. Second, a campaign was launched with the federal government and through the court system, led by Guy Bertrand, to obtain a decision on the constitutionality of secession. The Supreme Court decision (1998) states that the Province's territory would be up for negotiation if Quebec went with secession. Based on this court decision, the federal government adopted the *Clarity Act*, which details the conditions under which Canada would negotiate if a clear majority of Quebecers voted for sovereignty in a future referendum. Should partition be implemented, it would have important territorial consequences, not the least being a complex redrawing of Quebec's territory according to small units of the voters' choice, most probably the ridings.

When the Quebec government imposed mergers on Montreal Island in 2000, much of this activity on partition, which relied on local municipal boundaries, was threatened. Moreover, even anglophones who did not support partition were affected, for their traditional mobilization strategies were threatened by the loss of local institutions. This has resulted in a significant move towards territorial and jurisdictional strategies in an effort to preserve these local institutions and boundaries, which were seen as secure spaces for community well-being in the face of increasing urban and linguistic tensions.

Another example of this strategy is demerger resolutions passed by municipal councils. Westmount's former mayor Peter Trent and the citizen

antimerger group DemocraCité developed the idea of pressuring the Quebec Liberal Party to promise to adopt a demerger policy if it was elected in the April 2003 election. Several municipal councils in the Montreal area had adopted demerger resolutions immediately after the merger legislation was approved. This gave a clear signal to Jean Charest and the Liberals. The procedure for demerging was similar to the California municipal secession policy adopted in 1997 in response to pressure by San Fernando Valley secessionists: a referendum is to be held on demerging if 10 percent of the population signs a petition against amalgamation.<sup>13</sup> Since January 2006, 15 municipalities were demerged on the Island of Montreal, amounting to 237,949 residents.

#### THE CHARTER MOVEMENT: CROSS-CANADIAN ALLIANCES

While demerging has not been on the agenda in Ontario, the secession of newly amalgamated Toronto from the rest of the province was briefly discussed by various citizens and by Councillor Walker. These earlier formulations eventually evolved into a Canadian charter movement similar to the U.S. home rule movement at the turn of the twentieth century.

As Keil and Young note, in the Canadian institutional framework, three avenues are possible for providing more autonomy to municipalities: (1) amending the federal constitution to recognize municipalities as a third order of government; (2) amending provincial municipal acts; and (3) a provincially approved city charter, which would grant municipal autonomy in specific areas under a provincial-municipal contract (Keil and Young 2001). After initially flirting with the first two options, several Toronto actors opted to lobby the provincial government for a city charter (Chief Administrative Officer 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d; Grewal 2000; Rowe 2000; *Toronto Star*, 2000; Welsh and Moloney 2000).<sup>14</sup>

Toronto City Council took over the charter idea, motivated partly by a budget crisis in 2001–2, when the council faced a shortfall that led to service cuts, higher transit fees, and an increase in property taxes. The civic-spirited business leader Alan Broadbent initiated meetings and drafted a charter in association with a number of academics, ex-mayors, and various civic leaders (Broadbent 2000; Rowe 2000). The Toronto Environmental Alliance also drafted a charter focusing on regional governance (Keil and Young 2001). This was accompanied by pressure for a change in the provincial *Municipal Act*, which could provide the city with enhanced revenue sources, regulating abilities, and protections from unilateral provincial changes of municipal boundaries.

These various jurisdictional and territorial strategies in Toronto and across Canada are monitored by a network of reformist activists led by John Sewell (see their website, [www.localgovernment.ca](http://www.localgovernment.ca)). As the website's *Local Self-Government Bulletin No. 3* indicates, "the Toronto debate goes beyond asking for autonomy and respect, and raises the question of the kinds of power which

should be exercised by a big city” (Sewell 2000a). The website offers a good source of information illustrating the cross-Canada alliances developing on the issue of local autonomy.

Activists in Montreal and Toronto have insisted on the importance of local territorial boundaries while developing a number of jurisdictional strategies playing one level of government against another (particularly during the 1997 and 2000 federal elections). These strategies have multiplied the scales at which claims to autonomy are made in a country in which such claims were long dominated by the provincial level of government.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has taken a civil-society-centred approach to Canadian intergovernmental relations, examining how polyscalar mobilization strategies exploited by certain social actors can influence the kinds of institutional and territorial reorganization undertaken by state actors. Do local autonomy movements in many North American city-regions today represent an overall trend that tends to redefine relations between different levels of government? Do claims for political autonomy at the local level, expressed in the form of secessionist movements or resistance to mergers, represent a more general phenomenon of the rescaling of political authority in the contemporary world? Despite the fact that most of the examples discussed here were only partly successful on the proximate issue of local autonomy, the cases of Toronto and Montreal point towards a positive answer to these two research questions, given that new opportunities have been opened for territorial strategies of mobilization to be developed.

By situating the struggles against amalgamation in Montreal and Toronto in the context of larger sociopolitical struggles – namely, the anglophone rights coalition and the reformist coalition – it was possible to see the campaigns against mergers as jurisdictional and territorial strategies of mobilization. The starting point was that in the general process of intergovernmental reforms, a situation of territorial flux provided opportunities for social actors to develop their own competing territorial and jurisdictional strategies. Claims for local autonomy were thus not the ultimate aim of these coalitions but were an instrument developed to affirm cultural differences, in the case of Anglo-Montrealers, and to sustain a specific vision of urban life, in the case of Torontonians.

Various examples of jurisdictional and territorial strategies were discussed, including pressure to put urban affairs back on the federal agenda, partitionism and demerger, and the emergence of a Canadian charter movement. The object was to highlight these polyscalar strategies and to examine their influence on state restructuring in order to explore rescaling processes from the

standpoint of civil society. The interaction between intergovernmental reforms and the strategic multiplication of the scales at which claims to autonomy are made begin to illustrate that we may be witnessing a rescaling, not only of institutions but of the exercise of power. The impact of this territorialization of civil-society activities on political debates and social justice is difficult to assess at this point. But certainly the scale at which social actors focus their political claims will affect redistributive policies – a central yet not always openly articulated element of the struggle in both Toronto and Montreal.

## NOTES

- 1 In the United States alone, local secessionism rose in the 1990s with active movements in more than fifteen cities, the most prominent being in the populous (1.4 million) San Fernando Valley of the City of Los Angeles. To provide a point of comparison, the aggregate population of all territories detached from all municipalities in the United States as a whole between 1970 and 1985 was only 119,000 (Briffault 1992, 777). In Canada, local autonomy movements tend to take a wider range of modalities (from resistance to mergers to a Canadian charter movement), but U.S.-style local secessionism also exists. For instance, the California procedure for secession has directly influenced the Quebec Liberal Party's procedure for demergers (interview with Roch Cholette, 4 June 2001). Secession was also briefly on the agenda of Toronto activists in the aftermath of amalgamation.
- 2 For excellent empirical analyses of these phenomena in Europe, please refer to three edited books: Balme 1996; Le Galès and Lequesne 1997; Balme et al. 2002. In the latter book, Balme, Chabanet, and Wright have asked contributors to reflect not only on the proliferation of institutions at the supranational and subnational levels but also on the Europeanization of social and political mobilization, that is, on the appearance of the EU as a target of political mobilization, on the proliferation of EU interest groups and the effect of the construction of Europe on national interest groups, and on the access to European institutions for subnational authorities.
- 3 Anglophone rights and reformist movements are conceived in this paper as political formations that are more loosely organized than political parties or interest groups but not necessarily socially transformative like social movements. The terms "coalitions" and "civil-society actors" are used to designate this type of sociopolitical mobilization. It is also important to note that these coalitions are visible mainly through their leaders and their most militant activists; they do not necessarily embody the views of all the citizens they claim to represent.
- 4 The analysis of mobilizing strategies appearing in this article consisted in the compilation of a list of actions and issues undertaken by the anglophone rights and reformist activists in the 1990s (obviously this list cannot be exhaustive). Information on strategies came from documents produced by their main organizations,

from interviews, from media coverage, from direct observation, and from secondary studies. The list was then categorized according to the variables (1) sectoral and (2) territorial and jurisdictional, in order to determine the dominant type of strategy at a specific period (Boudreau 2003a, 2003b).

- 5 Between 1970 and 1980 there was an increase of 78 percent, and there was a further 71 percent increase between 1980 and 1993 (Lemon 1996, 274; Filion 2000, 173).
- 6 The term “reformist” is used here to designate local councillors adhering to reformist ideals, as well as activists.
- 7 The argument against amalgamation was not specifically cast as a will to preserve this regime. This would have alienated potential suburban allies in the struggle to prevent mergers. Rather, the argument was framed on the more neutral ground of “local democracy” (for a detailed analysis, see Boudreau 2003a).
- 8 I am indebted to Jean-Pierre Collin for this observation.
- 9 The reader may have noticed that the Montreal Citizen Movement (MCM) remains absent from the present analysis. The MCM could be seen as the equivalent of the Toronto reformist coalition. At first glance, it may seem surprising that these two reformist coalitions took opposite positions on amalgamation. A careful comparative analysis of their positions might be an extremely interesting exercise to undertake in another paper. Suffice it to say here that part of the explanation may be that the language component of the struggle in Montreal had an important influence beyond the typical reformist claims. Moreover, Montreal’s and Toronto’s levels of decentralization and democratic traditions before amalgamation were very different. Finally, the Harris government’s neoconservative motives for amalgamation contrasted with the PQ’s stated objectives.
- 10 Business elites were also very active in pushing for federal involvement in cities. This was done through traditional lobbying practices but also through alliances with other civil-society actors, such as local autonomy movements. This is the case, for instance, of the Toronto City Summit Alliance (Boudreau and Keil 2004; Keil and Boudreau 2005).
- 11 The Federation of Canadian Municipalities already had lobbied the federal government for a greater role for Canadian cities; it had done so in 1982 when the constitution was patriated to Canada.
- 12 Toronto Mayor David Miller continues to invite federal government representatives to come to municipal committee meetings on relevant issues (particularly transportation and immigration) in an effort to build stronger ties between the two levels of government, bypassing the provincial level (interview with David Miller, 8 April 2002).
- 13 Roch Cholette (who was urban affairs critic when the PLQ was in opposition in Quebec) has studied the California secession procedure very closely, and the demerger proposal put forward by Quebec’s Liberal premier Jean Charest is considerably less stringent than California legislation (AB62). In California, for an area to secede from a municipality, a petition of 25 percent of registered voters

in the secessionist area has to be submitted to a state agency, which then undertakes a “feasibility study” that has to prove secession would be revenue-neutral. Then secession is put on the ballot and has to be approved by a double majority: in the secessionist area, and in the city at large.

- 14 Jane Jacobs also initiated, in May 2001, a meeting of the mayors of the country’s five biggest cities to discuss strategies for gaining more autonomy (Coyle 2001; James 2001).

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