

Labour geographies of socially embedded work: the multi scalar resistance of Mexican teachers

By Paul Bocking

Citation

Bocking, Paul (2018). "Labor geographies of socially embedded work: The multi scalar resistance of Mexican teachers," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*. First Published June 18, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X18784019>

Abstract

Public sector workers experience particular challenges from the state when they organize and take collective action. Accountable to administrators as well as parents, teachers are embedded within complex power relations at scales from the classroom to the district and the state or nation. This article draws on labour geography's understandings of how worker agency is socially situated, to explore how the capacities for protest of dissident elementary and secondary teachers in Mexico City has been limited. These obstacles are found within their workplaces governed by the local Secretary of Public Education, in broader political dynamics within the city and in a centralization of governance over education policy to the national level. As a result, between 2013 and 2016 teachers here were less likely to join protests against policies initiated by President Enrique Peña Nieto that were widely deemed harmful to their professional autonomy, and which drew strong resistance in other regions of the country. This article concludes by briefly assessing how, as Peña Nieto's term concluded, dissident teachers turned towards the national election and an equivocal relationship with the centre-left Morena party.

Introduction

Public sector workers experience particular challenges from the state when they organize and take collective action. Accountable to school administrators and education ministry officials as well as parents, teachers are embedded within particularly complex power relations at scales from the classroom to the local district and the state or nation. This article explores how the agency of elementary and secondary teachers in Mexico City was constrained by specific obstacles within their workplaces governed by the local Secretary of Public Education (SEP), the city's broader political dynamics, and an effective centralization of governance over education

policy to higher levels of authority. As a result, teachers were less likely to join protests called by the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE)¹ between 2013 and 2016 against policies initiated by President Enrique Peña Nieto that were deemed harmful to their professional autonomy, and which drew strong resistance in other regions of the country. These dynamics necessitate a socially embedded, multi scalar strategy by teachers within the struggle over the neoliberalization of public education.

I situate the struggles of Mexico City's teachers within discussions on constraints to workers' agency, socially embedded labour, the centralization of governance and multi scalar strategy. I then explain how, until 2013, the CNTE combined its regional base and occasional national mobilizations to defeat policies it considered harmful for professional autonomy, including the use of standardized exams to evaluate teachers and the marginalization of pedagogical training. I then introduce Peña Nieto's 'fast' education policy and the initial efforts of the teachers' movement to defeat it. I explain why the resistance of Mexico City teachers was far weaker than in the militant rural southern bastions of the CNTE. These include differences in teacher relationships with the communities in which they work, the characteristics of primary and secondary teaching, local political alliances and disciplinary capacities of the state. I use this discussion to assess the CNTE's upsurge against these education reforms over the summer of 2016, and its equivocal relationship with the centre-left Morena party.

Methodology

Aspiring to a "rigorous but not disinterested scholarship" (Hennessy 2013: 71) and contending that academic work which attempts to influence policy is highly subjective and thus

inherently biased (McDowell 2010), a key motivation for this study is to address a dearth of teachers' voices in understanding how policy affects their profession. Much of the policy literature² frames teachers as self-interested parties to be acted upon, rather than subjects with agency whose ideas should be taken seriously (Rezai-Rashti 2009: 307). In 2013, I participated on behalf of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation³ in a conference in Mexico City of teacher unionists from Canada, the US and Mexico. Here I met local teachers, two of whom facilitated multiple visits to their schools in spring and summer of 2015, winter and fall of 2016 and spring 2017. Both of these schools were located in working class Iztapalapa in southeastern Mexico City, the largest of the city's boroughs. Controlling for socio-economic status helped me to identify other causes for divergent experiences of teachers in these schools.⁴ I recruited teachers at these schools by combining snowball and purposive sampling (Babbie & Benaquisto 2002), ensuring participants represented diverse experience, subject area, age, gender, school involvement and political views. I conducted twelve initial semi-structured confidential interviews of at least an hour, followed up through informal discussion in later visits to obtain their understanding of subsequent events, and also engaged in casual conversation with other staff. I interviewed principals at both schools, and at one, the official union representative.⁵ I did not pursue official endorsement from higher education authorities due to the suspicion in which they were held by many teachers, but I did interview several senior officials.

I observed teachers' overall conditions of work, and specifically how they interacted with each other in the staff room or the corridors. I was frequently invited into classrooms to speak to students and participate in lessons. As a teacher, I brought with me a lens to understand and contextualize these interactions. Following Kearns (2004), I saw these observations as an

important supplement to my interviews. Insider research can make the investigator better placed to “ask meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues,” and “project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study.” (Merriam et al 2001). In the politically polarized context of education in Mexico City, it helped to win teachers’ trust and thereby share a more unvarnished perspective (Greene 2014). Insider research also presents the challenge of avoiding bias that may otherwise emerge from studying a context in which one has personal familiarity. Despite engaging in intra-occupational analysis, as a foreigner who worked within a vastly different education system in Canada, my insider status was still significantly distanced to my interviewees’ experience. To further my distance, before the interviews I emphasized my credentials as a politically independent researcher.

I conducted content analysis and hand coded data from interview transcripts and field notes to create and then populate categories of analysis on the impact of contemporary policy on teachers’ professional autonomy. Categories included scalar shifts in governance, standardized evaluation and exams, teacher-principal power dynamics, the de-professionalization of teaching credentials, structures of employment, teacher/community relations, and strategies for resistance or acquiescence by dissident activists and unions. Interviews with academics, policy briefings and secondary research helped form these categories.

Centralization of education governance and constraints on the embedded agency of teachers: the need for a multi scalar strategy

Labour geography emerged in the 1990s as a corrective to a tendency within economic geography and the social sciences to neglect the agency of workers while analyzing economic

and political structures and contexts. The first wave of labour geography (see Herod 1997, 2001) was critiqued for its over-emphasis on workers' agency through its selection of successful cases that are arguably not representative of organized labour, let alone workers generally (Castree 2007; Tufts & Savage 2009; Coe & Jordhus-Lier 2011; Sweeney & Holmes 2012). The debates on structure and agency and its application to labour geography will not be explored deeply here, but the categories developed by Katz (2004: 246-247), are useful for defining what is meant by 'workers' agency.' These categories distinguish between ameliorative and accommodative 'resilience' and 'reworking' strategies, and overt 'resistance'. This article focuses on teachers' agency in the latter sense. The specific constraints on agency experienced by public sector workers has received attention from labour geographers (Coe & Jordhus-Lier 2011; Coe 2012; Jordhus-Lier 2012), with some analysis focusing on the Global South (Jordhus-Lier 2013; Bergene, et al 2010). Many of these, including the ability of their employer to draw direct recourse from the coercive powers of the state, as well as the particularly strategic question of community-labour relationships, are addressed here.

Understanding constraints on the agency of teachers means recognizing that like many workers, they are highly embedded within the power relations of their workplace (Hastings & MacKinnon 2017), the school. Relations between teachers and school directors vary widely, often dependent on personal dynamics. One of the more effective ways teachers have responded has been to acknowledge being socially situated to a greater extent than many other public workers, and by building coalitions with parents as a form of 'community unionism' (Tattersal 2009, 2010; Weiner 2012; Hagopian 2014). Brogan (2014) and Alter (2013) show how this was vital to the relative success of the Chicago Teachers' Union in opposing disinvestment from

public schools. The capacity to do this is one of the explanations for variations in the strengths of the Mexican teachers' movement (la CNTE) from state to state.

The governance of education has undergone a profound centralization, or scaling up to higher authorities, across North America. This shift, which is contrary to decentralization in other areas of the public sector (Sweeney 2013), is a key characteristic of contemporary neoliberal education policy.⁶ In the US, 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) legislation introduced by President George W. Bush in 2002, gave the federal government power to mandate that states enact standardized testing programs. It was bolstered by President Obama's 'Race to the Top' initiative in 2009, which provided grants to compliant states (Hursh 2013). While the centralization of education policy to the national scale appears to have stalled with the passing of the 'Every Student Succeeds Act' in 2015, which rolled back much of NCLB, the shift of power from municipalities to state legislatures continues. The election of a centre-left mayor of New York in 2013 prompted the governor to overrule his proposals to limit the expansion of charter schools and curb standard testing, and expand both (Brody 2015; Bocking 2017).

These concentrations of power have facilitated a roll out of 'fast policy' (Peck & Theodore 2015) advocated by think tanks and multilateral agencies like the OECD, that have tended to be opposed by teachers' unions for their adverse impact on professional autonomy and working conditions. The objective is seemingly to 'outflank' unions primarily situated at a local scale.⁷ In the current context of the rescaling of public service provision, public sector workers must grapple with multiple scales of state authority (Brenner et al 2010). Oseland et al (2012) contends that labour geography has produced an over- emphasis on scalar shifts from the local to the international, bypassing the state/provincial and national scales, that are decisive for public

employees. Understanding the contingent nature of workers' agency to use scalar strategies in the education sector, Sweeney (2013) studied the rescaling of collective bargaining in Ontario. Following this trend across Canada and the prior uploading of education financing from municipalities to the Ontario government, decision-making shifted from negotiations between school boards and local unions to bargaining between the provincial government and central union leaders.⁸ The association in Mexico between the (re)centralization of education governance to the national level and the rollout of neoliberal policies has been well-identified (Hernandez 2013; Aboites 2012, 2015). This article builds on such research within the Mexican context, and heightens understandings of how these scalar shifts affect the agency of socially embedded workers like teachers.

The scaling up of education governance necessitates a multi scalar strategy for teachers, embedded within the local contexts where they live and work. Tufts (2007) described an effective multi scalar strategy as a 'spatial circuit of union renewal', where knowledge and resources flow between levels of the union. Higher scales are not privileged over the workplace and local level, as this is where workers are embedded and where they hold the potential for collective action. Scaling up may be increasingly necessary for workers to adequately confront employers, though Tufts observes that if the higher scale strategy becomes too distanced from local needs or capacities, a 'break' in the spatial circuit can occur as the local units disengage. The remainder of this article will discuss how the geographical unevenness of the Mexican teachers' movement (the CNTE) with its relative weakness in Mexico City among other places, undermined its ability to confront centralized governance from 2013, and how some of these shortcomings may be overcome in part through addressing the spatial issues described above.

Regional Strategies of the Mexican Teachers' Movement

The modern Mexican public education system (Secretaria de la Educación Pública -SEP), based out of offices graced with revolutionary murals by Diego Rivera a few blocks from the central Zocalo square of Mexico City, has through most of its history since 1921, been highly centralized. Over the 20th Century, the SEP was one of the primary means by which the government established its authority over the national territory. Centralization was applied at the behest of the state to organize teachers into the National Union of Education Workers (Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación -SNTE) in 1943. Like most unions, it quickly became a corporatist pillar of the long ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional -PRI) (Vaughan 1982; Monsivais 1987).⁹

The CNTE emerged in 1979 in the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca where corporatist union structures were weaker, and where an independent political base existed among socialist peasant and Indigenous groups. Demanding salary increases and union democracy, the movement spread through central Mexico, coalescing in mass protests in the capital. In subsequent upheavals, notably in 1989, the movement became the dominant force within the SNTE in the adjacent states of Guerrero, Michoacan and in Mexico City's large elementary teacher local, Section 9. Despite instigating nationwide mobilizations, the CNTE was unable to consolidate itself in the remaining 27 states, particularly in the north. A stalemate emerged where the corporatist leadership retained control over the powerful national SNTE apparatus and most state locals, but the CNTE won autonomy in the southeast and Mexico City's Section 9, with the ability to reach separate accords with state governments (Foweraker 1993; Cook 1996).

From the 1970s, education officials slowly decentralized the system to mitigate an unwieldy bureaucracy and the SNTE's pervasive influence. Ironically, the interruption of PRI rule with the election of Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) in 2000 reversed this trend. Fox, and more so his successor Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), held considerable ambition for national education reform with a neoliberal character. They found a valuable ally in SNTE president Elba Esther Gordillo, an important political broker who sustained the union's PRI-era corporatist power structures. In 2008, Calderon and Gordillo initiated the Alliance for Quality Education (ACE), a series of measures to restructure the teaching profession. Most controversially, it proposed standardized written exams for new teaching positions, to obtain permanent status and promotions (Leyva & Rodriguez 2012: 558). Leyva and Rodriguez (2012) contend that this undermined the importance of experience and performance in the classroom, a more accurate measure of professionalism for newer and temporary teachers in their trajectory towards permanent employment.¹⁰ The ACE removed the right of public normal school graduates to a teaching position, and graduation from a normal school or a faculty of education as a mandatory prerequisite for obtaining a position (Hernandez 2012: 356-357). A degree in a relevant subject area and passing the exam would be sufficient (Bocking 2015: 81). Pedagogy, knowledge of child and adolescent development and classroom management would be initially evaluated on the exam and further developed on the job. They would not require years of professional study and training beforehand.

Over 400 000 teachers within and outside the CNTE in 14 states participated in strikes at various times over 2008-2009 in opposition to the ACE. In the most successful instances, teachers allied with parent groups concerned about school fees and commercialization, and

campesinos engaged in struggles for land rights. Gordillo intensified the impact of the ACE on teacher evaluations, proposing in 2011 that salary increases be determined by student scores on the standardized ENLACE exam, administered since 2006 in grades three to nine (Leyva & Rodriguez 2012: 560; Hecock 2014: 69). This elicited further opposition from her members, whose incomes became dependent on a multiple choice test to which they had to orient their instruction. The primary purpose of the ENLACE became a form of Value Added Measurement, similar to contemporary policies in the US (Ravitch 2013; Kuhn 2014).

Dissident teachers claimed victory in the spring of 2012, when tens of thousands refused the ACE's teacher exams without reprisals. Mexico City's elementary teachers organized activities in the Zocalo to demonstrate an alternative pedagogy, drawing 20 000 parents and students (Hernandez 2013: 199-202). State governments reached agreements with locals of the SNTE, circumventing the ACE. The CNTE celebrated its 'Plan for the Transformation of Education in Oaxaca' (PTEO), developed with parental input (Bacon 2013).¹¹ Meanwhile, combined with boycotts by the CNTE, the informal efforts by individual teachers to 'game' the ENLACE, compromised¹² the validity of the exam (SEP Mexico City Official 1, Interviewed Feb. 2015; Hugo Aboites, Interviewed Feb. 2015). Unable to control its administration, the ENLACE exam was cancelled by the SEP in 2013.

These regionally concentrated struggles that periodically grew into larger national protests applied considerable pressure on the SEP. Most of the strikes, highway blockades and building occupations in opposition to the ACE, which occurred in a handful of states, created a strong incentive for these governments to break ranks with federal authorities in the interests of regaining social peace. This was made easier by the earlier partial decentralization of education

administration to the state level. Calderon's successor, Enrique Peña Nieto, adopted a new scalar approach to education governance.

Entrenching Education Policy and Governance at the National Scale

Shortly after his victory in July 2012, Enrique Peña Nieto appointed a transition team on education led by Mexicanos Primero chair Claudio X Guajardo, the nation's most prominent business advocate on education. President-Elect Peña Nieto visited OECD headquarters in Paris to meet over several days with its chair and former PRI politician Jose Angel Gurría. In September, the OECD released the policy document *Getting it Right: Strategic Reforms for Mexico*, with a focus on education. Its recommendations overlapped with Mexicanos Primeros', and centred on increasing the evaluation of teachers with the aim of undermining their permanent employment status, while reducing the mandatory professional training of teachers by assessing competency in pedagogy with a written exam rather than attainment of an education degree, measures largely found in the defunct ACE (Arriaga 2013; Bocking 2015: 78-79).

Recommendations from both organizations were reflected in Peña Nieto's proposals for education presented on December 2, 2012, a day after being sworn into office. The leadership of the 'Pact for Mexico', a grand coalition of the three largest parties, the PRI, PRD and the PAN, had agreed behind closed doors to pass substantive legislation during the first months of Peña Nieto's term on basic education (Hernandez 2013: 27-31). On December 10, amendments to Articles 3 and 73 of the Constitution were moved in congress, stipulating that teachers' employment would be contingent on evaluation, exempting public primary and secondary teachers from labour law that covered all other employees. The amendments entered law on

February 6, 2013 (Arriaga 2013: 13-14; Bensusan & Middlebrook 2013: 84; Aboites 2015: 4-5; Bocking 2015: 78-79).

Gordillo was imprisoned later that month, charged with embezzling hundreds of millions of pesos from union funds (Hernandez 2013: 263). The Professional Teaching Service Law (Ley de Servicio Profesional Docente) passed in September 2013, putting the constitutional reforms into practice. The 2013-14 school year began with protests in 27 of the 32 states, led by the CNTE but also drawing unaligned teachers in new regions. It culminated in weeks long strikes in the CNTE's southern strongholds and one day strikes in the Yucatan, Veracruz and the northern states, rivalling the strike wave of 1989 for its geographic breadth (Aboites 2015; Bocking 2015).

By November, the movement won vague agreements from state governments where the struggle had been strongest, to work around the federal dictate for a standardized testing regime for teachers, often combined with firmer commitments to hire more teachers or cancel school fees. But concurrent negotiations at the national level between the CNTE and the Interior Ministry yielded no gains. Payroll was re-centralized to the national SEP, to control staffing and stymy pressure at the state level from parents and the CNTE to hire more teachers. By early 2014, unlike with the defeat of the ACE two years prior, state governments that made side agreements with the CNTE came under strong pressure from federal authorities, which filed successful claims with the Supreme Court that they were in abeyance of the national constitution. These states soon reneged on their agreements (Aristegui Noticias 2014; Aboites 2015: 2-5; Bocking 2015: 93). The CNTE retreated from the national scale, to try to re-win exemptions in their strongest bases (Maria de la Luz Arriaga, Interviewed Jun. 2015). This proved unsuccessful. Pushed by federal authorities, state governments counterattacked by seeking to oust the CNTE

from state-level education departments where it had influence.¹³ Peña Nieto's scalar strategy of re-centralizing control over education policy to the national level by embedding reforms in the Mexican constitution was proving successful. Standardized testing of teachers began in most states in the following 2015-16 school year.

Unlike the movement of 1989, and despite the emergence of strong movements in important states including Veracruz and Jalisco, the dissidents were unable to win control over the official structures of their union sections, which could only be ceded by conventions called by the national executive (Maria de la Luz Arriaga, Interviewed Jun. 2015; CNTE Section 10 Activist, Interviewed Feb. 2015).¹⁴ Advances for the movement are considerably impeded as a result of these mutually reinforcing state and national structures of control. The day after Gordillo's arrest, the union's national executive appointed general secretary Juan Diaz de la Torre to her place (Hernandez 2013). Despite his lesser stature, this did not lead to a collapse of the 'institutional' forces in the national SNTE and most of its state sections (Enrique de la Garza Toledo, Interviewed Feb. 2015). After being virtually invisible during the CNTE-led upsurge in 2013, de la Torre increased his prominence as the protests ebbed. He received recognition from Peña Nieto at summits on education policy and annual salary negotiations, while endorsing the teacher evaluation policies vociferously opposed by the CNTE.¹⁵ De la Torre pursued and obtained international recognition from Education International, the American Federation of Teachers, UNESCO, and, retreading Peña Nieto's pilgrimage to Paris, José Gurría of the OECD (SNTE 2014; El Universal 2015; La Jornada 2015; SNTE 2015; SNTE 2016b).

Embedded in the Workplace and the Neighbourhood: Weaknesses and Opportunities for Mexico City's Dissident Teachers

De la Torre's appeasement of Peña Nieto at the national level affected Mexico City's secondary teachers in the absence of a strong dissident movement in Section 10. According to a secondary teacher, "With the new reform, the union disappeared. ... The union exists but not for teachers, we're not protected by the union." (Mexico City Teacher 5, Interviewed Feb. 2015)

[Author's translation]. A school official attributed labour stability in Mexico City in part to de la Torre's closer alignment with the government:

If we compare [Mexico City] with other states obviously there's a great deal of stability and very good relationships... This owes to very fluid communications... but also to the national context where the SNTE is since the departure of Gordillo, and the identification of corruption, in a position of greater alliance, we say, with the Secretary of Public Education. Not the Coordinadora [CNTE], but the SNTE. (Mexico City SEP Official 1, Interviewed Feb. 2015) [Author's translation].

A secondary teacher for 23 years bitterly described the situation of a dominant, institutionally aligned Section 10 leadership and weak CNTE dissidence for rank and file members:

...the union has never truly helped us. One nearly always has to go out on their own to solve problems... It's no more than a symbol and the truth is that it's divided between the democráticos [CNTE] and the charros [institutionals]. It's a constant struggle between them and this doesn't benefit us... (Mexico City Teacher 2, Interviewed Feb. 2015) [Author's translation].

While many Mexico City teachers held strong opinions on the the education reforms (most were opposed in the two secondary schools where I conducted interviews), relatively few aligned themselves with the CNTE or the official SNTE. Two CNTE Section 10 activists attributed this to a resignation over their lack of agency to challenge the reforms. They held little optimism in the likelihood of a mass upsurge among the city's teachers in the manner of their colleagues in

the southeast (CNTE Section 10 Activist, Interviewed Feb. 2015; Mexico City Teacher 9, Interviewed Jun 2015).

Interviewed participants identified significant differences between the experiences of secondary and primary teaching to explain why the dissident movement in the latter was far stronger in Mexico City. One described secondary teaching as more individualistic, with cooperation among the staff uncommon (Mexico City Teacher 5, Interviewed Feb. 2015). A Section 10 activist (Interviewed Feb. 2015) added that the tendency of many school directors to discourage professional collaboration, is augmented by the secondary level's division into subject areas. Primary teachers at the same grade level more frequently share resources together. Some also argued that secondary teachers are not as collegial as primary teachers because while the former had long been a heterogeneous group of graduates from public normal schools and university faculties of education, with the Ley of 2013, they were now joined by professionals lacking any degree in education. By contrast, a majority of primary teachers were still graduates from the public normal schools. As four year boarding colleges, they were long the incubators of a distinct teacher identity. Many graduated together from Mexico City's large Escuela Nacional de Maestros. Another explanation are the differing structures of employment. Whereas primary teachers arrive and leave together for the morning and afternoon shifts, secondary teachers have unique schedules with hourly employment contracts. A secondary teacher with nine hours of classes each in two schools is less likely to develop a strong identification with either school community¹⁶ (CNTE Section 9 General Secretary, Interviewed Jun 2015; CNTE Section 10 Activist, Interviewed Feb. 2015; Mexico City Teacher 9, Interviewed Jun 2015). A rich literature compares the work experiences, approaches to teaching (Hargreaves 2000) and union

involvement of elementary and secondary teachers (Murphy 1992). The historic gender division between feminized elementary and traditionally male dominated secondary teaching is especially important. Yet the division is not as stark in Mexico, where 33% of primary teachers are male (INEE 2015). Close to an equilibrium exists in secondary teaching.

The CNTE has a longer and deeper history of organizing among Mexico City's primary teachers, first winning the local executive in 1989 through an open election convened by the national union in the aftermath of that year's upsurge. However CNTE Section 9 has faced significant obstacles. The CNTE won subsequent elections until 2007, when at the last minute, the electoral convention was moved by the national union to a location unknown to most delegates, 80 percent of whom had pledged support to the CNTE slate. Gordillo's candidates won by a landslide. CNTE supporters secured judicial recognition that the election was unjust, but the SNTE has not respected this finding (CNTE Section 10 Activist, Interviewed Feb. 2015; Hernandez 2012: 386-388; Leyva & Rodriguez 2012: 548). According to CNTE Section 9's general secretary (Interviewed Jun 2015), he and other members of a parallel executive can continue representing members (on their personal time and without remuneration) because the Mexico City SEP is aware that they have the support of most teachers.

One of the biggest reasons given for the greater strength of primary teacher dissidents is their ease in building alliances with parents (Hugo Aboites, Interviewed Feb. 2015). A secondary teacher explains its importance for building a movement:

In the primary schools it's easier because the parents are more active. In secondary it gets more difficult, but you have to do this work. At the end of the day, if you do a good job, they see that you're there in the classroom, they see how education is being destroyed not by the teacher, but by external conditions. . . .constant work gives you legitimacy. (Mexico City Teacher 9, Interviewed Jun. 2015) [Author's translation].

Primary and secondary teachers share the same SNTE locals elsewhere in Mexico, making this alliance building easier outside the capital. Mexico City secondary teachers suggested that the school plays a more central role in community life in the predominantly rural south. A teacher blamed school directors who shoed staff out of the building once their shifts were done, and lacked interest in extracurricular activities that could link the school with its surrounding neighbourhood.¹⁷ A custodian who worked in the school she attended as a child, and a longtime prefect (responsible for student discipline) emphasized that teachers who lived in the neighbourhood tended to more easily connect with students and their parents. They estimated that 30 percent of the teachers at their school lived nearby in the culturally vibrant but economically struggling neighbourhood (Mexico City Support Staff 1 & 2, Interviewed Jun. 2015). The custodian recalled arriving at the school to find that parents had blockaded the entrance to protest the shortage of certified teachers in all subject areas. While parents can support the struggles of education workers, reciprocation is risky:

If I support a parent that's blocking the door to the school, I'll be the one who's disciplined... when the teachers demonstrate they do it away from the school, not here. They don't close the schools, they simply stop work to go demonstrate in the Zocalo, [Monument to the] Revolución, etc. (Mexico City Support Staff 2, Interviewed Jun. 2015) [Author's translation].

Yet moving demonstrations from the school to the distant city centre arguably makes parental participation more difficult (Mexico City Teacher 6, Interviewed Feb. 2015).

Strong differences in the political cultures of Mexico City and the southeast states are also important for explaining the unevenness of teachers' agency. Reports from Chiapas during the waves of teacher strikes and protests from May to July 2016 against Peña Nieto's education

reforms provide abundant examples of parents and community allies providing support that would make the discipline feared by Mexico City teachers less likely. On May 23, the group “Organized Chiapan Businesspeople” delivered to the [striking] teachers a ton and a half of supplies, such as bottles of water, biscuits, soap, canned tuna, beans and rice.” (Henríquez 2016a). The following weekend, thousands of parents and other supporters marched in 80 of the state’s 122 municipalities in solidarity with the teachers’ strike (Henríquez 2016b). On July 13, La Jornada reported:

The blockade installed by residents of this city at the access to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, to support the... CNTE in their struggle, has taken on a life of its own. It has constituted itself as a permanent popular assembly, broadening the demands of the teachers, and at 15 days it is a reflection of the popular reach that the teachers’ movement now has in Chiapas. Hundreds of people, up to 3500 in recent days, remain here, day and night... everything started on June 27, when faced with the threat of repression against the blockade here... people mobilized to create a ‘security corridor’ around the teachers. In a few days it transformed into a centre of... movements that defended the land, opposed the privatization of energy, demanded street paving, drinkable water and defence of the region’s nature reserves. (Bellinghausen 2016) [Author’s translation].

Teachers’ movements in the southeast states have alliances with campesino and other community movements with deep histories of organization. They lack equivalents in Mexico City’s context, though several CNTE members described Iztapalapa as the most politically active borough (Mexico City Teachers 7 & 9, Interviewed May & Jun. 2015; CNTE Section 10 Activist, Interviewed Feb. 2015).

Government responses to teacher and popular protest vary dramatically between Mexico City and the southeast states. Sociologist Enrique de la Garza Toledo (Interviewed Feb. 2015) suggested that the administrations of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) since 1997 in Mexico City contributed to de-radicalizing and co-opting dissident movements, whose

members may have been reluctant to alienate the government with protests when possibilities for dialogue existed. This tendency declined with the election of Mayor Miguel Mancera in 2013, who moved closer politically to Peña Nieto. Few parallels exist in Chiapas or Oaxaca, where the PRI long wielded control and a reputation for violent repression of protest. Authorities in Chiapas, Veracruz and Guerrero alienated parents at the outset of the education reforms in 2013 by downloading onto them the cost of various school operations, encouraging them to make common cause with striking teachers (Aboites 2015: 5). The Mexico City SEP has insisted that no parent would ever be required to pay a fee, and with support from the city government, provides free uniforms, supplies and bursaries.

The Mexico City SEP also retained stronger administrative capacities for enforcing discipline, curtailing teachers' agency to protest. It is easier for regional and zone inspectors to regularly visit schools within a contiguous urban area, rather than spread across hundreds of kilometres of rural territory. Arnaut (2008) argues that the administrative hierarchy of directors, sector chiefs, supervisors, and school directors are stronger in Mexico City, which remained continuously under direct federal control, than in many states that experimented with decentralization. A senior official contrasts the ability of teachers in the southeast to engage in illegal strikes, with their firmer grip in the capital:

Sections 9 and 10... the relationship is very good. The leaders of these sections are of the SNTE, and up until now we haven't had [strikes] in Mexico City... Because the law stipulates that if you are absent, you are not paid. If you miss three consecutive days, without justification, then you lose your employment. There are states like Oaxaca, Guerrero, etc. that haven't paid attention to this and they haven't made deductions. On the contrary, as the newspapers say, they [CNTE] have been able to negotiate lost wages for everyone who came to protest. In the case of the DF, no. It's very punctual. The teacher that's absent is reported and [the pay] is deducted. The teacher who's absent three times... we proceed with the firing if there's no justification... this has meant, in

addition to good communication, that we have a very stable and organic relationship with the leaders of the Section. (Mexico City SEP Official 1, Interviewed Feb. 2015) [Author's translation].

An Embedded, Multi Scalar Strategy

The upbeat national website of the SNTE provided no indication that another wave of strikes and protests by teachers across Mexico was unfolding against education reforms from May to July 2016. Press releases on successful meetings of its leadership with state officials and international dignitaries was only interrupted by a statement on the killing of 11 protestors by police in rural Oaxaca on June 19 while clearing a highway blockade organized by the CNTE. Some were relatives of teachers, one was a local journalist (McDonnell 2016; Hernandez 2016). The SNTE expressed its “profound concern” that “under the banner of education reform, some actors had entered the debate with a belligerent position that precipitates violence”, appearing to blame the CNTE for the deaths (SNTE 2016a). The attack made international news. Some commentators drew comparisons with the abduction of 43 Ayotzinapa student teachers in 2014. Teachers’ unions held solidarity rallies at Mexican Consulates in Canada and the US. Many more organizations, including Education International, denounced the killings. The negative publicity for Peña Nieto was compounded, as it coincided with a meeting of the North American heads of state in Toronto.

Section 9 of the CNTE then convoked a strike over the last two weeks of school in July (except for a final day to deliver grades and meet with parents), with the estimated participation of 400 of over 1300¹⁸ primary schools across Mexico City, a mobilization not seen for years by the city’s teachers. A few dozen secondary schools in Iztapalapa held one-day strikes, avoiding

the three day absence leading to a firing rule (Mexico City Teacher 7, Interviewed Oct. 2016).¹⁹

The walkouts by Mexico City teachers were joined by an unprecedented dynamic. Morena, a left party that split from the PRD following the 2012 elections and by 2015 comprised the largest political force in the capital, mobilized its extensive network of neighbourhood committees in support of the teachers. It hosted a hundred thousand strong march to the Zocalo.²⁰ Amid the ongoing road blockades, occupations and strikes in the CNTE's strongholds and sporadically elsewhere, the Interior Ministry agreed to negotiations on the teacher evaluations, the fate of 8000 teachers fired during the strikes and several imprisoned leaders (Poy Solano 2016). Meeting with CNTE leaders, deputies of Morena, the PRD and other parties expressed interest in revising Peña Nieto's education legislation.

As the 2016-2017 school year began the SEP announced that the standardized teacher exam would be voluntary, except for those who had failed it previously, a major victory for the teachers' movement. This reversal suggests the importance of both Mexico City teachers and the movement's intervention into national politics to tip the balance in a conflict that was previously largely regional. It can be understood as a successful 'spatial circuit of union renewal' (Tufts 2007), in that the particular local challenges that made it more difficult for Mexico City teachers to join the larger protest, were successfully addressed within the scaled up struggle. It also reinforces the importance of a 'community unionist' approach of constructing broader alliances for socially embedded public sector workers like teachers. Despite sentiments of demoralization and resignation to the national education policy expressed by teachers in 2015 and February 2016, the conflict is a reminder of how their political culture remains in flux. The government has not fired teachers who were absent for the exams in 2015 and 2016. It has fired 586 teachers

with more than three unexcused absences in a month, most of whom participated in the strikes at the end of the 2015-2016 school year (Maria de la Luz Arriaga, Interviewed Oct. 2016; CNTE 2018). Twenty one were from Mexico City, including all 11 classroom teachers of the small Leonardo Bravo primary school, where CNTE leader Francisco Bravo is the director.²¹

Conclusion

The political context for education policy in Mexico increasingly polarized over the early 21st Century. Peña Nieto became historically unpopular, contributing to the discredit of his signature policies. The social disruptions caused by, and in reaction to his education policies, will likely define much of his presidential legacy. Mexicanos Primero and some leaders from the PAN maintained counter pressure, with the Business Coordinating Council, Mexico's most important corporate lobby group, urging the government to not concede to "acts of extortion" (Carlos Miranda 2016). The CNTE's frequent closures of highways, malls and airports has aggravated business groups and fed the portrayal by conservative media of the dissident teachers as violent and disruptive. Weeks of school closures in some regions has alienated some parents, despite efforts of striking teachers to engage with them (Ahmed & Semple 2016). The imperative for teachers' unions of constantly renewing relationships with parents and incorporating their demands (Brogan 2014), has been evident throughout the movement's experience, weighing heavily on the conditions for victory or marginalization.

Teachers have proven their capacity to render contentious policies inoperable, as with the ACE or the ENLACE exam that determined teacher pay. It is yet to be seen if the teacher evaluations of the Ley de Servicio Profesional Docente will be successfully implemented over

the long term. Visible at the peaks of national mobilization in the early fall of 2013 and summer of 2016, the CNTE expanded and reinforced its networks in the north and centre of the country, beyond its bases, in the context of an official SNTE with a diminishing impact on the work lives of its members. Yet the control of Juan Diaz de la Torre and his allies over the union's institutional apparatus has not weakened. The movement does not appear to have significantly grown in this time among Mexico City's secondary teachers, whether due to the greater governance powers of the education system, or because of its division from the better organized primary teachers and their stronger parental support. The CNTE must still strive to embody its name as a truly national organizing body of education workers.

The CNTE has lacked powerful allies beyond the regional level in states like Chiapas and Oaxaca, contributing to the fragmentation of attempts to scale its struggle upwards. An alliance with the Morena party could introduce new political dynamics. Despite Morena's dominance since 2016 in the Mexico City legislature, the centralization of education governance gives it little power in this arena. However the party's many active members could assist in greatly strengthening the CNTE's organized support in Mexico City when teachers mobilize. Reinforced in the capital, the CNTE would be better placed to confront education policies on the national level. Alliances with Morena create potentials for conflict within the CNTE, which has historically mitigated internal division by eschewing relationships with political parties. Many in the CNTE, having long fought the PRI's domination of the SNTE and more recently, soured relationships with state-level PRD governments, are concerned of the potential for co-optation. Yet in the waning months of Peña Nieto's presidency, many CNTE activists shifted their focus to campaigning with Morena in advance of the national election, despite internal criticism that the

implementation of neoliberal reforms advanced in the meantime (Poy Solano 2018; Antonio González 2018).

The experience of Mexico City's dissident teachers provides a significant case study to analyze the socially situated factors that constrain workers' agency in the public sector, amid the centralization of governance. Much depends on the character of workplace power relations for determining whether it becomes a site of dissident worker-led culture, or dominated by the top-down transmission of policy. Considering the limits of workplace agency in settings with strong managerial control, external linkages with parents and community allies are obviously vital. These avenues for dissent are mutually reinforcing; it would be difficult to entangle which is more important. Case studies of an anthropological nature would likely be needed to ascertain the balance of importance between changing teacher composition and professional identity, fragmented work schedules, and vigilant senior administrators as suppressing factors in Mexico City, and the greater social embeddedness that empowers many teachers in Oaxaca and Chiapas to protest.

The experience of Mexico City's activist teachers in 2016 taking local action as part of a national movement can be seen as a successful case of Tuft's (2007) 'spatial circuit of union renewal'. A social space was created where teachers at hundreds of the city's schools walked out, risking their employment in the face of the institutionally weak local movement, while supported by parents critical of the shortcomings of the education system. Yet the longterm outcomes on education policy remain uncertain. By acting at the neighbourhood and city scales where they live and work, teachers had the ability within their socially situated contingencies, to join the larger struggle and effectively meet centralized governance with a multi scalar resistance.

References

- Aboites H (2012) *La Medida de una Nación: Los primeros años de la evaluación en México*. Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.
- Aboites H (2015) The expected crop: social insurgency and new alternatives for education in México. *Critical Education* 6(2): 1-8.
- Administración Federal de Servicios Educativos en el DF (2016) Statistics 2015-2016. Available at: www2.sep.df.gob.mx/inf_sep_df/estadisticas/ef2015_2016.jsp (accessed 12 January 2017).
- Ahmed A and Semple K (2016) Clashes Draw Support for Teachers' Protest in Mexico. *New York Times*. 26 June Available at: www.nytimes.com/2016/06/27/world/americas/mexico-teachers-protests-enrique-pena-nieto.html (accessed 30 January 2018).
- Alter T (2013) 'It Felt Like Community': Social Movement Unionism and the Chicago Teachers Union Strike of 2012. *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 10(3): 11-25.
- Antonio O (2018) La Reforma educativa no está muerta: la guerra llegó a las aulas. In: *Insurgencia Magisterial*. Available at: www.insurgenciamagisterial.com/la-reforma-educativa-no-esta-muerta-la-guerra-llego-a-las-aulas/ (accessed 30 January 2018).
- Aristegui Noticias (2014) EPN va contra estados que se saltaron la reforma educativa. In: Aristegui Noticias. Available at: www.aristeguinoticias.com/1504/mexico/epn-va-contra-estados-que-se-saltaron-la-reforma-educativa/ (accessed 17 July 2016).
- Arnaut A (2008) La administración de los servicios educativos y el entorno político en el Distrito Federal después de la federalización de 1992. In: Messina G et al. (eds) *Descentralización y reforma educativa en la ciudad de México*. Mexico City: Secretary of Education, pp. 145-152.
- Arriaga M (2013) *Propuesta empresarial para la mala medición y el despojo de los derechos laborales*. Mexico City: Trinacional Coalición en Defensa de la Educación Pública.

- Babbie E and Benaquisto L (2002) *Fundamentals of Social Research*. Toronto: Thomson Canada.
- Bacon D (2013) Oaxacan Teachers Challenge the Test. In: California Federation of Teachers. Available at: www.cft.org/key-issues/quality-education/end-high-stakes/539-oaxacan-teachers-challenge-the-test.html (accessed 20 January 20 2017).
- Bellinghausen H (2016) Apoyo a maestros de Chiapas deviene en asamblea popular permanente. *La Jornada*, 13 July, Available at: www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/07/13/politica/006n1pol (accessed 13 July 2016).
- Bensusan G and Middlebrook K (2013) *Sindicatos y Política en México: cambios, continuidades y contradicciones*. Mexico City: FLACSO.
- Bergene A et al (2010) *Missing Links in Labour Geography*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing.
- Bocking P (2015) Why Do Governments Adopt Neoliberal Education Policies? Critical Theory on Policy Movement in the Context of Contemporary Reform in Mexico. *Alternate Routes* 2015: 74-100.
- Bocking P (2017) *Understanding the Neoliberalization of Education through Spaces of Labour Autonomy*. PhD Thesis, York University, Canada.
- Brenner N, Peck J and Theodore N (2010) Variegated neoliberalization: geographies, modalities, pathways. *Global Networks* 10(2): 182-222.
- Brody L (2015) New Evaluation Rules Set for New York Teachers. *Wall Street Journal*, 15 June, Available at: www.wsj.com/articles/new-evaluation-rules-set-for-new-york-teachers-1434410567 (accessed 16 June 2015).
- Brogan P (2014) Getting to the CORE of the Chicago Teachers' Union Transformation. *Studies in Social Justice* 8(2): 145-164.
- Carlos J (2016) CCE pide salida 'justa', sin violar la ley, para el conflicto magisterial. *La Jornada*, 8 August, Available at: www.vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/cce-pide-salida-justa-sin-violar-la-ley-para-conflicto-magisterial (accessed 8 August 2016).
- Castree N (2007) Labour geography: a work in progress. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 31(4) 853-862.
- CNTE (2018) Declaración Política de la CNTE. Available at: www.cnteseccion9.wordpress.com/2018/01/31/declaracion-politica-de-la-cnte/ (accessed 31 January 2018).

- Coe N (2012) Geographies of production III: Making space for labour. *Progress in Human Geography* 37(2): 271-284.
- Coe N and Jordhus-Lier D (2011) Constrained agency? Re-evaluating the geographies of labour. *Progress in Human Geography* 35(2): 211-233.
- Cook M (1996) *Organizing dissent: unions, the state, and the democratic teachers' movement in Mexico*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Greene M (2014) On the Inside Looking In: Methodological Insights and Challenges in Conducting Qualitative Insider Research. *The Qualitative Report* 19(29): 1-13.
- Foweraker J (1993) *Popular Mobilization in Mexico: The Teachers' Movement, 1977-87*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hagopian J (2014) *More than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Hargreaves A (2000) Mixed emotions: teachers' perceptions of their interactions with students. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16(8): 811-826.
- Hastings T and MacKinnon D (2017) Re-embedding agency at the workplace scale: Workers and labour control in Glasgow call centres. *Environment and Planning A* 49(1): 104-120.
- Hecock D (2014) Democratization, Education Reform, and the Mexican Teachers' Union. *Latin American Research Review* 49(1): 62-82.
- Hennessy R (2013) *Fires on the Border: The Passionate Politics of Labor Organizing on the Mexican Frontera*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Henríquez E (2016) Miles de padres de familia y pobladores marchan en 80 municipios de Chiapas. *La Jornada*, 28 May, Available at: www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/05/28/politica/003n2pol (accessed 28 May 2016).
- Hernandez L (2012) *Cero en Conducta: Crónicas de la resistencia magisterial*. Mexico City: Para leer in Libertad.
- Hernandez L (2013) *No habra recreo: contra-reforma constitucional y desobediencia magisterial*. Mexico City: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.
- Hernandez L (2016) La masacre de Nochixtlán y la reforma educativa,” *La Jornada*, 5 July,

Available at: www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/07/05/opinion/017a1pol (accessed 30 January 2018).

Herod A (1997) From a geography of labor to a labor geography: labor's spatial fix and the geography of capitalism. *Antipode* 29(1): 1-31.

Herod A (2001) *Labor Geographies: Workers and the Landscapes of Capitalism*. New York: Guilford Press.

Hursh D (2013) Raising the Stakes: High-Stakes Testing and the Attack on Public Education in New York. *Journal of Education Policy* 28(5): 574-588.

INEE (2015) *Los docentes en México: Informe 2015*. México: Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación.

Jordhus-Lier D (2012) Public sector labour geographies and the contradictions of state employment. *Geography Compass* 6(7): 423-438.

Jordhus-Lier D (2013) The geographies of community-oriented unionism: scales, targets, sites and domains of union renewal in South Africa and beyond. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. 38: 36-49.

Jornada (2015) Reconocen organizaciones internacionales al SNTE. *La Jornada*, 11 May, Available at: www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/05/11/politica/015n2pol (accessed 11 October 2016).

Katz C (2004) *Growing up global: economic restructuring and children's everyday lives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kuhn J (2014) *Fear and Learning in America: Bad Data, Good Teachers, and the Attack on Public Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

La Botz D (2015) Oaxaca Braces for Conflict. *North American Congress on Latin America*. Available at: www.nacla.org/news/2015/08/20/oaxaca-braces-conflict (accessed 26 January 2017).

Leyva M and Rodriguez J (2012) La construcción conflictiva del SNTE. In: Garza T (ed) in *La Situación del trabajo en México, 2012*. Mexico City: Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, pp. 529-567

McDonnell P (2016) Protesters say a massacre took place in this Mexican town. Now it's become a rallying cry against the government. *LA Times*. 6 August, Available at: www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-mexico-protest-deaths-20160728-snap-

- htmlstory.html (accessed 30 January 2018).
- McDowell L (2010) Interviewing: Fear and Liking in the Field. In: DeLyser D et al (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 156-171.
- Merriam S et al (2010) Power and positionality: Negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 20(5): 405-416.
- Monsivais C (1987) *Entrada Libre: crónicas de la sociedad que se organiza*. Mexico City: Ediciones Era.
- Murphy M (1992) *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Oseland Stina et al (2012) Labor agency and the importance of the national scale. *Political Geography* 31: 94-103.
- Peck J and Theodore N (2015) *Fast Policy: Experimental Statecraft at the Thresholds of Neoliberalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Peláez G (1984) *Las luchas magisteriales de 1956-1960*. Mexico City: Ediciones de Cultura Popular.
- Pérez J (2015) Golpe a la CNTE; se le quita poder en el instituto oaxaqueño de educación. *La Jornada*, 25 July, Available at: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/07/22/politica/004n1pol> (accessed 26 January 2017).
- Poy L (2016) Expertos: acuerdos SEP-SNTE no tocan el carácter punitivo de la evaluación,” *La Jornada*. 17 July, Available at: www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/07/17/politica/005n2pol (accessed 17 July 2016).
- Poy L (2018) El magisterio disidente tendrá un papel determinante en las elecciones,” *La Jornada*. 21 January, Available at: www.jornada.unam.mx/2018/01/21/politica/011n1pol (accessed 21 January, 2018).
- Ravitch D (2013) *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Rezai-Rashti G (2009) The Neo-liberal Assault on Ontario's Secondary Schools. In: Levine-Rasky C (ed) *Canadian Perspectives on the Sociology of Education*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, pp. 307-322
- Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación (2014) *Internacional de la Educación*

- reconoce liderazgo del SNTE. Available at: www.snte.org.mx/web/vernoticias/5716/32/internacional-educacion-reconoce-liderazgo-snte (accessed 2 May 2015).
- Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación (2015) Maestros mexicanos comparten experiencias con docentes estadounidenses. Available at: www.snte.org.mx/web/vernoticias/8423/32/maestros-mexicanos-comparten-experiencias-docentes-estadounidenses (accessed 27 April 2015).
- Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación (2016a) Posicionamiento del SNTE ante los hechos ocurridos en Nochixtlán y Hacienda Blanca, Oaxaca. Available at: www.snte.org.mx/web/vernoticias/12875/436/posicionamiento-snteante-los-hechos-ocurridosen-nochixtlan-haciendablanca-oaxaca (accessed 8 August 2016).
- Sindicato Nacional de los Trabajadores de la Educación (2016b) Reconoce la OCDE al SNTE por el apoyo brindado a los maestros en su proceso de evaluación. Available at: www.snte.org.mx/web/vernoticias/11107/408/reconoce-ocde-al-sntepor-apoyo-brindado-los-maestros-proceso-evaluacion (accessed 10 January 2016).
- Sweeney B (2013) The labour geographies of education: the centralization of governance and collective bargaining in Ontario, Canada. *Geoforum* 44: 120-128.
- Sweeney B and Holmes J (2012) Problematizing Labour's Agency: Rescaling Collective Bargaining in British Columbia Pulp and Paper Mills. *Antipode* 45(1): 218-237.
- Tattersal A (2009) A little help from our friends: exploring and understanding when labor-community coalitions are likely to form. *Labor Studies Journal* 34(4): 485-506.
- Tattersal A (2010) *Power in Coalition: Strategies for Strong Unions and Social Change*. Ithaca: Cornell Press.
- Tufts S and Savage L (2009) Labouring geography: negotiating scales, strategies and future directions. *Geoforum* 40(6): 945-948.
- Tufts S (2007) Emerging labour strategies in Toronto's hotel sector: toward a spatial circuit of union renewal. *Environment and Planning A* 39: 2383-2404.
- Universal (2015). Organiza SNTE Coloquio Internacional por la Educación Pública, *El Universal*. 9 February, Available at: www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/estados/2015/09/2/organiza-snte-coloquio-internacional-por-la-educacion-publica (accessed 11 October 2016).
- Valadez A (2016) De madrugada, el SNTE aplica charrazo en sección 34 de Zacatecas," *La Jornada*. 16 July, Available at: www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/07/16/opinion/005n1pol

(accessed 1 August 2016).

Vaughan M (1982) *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880-1928*. Decal: Northern Illinois University Press.

Weiner L (2012) *The Future of our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

End Notes

¹ The CNTE is a large militant faction within the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE).

² Studies by the most influential think tanks on education policy including the Brookings Institute, the OECD and the World Bank generally fall under this description.

³ I began working at the Toronto District School Board in 2008, first as an adult educator and then as a long-term occasional teacher. I continued to teach intermittently on temporary contracts while completing my PhD and serving on the executive of my local of OSSTF.

⁴ This research emerges from my dissertation (2017), which includes cases in Ontario, Canada and New York state.

⁵ Additional interviews included CNTE activists and leaders, and academics studying Mexican labour and education policy. I did not obtain a response from the official leaders of the Mexico City union locals or its national office.

⁶ Despite *discourse* including ‘school-based management’ and ‘school autonomy’. In some sites these policies have increased the managerial power of principals.

⁷ New York State’s intervention into K-12 education, superseding the authority of New York City, created a scalar problem for the United Federation of Teachers, which is legally structured to negotiate with the city, despite the state’s increasing power over its members.

⁸ The author participated in local union negotiations in Toronto through this framework in 2015.

⁹ A precursor to the scalar struggles discussed here was the movement of Mexico City’s primary teachers in the late 1950s, led by Othon Salazar. They defied the national union, the SEP and the state in demanding salary increases and union democracy. Despite coinciding with other major labour struggles, Salazar was imprisoned and the movement was suppressed (Peláez 1984).

¹⁰ The teaching position exam purported to eliminate practices where a retiring teacher could pass on their position to a son or daughter, or for a price, recommend someone for the position. Alternately, positions were awarded by administrators or union officials as a form of patronage (Leyva & Rodriguez 2012: 562).

¹¹ However it would be frozen in the state congress when the Oaxacan government turned against the union in 2015 (Pérez Alfonso 2015).

¹² The drive for salary increases precipitated instances of teachers ‘loaning’ high achieving students to write multiple exams, amid an increase in rote, drill based ‘teaching to the test’ (Aboites 2012: 831).

¹³ In Oaxaca, where the movement had its strongest institutional base, the state education department was purged in 2015. 300 of its 4000 positions had been appointed by the CNTE (La Botz 2015).

¹⁴ CNTE activists won an overwhelming majority of delegates to the convention of the Zacatecas state section in July 2016, but the national SNTE circumvented them by appointing their preferred executive at a secret parallel convention. The same month, the dissident slate running for the state executive of Chihuahua were simply removed from the ballot by the national SNTE (Valadez Rodríguez 2016).

¹⁵ Dissidents argue that de la Torre’s acquiescence to Peña Nieto’s policies can be attributed to his implication, as Gordillo’s former lieutenant, in many of her corrupt practices.

¹⁶ Many teachers are allotted less than full time hours, and depend on driving taxis or working in shops.

¹⁷ The local neighbourhood has a lively music culture that has produced famous cumbia bands. Yet the school does not offer music classes, clubs or activities, or even the usage of its space after hours for community groups (Mexico City Teacher 6, Interviewed Feb. 2015).

¹⁸ There are 1312 public primary school facilities in Mexico City. Most operate on double morning and afternoon shifts, often with separate staff, leading to over 2000 schools by this measure (AFSEDF 2016)

¹⁹ Brigades of parents from a politically active school traveled to other schools to encourage parents to support the movement citing the system's dismal funding for schools (Mexico City Teacher 7, Interviewed Oct. 2016).

²⁰ Email correspondence with member of the Trinational Coalition in Defence of Public Education, July, 2016.

²¹ Personal observations, October 2016.