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“Immigrant Settlement Services in Ontario: From Government to Multilevel Governance”*

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When we conducted our five-centre study of the governance of immigrant settlement services in Ontario in 2005 to 2007, settlement agency actors were in a mood of cautious optimism (Stasiulis, Hughes and Amery, forthcoming). They anticipated with relief and pleasure the new Canada-Ontario Immigrant Agreement and particularly the close to one billion dollars that was to be allocated for Ontario settlement through this agreement. By contrast, this is a very **unsettling** moment in the history of Ontario’s immigrant settlement services.

—Ontario has yet to successfully negotiate a new COIA with the federal government, with a deadline set for end of March.

—Ottawa has withheld \$207 million owed to Ontario under the first COIA

—the Harper government has made deficit slashing a priority in the next budget

—There has been a notable decrease in immigrants arriving in Ontario in relation to (e.g.) the Prairie provinces (down from 50% in 2006 to 42% in 2009)

—On the argument that Ontario is receiving proportionately fewer immigrants, the federal government has imposed sizeable federal funding cuts (\$44 million) to Ontario's settlement agencies, leading to the demise of long-standing, deeply-rooted community agencies (e.g. South Asian Women's Centre, Tropicana, the Afghan Association), providing services to some of the most recent and/or vulnerable populations.

--Citing financial mismanagement, in 2009 and 2010, CIC terminated funding to at least five major Ontario settlement agencies (in Brampton, Peel and Hamilton)

It is no wonder that a climate of fear is engulfing the settlement sector, as each service provider wonders if they are next on the chopping block.

Since the 1990s, one of the most serious challenges faced by the settlement services sector in Ontario is the increasingly diverse base of clientele and the construction (since 1990s) of a **novel immigrant in need of settlement services**.

In Ontario, the settlement sector has been referred to as a “shadow state,” a committed network of organizations and agencies which face demands for services that far exceed the sector's resources. Working at the local level, these agencies have pioneered innovative projects, responding to diverse needs of a diverse constituency such as women facing domestic violence, elderly immigrants, youth, immigrants living with HIV/AIDS, and so on. While these agencies meet the eligibility criteria of

“settlement” as defined by the federal government’s ISAP and LINC programs, they also exceed these criteria in terms of the clientele and years in Canada.

As one study of immigrant settlement in the Greater Toronto Area observed, there is “no typical immigrant client. Clients may range from poor and unskilled persons with little or no English to *very skilled English speakers who lack Canadian experience*” (Friskin and Wallace 2002, ix, emphasis added).

Astonishingly, skilled worker immigration has come to be associated with chronic **poverty** (Reitz 2005).

Immigration policy or immigrant recruitment, while always influenced by economic and labour market considerations, is overwhelmingly now cast as an **economic development strategy on the part of the federal government** in the sense that economic priorities are overdetermining immigrant selection priorities. The share in the economic class of immigrants (including principal applicants, spouses, and dependants) in Canada as a whole has increased from 29% in the 1992 entering cohort to 55% in 2001, rising to almost 70% in 2009 in Canada as a whole, and currently constituting over 51% of immigrants to Ontario. The numbers of those migrating in economic selection processes is much higher insofar as the numbers of temporary foreign workers is rising in Ontario – approximately 94,000 in 2009, or one-third of total visa workers issued to temporary foreign workers in Canada. Temporary workers, do not meet the eligibility criteria of federal settlement services, but

nonetheless, are in need of many settlement-type services. In addition, many of them are now engaging in a two-step process of becoming permanent residents in Canada.

Yet immigrant settlement services are conceptualized as social programs rather than economic programs, making them more amenable to cuts by a deficit-slashing government. So there exists a major disconnect between federal immigrant recruitment and immigrant settlement policies under joint (federal-provincial) jurisdiction.

Each centre had a different profile of clients (e.g. proportionately more refugees in Ottawa and Niagara than in the other three centres). In all five centres in our study (Niagara region, Ottawa, Peel, Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo), however, settlement agencies were contending with the unanticipated increase in work loads created by an unexpected type of client – namely, the skilled or professional immigrant who faces difficulties in finding jobs commensurate with his or her qualifications. One recent study found that even business class immigrants living in York were disproportionately seeking settlement services (Lo et al. 2010). Various analyses have been offered for the reasons for this unanticipated client pool, such as

- the absence of pre-arrival screening of credentials as is done in other immigrant-receiving countries such as Australia and New Zealand;
- deficiencies in pre-arrival information about labour market realities, and the often complicated process of foreign credential recognition;

- the inordinately long processing time of immigrant applications;
- the gate-keeping of professional associations; and
- the inadequately-filled need for job-appropriate official language competence.

Progress has been made at the provincial and federal level in responding to the challenges of recognition of overseas credentials:

In Ontario, the 2006 Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act provides provincial oversight over 34 regulatory bodies governing credential recognition in such professions as medicine, architecture, accountancy, engineering, teaching. The legislation mandates the appointment of a fairness commissioner who would be a champion of newcomers going through the regulatory and credentials recognition process. The province has introduced new bridging programs, and offered more spots for medical professionals in their programs meant to fast-track foreign professionals. At the federal level, Citizenship and Immigration Canada established the Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO) in 2007, a super directory and prime example of e-governance in settlement, to help internationally trained individuals find the information and access the services they need to put their skills to work quickly in Canada (Government of Canada). However, Canada and Ontario have a long way to go in dealing with this major problem for professional and skilled worker immigrants.

The vast majority of newcomers to Ontario are non-European or ‘visible minorities’ encountering systemic, racialized barriers within the process of settlement,ⁱ lending a distinct racial cast to immigrant poverty and the entire matrix of newcomer needs.

- By the early 2000s, entering skilled class immigrants were actually **more** likely to enter poverty and be in **chronic poverty** than family class immigrants.

The devaluation of immigrant credentials and overseas work experience are part of structural forms of discrimination and systemic exclusionary processes. The global rise in Islamophobia and anti-Arab sentiment most certainly has had a negative impact on the hiring of Muslims and Arabs in Ontario, as elsewhere. Recent immigrants also lack the personal and professional networks that are tapped in contemporary Canadian hiring practices, especially for managerial and higher level jobs (Fong 2008, 7), and thus cuts to settlement services will have a devastating impact on them.

These processes have constituted **a novel form of immigrant in need of newcomer settlement and integration programs – the immigrant who arrives with plentiful human capital, yet is unable to translate their specialized skills and advanced education into a commensurate job and income.**

It is perhaps not surprising that this degree-qualified immigrant has become the focus of the majority certainly the first crop of multilevel governance immigrant integration experiments in Ontario city-regions.

I want to turn now to ask how did Ontario arrive at the precarious and uncertain moment in immigrant settlement services? What preceded COIA and the current rather uncertain status of Ontario in immigrant settlement policy? Despite sharing jurisdiction with the federal government on immigration matters, and attracting the

largest number and percentage of immigrants among all Canadian provinces, Ontario has been a relative latecomer among provinces in taking a more proactive role in immigration issues. While some provinces, such as Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia, have played a more dynamic role in immigrant recruitment and settlement since the 1990s, the Ontario government has been remarkably lagging in this respect.

The 1990s, when the federal government was willing to devolve some responsibilities over immigration represented a period of diluted interest in settlement and integration for the Ontario government. The 1995-2003 years of the “Common Sense Revolution” of the Conservative government of Mike Harris represented a period of complete obliteration of provincial policy voice on immigration and immigrant services (OCASI 2009, 9). This period of dismantling and deregulation of public support for immigrants corresponded to what Peck and Tickell (1994) refer to as “roll-back neoliberalism,” where many of the gains made by equity-seeking groups representing marginalized populations were hastily swept aside (cited in Keil 2002, 580). The province’s employment equity programs were eliminated as were several of the hard-won gains by foreign live-in caregivers, one of the most vulnerable group of immigrant workers in the province.

Institutionalized relationships involving funding, service-delivery and advocacy between the provincial government and the non-profit sector were thereby undermined. Our interviews with settlement service providers (conducted

in 2005 to 2007) indicated that the trust in the province is haltingly being built, as thus far the province had had little involvement in settlement funding. According to OCASI, the Liberal government under Dalton McGuinty has reversed some but not all of the decisions implemented by the previous Conservative government, particularly those that have had a harsh impact on immigrants and refugees. The time had come for the federal government, which had the blessings of the community settlement sector, to negotiate an agreement with this province (OCASI 2009, 2).

There has recently been a discernible movement in Ontario's immigrant-receiving centres from 'government' to multi-sectoral 'governance' in the policy area of immigrant settlement. Agreements such as COIA and the MOU for the City of Toronto provide a framework for multi-sectoral governance. The energetic formation of partnerships in Ontario's centres, particularly aimed at assisting in **labour market integration of immigrants**, reflects the relative consensus among provincial authorities, immigration advocates and researchers regarding several matters. These include (1) the dire need to redress the Ontario government's shirking of leadership and financial support for immigrant policy and program issues since the mid-1990s, (2) concern that the level of federal funding for Ontario had remained unchanged for some time and required "fair share" adjustments in relation to the size and annual growth of Quebec's grant, and (3) the declining job and income outcomes for newcomers (Seidle 2010, 9).

But the flourishing of such partnerships instantiates Peck and Tickell's second period of neoliberalism – “roll-out neoliberalism” – the active creation of new institutions, on a governance terrain where distinctions between state, civil society and market become blurred, and “marketization” rules each of these domains and the relationships among them (Keil 2002, 582).

At the local level, multi-sectoral governance is an element of the “neoliberalization of urban space,” (Geddes 2005, 373, 360) and accompanies the three other key elements of neo-liberal local state restructuring: a shift from welfare to workfare, fiscal austerity, and supply-side economic policies. Within these shifts, governance involves new forms of local state apparatus, amounting to an “attack on the old bureaucratic ‘silos’” (360) and the creation of networked institutions to take their place. Private and/or community sectors play a more salient role *vis à vis* the public sector in service provision and local leadership, and by participating in ‘policy partnerships.’

Examples of multi-sectoral governance are proliferating in Ontario's handling of immigrant settlement. Some recent ones are the CIC-funded Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs) that attempt to take a broad approach to immigrant integration. The LIPs fit well the governance category of activity insofar as they are partnership-based, involving cross-sectoral collaboration and input.

The LIPs, however, were preceded by a prior experiment in multi-sectoral governance focused on employment and economic integration of newcomers, and on addressing the disconnect between immigrant selection policies and economic integration outcomes. Indeed, **four of the five major collaborative initiatives we encountered in our research were focused on immigrant employment.** The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)ⁱⁱ, the Niagara Immigrant Employment Council (NIEC), the Waterloo Region Immigrant Employment Network (WRIEN), and Hire Immigrants Ottawa (HIO) all have been developed since 2003. The fifth initiative – the Peel Newcomer Strategy – is broader in orientation than the employment-based ones.

Do the implied horizontal cooperative and consultative relationships involved in these governance schemes lead to a **meaningful decentralization and democratization in policy-making, more attuned to local and situated forms of knowledge (e.g. from settlement agencies)? How effective are some of these new partnerships in addressing the integration needs of newcomers to Ontario?**

I will just focus briefly on the employment focused initiatives in addressing these questions, and also make reference to the Peel Newcomer Strategy. The employment-based initiatives are meant to address both sides of the employer-employee contract: skilled newcomers who would benefit from help finding work in their field, and employers in need of labour who require assistance in locating, hiring,

and integrating newcomers. The overall goals are to improve labour market integration outcomes for skilled immigrants, enhance economic competitiveness for businesses and vitality for the community, and (in Waterloo and Niagara) attract and retain future immigrants with specialized skills. The actors involved in these initiatives are from the government, non-governmental, and corporate and organized labour sectors. They include the municipal/regional government, usually the provincial and/or federal governments, immigrant-serving agencies, large corporate employers, occupational regulatory bodies, chambers of commerce or boards of trade, district labour councils, and post-secondary institutions. The actors involved meet regularly, are led by a steering committee, and seek to coordinate their strengths in a common effort. Activities on which they collaborate include research, information provision, workshops, mentoring and bridging programs for newcomers, cultivating access to labour pools, awareness-raising, and training for employers. Provincial and/or federal governments are generally involved in a funding capacity, but with an expressed interest in learning from experiences of local-level actors.

The central importance of the business sector in immigrant settlement through these initiatives was repeatedly raised in interviews. A social services approach was perceived as being ineffective in economically integrating skilled immigrants. Services for employers as part of these initiatives are aimed at not only changing their practices, but also their attitudes so as to increase their knowledge of the assets that

newcomers can bring to their workforce and their willingness to hire them.

Immigrants are perceived “as representing a latent pool of talent that employers would be wise to tap into. At the same time, skilled immigrants are encouraged to find mentors in their fields, who make help them learn job-specific terminology, Canadian workplace culture, or give them personal references to specific employers” (Fong 2008, 22).

A number of **benefits** were perceived as accruing to actors participating in these partnership-based initiatives, and by extension, to the immigrant and non-immigrant communities at large. These included improved dialogue, cooperation, coordination, and resource-sharing in and across sectors and across levels of government. **Notably, these initiatives have provided participating newcomers with concrete benefits.** The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council in particular, shows positive results in this respect. With its location in the main economic centre of Canada, TRIEC has access to many head offices and large employers such as the big banks, which have the capacity to take on immigrant interns (Fong 2008, 18). It has proved more of a challenge for TRIEC to influence small and medium-sized employers who have fewer resources to dedicate to tasks such as the assessment of immigrant qualifications and are thus less inclined than large employers to consider immigrants as potential employees (Fong 2008, 18). Since its inception in September 2003 until December 2009, TRIEC and its partners placed 5000 skilled immigrants with

Canadian professional mentors and 1300 immigrants in bridging internships with Toronto-area employers; 80% of the participants have found full-time employment in their field (TRIEC, 2009; n.d.). Undoubtedly, greater numbers of skilled immigrants will benefit from the August 2009 announcement of promised investment by the province of \$5.2 million in York University programs designed to help highly skilled newcomers become licensed and find jobs in their field more quickly (TRIEC 2009).

A couple of caveats and considerations are worth noting, however, that may complicate both the immediate and longer-term successes of these governance approaches in general and as focused on immigrant employment. It is worth asking who sits at ‘the table’ that is so often mentioned with respect to these initiatives, especially among ‘social forces’, and what the impacts are of the exclusions. By and large, these groups seem to be closed loops, and “insiders determine who is in and who is out” (Good, 2005a, 263). This characterization comes out strongly in the Peel Newcomer Strategy. Some 120 stakeholders were referred to, but clearly there are several organizations not represented. The membership group consists of 24 “key stakeholders around the table” (PEEL7), of which only five are service-providing organizations (Peel Newcomer Strategy Group). There are no ethno-specific organizations represented, and the executive director of the pan-African organization interviewed in Peel seemed to have no knowledge of the PNS four months after the first key stakeholder meeting had taken place. A non-governmental Ottawa

respondent made similar observations about partnered activity there: “It is kind of like the club has been established...there is a regular set of thinkers from a regular set of organizations who influence what happens. There are some high-level agencies and some established corporate players that do quite well and they're already in the door” (OTT1). The lack of involvement among many service-providing organizations within partnership-based initiatives calls into doubt the extent to which organizations serving immigrants, and by extension their clients, can derive substantial benefits from these arrangements.

Furthermore, with respect to the PNS, the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group has been involved in various research and analytical ventures, developing “social risk” indicators to map and evaluate neighborhoods on their concentrations of new immigrants, visible minorities and poverty and their relative ability to settle newcomers. The analysis is framed in a way that mixes social work goals with social marketing intentions for newcomers and businesses (Peel Newcomer Strategy Group 2008). Moreover, its vision for “a coordinated service strategy to develop a client - focused service model” conforms to the neoliberal reliance on “clientelism” that positions immigrants as clients consuming services, rather than as one of the major parties to making change in how they are governed (Keil 2002).

Examining the employment-related partnerships, even the most successful such as TRIEC are not designed to redress the systemic problems of unemployment and

underemployment among skilled and professional immigrants, and the high incidence of poverty and social distress among newcomer families. As Fong (2008, 20) has argued about TRIEC, it adopts “a very solution-oriented but de-politicized approach to the issue of poor economic outcomes for skilled immigrants.” The individual internalization of responsibility is one of the key principles of neoliberalism (Fong 2008, 26). In framing its communications to be palatable to important stakeholders – especially employers, TRIEC and the other employment partnerships skirt examination of the more complex and difficult discussions of **systemic inequalities in the work force** and the racialized dimensions of these inequalities. TRIEC and the other employment partnerships need to be supplemented by strong legislated anti-racist and employment equity programs in the workplace if they are to have a broader impact.

In closing, I’d like to make **a few concluding remarks** about the status of Ontario’s settlement services for newcomers:

The shift from government to governance that emerged as the most notable pattern in Ontario municipalities in immigrant settlement (and in particular, the economic integration of immigrants) provides for **dialogue among a range of governmental and civil society actors, and perhaps greater flexibility and responsiveness in the administration of immigrant settlement services**. However, governance initiatives in this policy field do not signal a major shift in decentralization

or power sharing in immigration (recruitment and settlement) policy-making. As Ontario's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration stated (at this conference), Ontario is still "seeking a seat at the table."

One constraint faced by local or ethnocultural advocacy organizations in the settlement sector is a familiar one – namely, such organizations depend on government funding and thus experience "advocacy chill" or tensions between "resolving immediate service issues and developing broader advocacy" (Richmond 2004, 7). The March 2009 decision by the Immigration Minister to cut off almost \$500,000 in settlement funding to the Canadian Arab Federation over sharp political differences provides a glaring illustration of this point and unprecedented Ministerial political involvement in funding decisions in the settlement services sector. While funding imperatives have not impeded lobbying of federal immigration authorities, the policy input of 'social forces' in Ontario's field of immigration and settlement policies has been notably diminished and sifted through a hierarchical structure in the non-governmental sector of service agencies and impeded by constant fear of abrupt cuts to their funding. More critical (e.g. anti-racist) pro-immigrant social forces have yet to recover from the Harris era that did away with provincial policies such as employment equity, that were directed at addressing more systemic forms of inequality encountered by immigrants and racial minorities. Our interviews with civil society actors also reflected a transitional time as far as relations with the provincial government were

concerned, whereby the province had yet to earn the trust of these actors in demonstrating a sustained commitment to supporting effective settlement assistance. The character of the new partnership initiatives as a result are also a mixture of horizontal and hierarchical relations, where the voices of larger and more organized immigrant and ethno-racial communities are far better represented than those of newer and smaller communities, including those in dire need of settlement assistance (Friskin and Wallace 2003).

In addition, however, in shifting responsibilities and funding downwards to local actors in the integration of newcomers, federal immigration authorities have shown few signs of devolving responsibility for the recruitment and selection of immigrants in Ontario, despite the ‘partnership’ agreements such as COIA and MOU.

Devolution of mandates on immigration policy matters to municipalities and local actors is not in itself a public good for newcomers. Local governments may be unresponsive in their orientation to immigrants and may exacerbate barriers in the successful integration of newcomers, rather than serving to mitigate the exclusionary impact of upper-level policies and local conditions. Mississauga is a case in point where a power-house mayor has clearly opposed initiatives that examine settlement concerns of immigrants in any serious and systemic way, imposed her own assimilationist views onto the City, and engaged in an outmoded celebratory type of multiculturalism. Most importantly, sufficient funding rarely supports devolution to

local levels. However, municipal governments, and even more obviously, the extensive network of civil society actors that form the shadow state in Ontario's cities' settlement sector, are more attuned than upper-level governments to the complexity of local conditions that assist in or impede the economic, social and political incorporation of immigrants. Moreover, NGOs and scholars who form part of urban-based social movements and many of whom reflect the precept of 'working locally, thinking globally' are also highly attentive to the larger global and systemic processes that have local impacts and that are often ignored in the 'common-sense neo-liberalism' exemplified by the employment-related partnerships.

If the shift to multi-scalar, multi-sector governance in immigrant employment matters that is strongly evident in Ontario is to benefit more than a handful of immigrants, the federal government will need to show greater responsiveness and democratic openness to provincial and more localized forces on immigration selection as well as settlement policies. The **disconnect between immigrant selection**, which still in Ontario is directed by the federal government, and **immigrant settlement**, where the brunt of the responsibility and impact is felt at the local levels of government and communities, has created the diverse clientele for settlement services and the new immigrant in need. The traditional conceptualization of the municipal government's role as supplicant to higher levels of government will have to be overcome in order to see the spheres of government as capable of working in

partnership with each other and civil society actors empowered in ways that will substantially improve the life chances of newcomers.

And finally, if the federal government is to be consistent with its own use of immigrant selection policy as economic development strategy, should it not also reframe its settlement policy in similar terms? This would provide justification to more robustly fund settlement services (make settlement a priority and part of its targeted spending in Ontario) so that immigrant economic integration with all of its spin-off effects on the economy (not to mention positive social impacts) may occur.

*Note that references for these speaking notes can be found in:
Daiva Stasiulis, Christine Hughes and Zainab Amery, “From Government to Multi-level Governance of Immigrant Settlement in Ontario’s Cities,” ed. Erin Tolley, Immigrant Settlement Policy, McGill-Queen’s University Press, forthcoming.

ⁱ Ornstein's (2000) study of unemployment and poverty in Metropolitan Toronto found that adults of non-European origins have an *80 per cent* higher unemployment rate than adults of European origin, with Torontonians of African Black and Caribbean origins particularly disadvantaged. The family poverty rate for all non-European groups was at 34.3%, twice as high as for Torontonians of Canadian or European origins/identification (cited in Siemiatycki et al. 2003, 418-419).

ⁱⁱ Note that representatives from the Peel Region participate in TRIEC.