

*Tales of Two Cities: Women and Municipal Restructuring in London and Toronto.* By Sylvia Bashevkin. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press. 2007. 184 pp. \$85.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

doi:10.1017/S1743923X08000263

Judith A. Garber  
University of Alberta

In her book, Sylvia Bashevkin asks how urban feminist agendas around citizenship and public policy have been affected by the reconfiguration of local governments within metropolitan London, England, and Toronto, Canada. Her valuable political analysis refutes the prediction that the efficiency and competitiveness demands of globalization necessarily erode distinctions among localities. Rather, Bashevkin argues that neither doomsayers nor optimists could predict the outcome of this pair of major examples of local restructuring. Measured by 1) the electoral success of women, 2) the strength of the femocracy, and 3) the attention to women's issues within urban planning, reorganization has affected feminist interests more negatively in Toronto's "megacity" than in the Greater London Authority (GLA). She attributes this outcome to the more favorable institutional arrangements of the GLA, as well as to political leaders fighting harder for democracy and equality in London.

Bashevkin's cases present evident points for comparison. Both cities had been the objects of previous rounds of (de)centralization. Each of the reorganizations occurred at the tail end of the twentieth century and involved the countries' largest cities, which are also the largest immigrant-receiving cities. The impetus for both reorganizations came from above — at least in part to enforce neoliberal values locally — and voter referenda gauging public support for the reorganization proposals were nonbinding. Further, both cities ended up with directly elected mayors and fairly small legislatures. Finally, feminists had a historical, political, and administrative presence in London and Toronto.

Still, notable differences existed. First, in 1998, Londoners voted by 72% for New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair's plan to reinstate a metropolitan London government — known as the Greater London Council — which had been abolished by Margaret Thatcher's Tories in 1986. In 1997, Torontonians voted by 76% against the plan of Ontario Tory Premier Mike Harris to amalgamate the old City of

Toronto and five suburban municipalities comprising the Metro Toronto tier of government. Second, since restructuring, London's mayor has been the left-populist Ken Livingstone, while Toronto's was initially the conservative Mel Lastman and is now the moderate David Miller. Third, London was known for its "ideologically militant, fractured, and protest-oriented" women's movement, while Toronto's was "moderate, system-focused, and pragmatic" (p. 4), with the former more potent than the latter.

Bashevkin compares London and Toronto systematically, assessing each on the three feminist measures of citizenship listed previously. She characterizes representation of women in office as signaling liberal citizenship, the integration of feminists and feminist policy goals into municipal administration as reflecting difference citizenship, and the inclusion of women's goals regarding planning as indicating discourse citizenship. She also presents comments gathered during the numerous interviews she conducted in 2001 and 2005. These interviews enhance the study's longitudinal dimension, although it is limited by the short period under examination.

The author draws her conclusions about the status of feminist urban citizenship, then, from a six-part analysis. Only with respect to the representation of women in London's government did reorganization bring an actual improvement over pre-reorganization days. Taking into account the five other measures, restructuring has coincided with, and perhaps caused a decline in, women's status in London and Toronto. Women's groups have become less successful in "efforts to merge bureaucratic norms and [feminist] social movement values in . . . insider units" (p. 51). Spatial and social planning documents in London and Toronto have de-emphasized the needs of women (as well as the cities' minority populations). Overall, there is a decline in local attention to the broad range of feminist urban concerns, including housing, public transit, schooling, child care, safety, immigrant services, racial and gender equality issues, development, and democratic access to government.

Bashevkin emphasizes the relatively more advantageous position of women's citizenship in London, where women started out better off. Most notably, Toronto's femocracy was always weak and London's was strong, especially before the disbanding of the GLC in 1986. Further, the declines accompanying the centralization of local government institutions and the predominance of administrative efficiency and economic competitiveness norms have been more precipitous in

Toronto. In short, at least so far, megacity Toronto has been terrible for feminist goals, but the GLA has not been so bad.

The author is sanguine about the situation in London, though she does not idealize it. However, she sometimes overstates her case. For example, the “striking . . . cross-city divergences” (p. 48) in the representation of females on London’s metropolitan assembly and Toronto’s city council through 2004 are based on very small numbers; in 2004, women won 10 of 25 seats (40%) in the GLA, while in 2003, Toronto elected women to 14 of 44 seats (31.8%). (Or maybe she just knows her city: After Toronto’s election in late 2006, the number of female council members fell to 10). More convincing is her discussion of the positive implications of the voting system in London — 11 assembly seats are filled through party lists — and the significance of Mayor Livingstone’s choice to have powerful women as his deputy mayors.

Despite the complex set of factors examined in *Tales of Two Cities*, one wonders whether the likelihood of urban governance reflecting diverse women’s interests and welcoming democratic input is not largely attributable to the predisposition of the government that controls resources to provide funding for these goals. Without those resources, the urban political sphere is far less useful for feminist activists, politicians, and civil servants, as Bashevkin shows. Indeed, she notes that London’s riven, ideological feminist movement has always been more successful than the insider-oriented feminist movement in Toronto. The difference seems to be that there have always been *some* resources to attract feminist activists to the framework of local governance. The progressive, dynamic leadership of Livingstone has undeniably been necessary to make the most of the GLA’s institutional arrangements; however, his leadership would surely not have been sufficient had he been saddled with a conservative central government hostile to big cities, as megacity Toronto was in its first several years. This is not to deny the significance of local leaders and institutions to political outcomes, but to note the limits that cities face.

Bashevkin’s book is an enlightening look at the political factors shaping citizenship opportunities for urban women. Her careful comparative analysis will be of interest to academics, students, and feminists working in the local arena.