

Introduction

TRACING POLICY

Translation and Assemblage



This book explores the social life of policy. According to mainstream policy science, social policy is produced by policy experts on the basis of rational, scientific knowledge. Some of this knowledge is locally produced, and some of it is drawn from elsewhere, where similarly situated policy experts have worked to deal with related problems. Once developed, policy is implemented by policy providers, who operate as conduits for its administration in institutions designed to serve and manage various populations and their problems. Finally, social policy is received by the targets of policy, whose lives are accordingly altered for the better.

This story about social policy serves to produce and support modernist interpretations of governance that extend the metaphor of body as machine to minds and personalities as well as to society; that cover up the messiness of official policy production; that fail to take into account the reality that all those who engage with social policy—not only policy elites, but also providers and recipients—are active and knowledgeable insiders who in fact make and transform policy in their interactions with it; and, finally, that fall short of providing an adequate accounting of the realities and nuances of power as it is embedded in policy, always engaged with and sometimes thwarted by the range of actors who encounter it.

Initially, anthropologists were at least partially aligned with this mainstream story, certainly with regard to official policy production. When policy studies emerged as an academic and practical enterprise in the mid-

twentieth century, US political scientist Harold Lasswell (1951: 3) underscored the “intelligence needs” of policy, that is, the need to improve “the concrete content of the information and the interpretations available to policy makers.” In response to this call, and in a volume co-edited by Lasswell, anthropologists Margaret Mead (1951) and Clyde Kluckhohn (1951) argued that policy makers needed to understand *culture* in order to make good policy: both Culture (with a big “C”) as a feature of the human species, and culture (with a little “c”) as the specific parameters of practice and meaning-making characteristic of particular groups. As an argument against abstraction—armchair policy making, as it were—and in favor of policy making based on concrete, situated knowledges of cultural and social realities, this provided a useful intervention, an early instance of applied anthropology.

This intervention has not gone out of date. Indeed, contemporary practices of fast policy transfer (Peck 2002; Peck and Theodore 2001, 2010) fly in the face of this insight by framing policies developed in one location as applicable to all locations, engaging in precisely the kind of acultural universalizing that Mead and Kluckhohn challenged. However, while recent interpretive approaches to policy, emerging in political science as well as in anthropology (Belshaw 1976; Fischer 2003; Shore and Wright 1997, 2011; Shore, Wright, and Però 2011; Wedel et al. 2005), have continued to build on Mead’s and Kluckhohn’s contributions, they have also turned them on their head to argue that culture does not just have an impact on how policies play out, but also the reverse: that policy is one of the key mechanisms by which we “do” culture. In this reading, while it may be the case that we need to understand culture in order to make good policy, it is also the case that we need to understand policy in order to understand culture. Policy as a mechanism for social engineering is thus itself an artifact of the social, giving lie to the belief that there exists an outside-of-culture space of social scientific rationality.

From this interpretive stance, policies reflect particular kinds of knowledge of the problems we attend to and of how to best approach them. As such, they are charters for social action: they tell us what we need to do (Malinowski 1926; see Shore and Wright 1997). This telling, however, is built on a range of other knowledges, tacit as well as explicit, that go beyond the brief of any specific policy to index worldviews and ideologies—that is, understandings of the nature of human being, of social interaction, and of social organization, in both actual and idealized forms. The ideological agendas that mainstream policy analysts concede may influence policy (e.g., Evans 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) are accordingly seen as neither peripheral nor accidental in an interpretive framework. Instead, policy projects are envisioned as from the beginning interested and invested;

they involve constructing, rather than just responding to problems and categories of person in need of intervention (Clarke 2004; Fischer 2003; Innes 2002; Jenkins 2007; Kingfisher 2007a; Lendvai and Stubbs 2006, 2007; Shore and Wright 1997; Shore and Wright 2011; Stubbs 2005; Wedel et al. 2005). Analyses of policy must therefore begin with an examination of “the assumptions and framing of policy debates” (Wedel et al. 2005: 33)—of “its enabling discourses, mobilizing metaphors, and underlying ideologies and uses” (Wedel et al. 2005: 34)—in order to discern how policy buttresses the work of governance. In this framework, then, policy is not only an artifact and architect of cultural meaning; it is also a site of power struggles—over definitions, diagnoses, identities, the proper configuration of society, and sometimes over life and death.

These interpretive claims about the nature of policy are usefully set alongside analyses of the policy process that have discerned the *productive* aspects of what has typically been thought of as *implementation*. Observations of policy delivery in sites where policy providers meet with clients indicate that providers are not, in fact, neutral conduits through which policies flow intact and unmediated. Rather, providers’ interactions with policy mandates and clients in the space between bureaucracies and target populations actually determine what policies are, in fact, in operation, certainly in terms of their particular shapes and valences. The route from policy conception to realization is, accordingly, more convoluted than direct, and the distinction between official formation and implementation less clear than some may think, or wish (e.g., Lipsky 1980; Prottas 1979; Wirth 1991; see also Freeman 2006; Jenkins 2007; Kingfisher 2001; Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). Similarly, a number of ethnographic studies with the targets of policy have shown that recipients, too, far from being the passive receptacles that seem to people official policy makers’ imaginations, are actively engaged in interpreting, accommodating, resisting, and manipulating policy for their own ends (e.g., Freeman 2006; Goode 2002; Jenkins 2007; Kingfisher 1996a, 2001; Lipsky 1980; Prottas 1979; Stack 1974; Susser 1982; Valentine 1968).

These two insights—policy as a power-laden artifact and architect of culture, and policy as produced not only officially but also in myriad unofficial ways—serve to displace models of policy as rational, neutral, and acultural, as well as to trouble visions of policy as something that can be implemented in any kind of straightforward, top-down, unmediated, and transparent manner. Instead, these insights invite us to envision the life of social policy—a process rather than a thing—as complex and convoluted, tracing and leaving traces of meaning and power as it travels across sites and through persons. These tracings and traces are not accidents or imperfections—places or instances where something has gone awry, the

result of incomplete or poor information—but are, rather, inherent to the policy process itself.

A Case Study

My interest in tracing policy began in the summer of 2000, when I was writing grant applications to work with welfare mothers in southern Alberta, where I had recently moved from Aotearoa/New Zealand.¹ I discovered that in the early 1990s the Alberta provincial government of premier Ralph Klein, in the process of reforming its governing structures and welfare systems, had been heavily influenced by Roger Douglas, the former finance minister of New Zealand. Douglas had been a key architect of the New Zealand Model (hereafter referred to as the NZ Model), a dramatic project of neoliberal welfare state restructuring emphasizing privatization, marketization, and personal responsibility that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Although awarded little scrutiny in the social science literature relative to the development and export of US and British models of restructuring, the NZ Model, given its emphasis on a simultaneously comprehensive and speedy dismantling of the welfare state, nevertheless drew the interest of proponents of structural adjustment at the IMF and World Bank, as well as of conservatives in several Western welfare states (Baker and Tippin 1999; Kelsey 1995, 1999)—including some in Canada, whose federal government had put in motion a rescaling of the welfare state beginning in the early 1990s that laid the groundwork for provincial experimentation in the organization and provision of social services. Policy elites in Alberta became particularly interested in the NZ Model as they looked externally for legitimization as well as guidance on how to approach reform. This connection became the starting point for an ethnographic exploration that took me to a range of sites in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta between 2001 and 2006.

The New Zealand–Alberta story provides a particular set of theoretical and ethnographic opportunities. First, it foregrounds forms of policy travel that fall outside of the two frames that have tended to dominate scholarly analyses of policy movements across jurisdictions. In contrast to diffusionist models, which posit policy knowledge as radiating out from centers to margins—from the United States or Britain, for example, to Aotearoa/New Zealand or Australia; or from so-called developed to developing countries (for critiques, see Czarniawska and Sevón 2005; Freeman 2006; Newman 2006; Schön 1973)—the New Zealand–Alberta connection indicates that policy can also travel along the margins. If, as I argue throughout this book, policy making is a process of assemblage,

then policy travels across jurisdictions will be similarly less linear and more multidirectional, polyvocal, messy, and “irrational” than diffusionist models would suggest. This connection within the periphery provides a different perspective on globalization, decentering the United States and other big policy players in our analytical imaginations, thereby allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the many players in the global emergence and circulation of neoliberal forms of governance.

The New Zealand–Alberta case also buttresses challenges to methodological nationalism (e.g., Jenkins 2007; Lendvai and Stubbs 2006; Newman 2006; Stone 2002, 2004), which envisions policy production and movement as the exclusive purview of national states. This is a problem that has plagued globalization studies in general (Sassen 2007), as well as studies of policy transfer in particular, given that, in a number of cases, neoliberal restructuring has served to devolve policy making to smaller bodies, such as, in Canada, provinces. There is, in addition, growing recognition of the importance of think tanks and independent policy experts in policy formation and travel (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 2000; Lendvai and Stubbs 2006; Stone 2000, 2002, 2004). The New Zealand–Alberta connection provides an instructive example in this regard: not only did policy cross national and provincial boundaries, but, given that the key agent of transfer, Roger Douglas, was no longer a New Zealand official but a private consultant at the time, policy traversed, and rendered fuzzy, the distinction between the official and the unofficial.

Further, since policy travels unfold through time, the New Zealand–Alberta story provides an opportunity to trace the temporal dimensions of policy. Less than a decade after the NZ Model found a home away from home in Alberta, the Labor-Coalition government of Helen Clark, elected in 1999, took a different route, disassembling key features of the Model. Since the election of John Key in 2008, however, the more progressive era of Helen Clark has given way to a resurrection of a form of the NZ Model, marked by both the redeployment of blame-the-victim discourses and the tabling of policy proposals that would tighten access to state support. In Alberta, in the meantime, although Ralph Klein is now long out of office, the welfare reforms his administration instituted remain firmly in place, buttressed by discourses of economic crisis and austerity even in an oil- and gas-rich province. These permutations and iterations provide an opportunity to trace how particular policy frames work themselves out in specific communities of practice over time. Given these ongoing unfoldings, moreover, the New Zealand–Alberta case also speaks to contemporary policy contexts, marked by progressively accelerated fast policy transfer in situations increasingly characterized by a frenetic sense of urgency, and in which official policy responses of the sort

I describe here are framed in terms of inevitability, as the only options possible. The New Zealand–Alberta story thus sheds light on historical patterns that continue to unfold in current policy realities.

Finally, and most generally, despite long-standing theorizations of globalization as the travel of ideas across geographic and cultural space, there are few detailed analyses of these processes with regard to policy. Studies of the movement of policy frames from one jurisdiction to another—what in mainstream policy sciences is referred to as *transfer*—come the closest to this, but, as I argue later in this chapter, the rubric of transfer is inadequate to the task. Nor do studies of transfer explore what happens to policy as it moves through various sites of policy delivery and reception; rather, they tend to confine themselves to spaces of official policy making. Analyses of global pressures on national policy making (Esping-Andersen 1996; Mishra 1999; Taylor-Gooby 2001) and cross-national comparisons of particular policy arenas (e.g., Cochrane, Clarke, and Gewirtz 2001; Daly and Rake 2003; O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1996; Sainsbury 1996, 2000) similarly tend to restrict themselves to state-level analyses. In neglecting to follow policy beyond sites of official policy making through to sites of implementation and reception, these approaches, however fruitful, reveal only part of the terrain of policy travels. In this light, the New Zealand–Alberta connection provides an opportunity to empirically trace the simultaneous movement of policy up, down, and sideways.

Neoliberalism and Welfare for Poor Single Mothers

Neither unique nor aberrant, welfare state restructurings in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta were in keeping with, and contributed to, wider global shifts toward neoliberal forms of governance. Emerging neoliberalisms entailed a radical departure from liberal progressive forms of governance, which conceptualized and responded to social ills structurally and collectively. Instead, they embodied forms of governance that highlighted individual causalities and decentralized and individualized remedies for social problems (Brodie 2002). Attacks on the welfare state were a central element of these projects in the advanced capitalist countries of North America, Europe, and the Pacific Rim, where government officials and neoliberal pundits constructed social provisioning as prohibitively expensive in the context of international economic competition, and the receipt of state support as disempowering of recipients in its fostering of dependence (Kingfisher 2002a). The ensuing reforms had ramifications for education, housing, health care, employment, the environment, and public versus private ownership of resources and delivery of services,

among others. Although any of these would serve as an instructive empirical referent for a study of the New Zealand–Alberta connection, my focus here is on financial assistance (hereafter referred to as welfare) for poor single mothers.

I have chosen this focus for several reasons. Although seemingly gender neutral, the shift to neoliberalism entails a particular double bind for welfare mothers, who serve as a “litmus test ... of gendered social rights” (Hobson 1994: 171). In particular, in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta, welfare state restructuring brought in new rules regarding engagement in paid labor; and although the rules differed, in both cases poor single mothers were redefined as potential able-bodied workers—as unemployed rather than unemployable. Rejecting constructions of (poor) women as mothers and housewives in favor of their constitution as potential able-bodied workers (see, e.g., Kingfisher 2002b; Kingfisher and Goldsmith 2001; Mason 2003), the restructurings served to render motherhood a less acceptable reason for reliance on the state. The emphasis on employment, however, did not mean that poor single mothers were relieved of, or adequately supported in, their responsibility for their dependent children. The reforms accordingly placed welfare mothers in a double bind: they were simultaneously mothers and low-paid workers who did not have the resources to pay someone else to look after their children. My focus on welfare for poor single mothers is intended to highlight the extreme social and economic vulnerability that this double bind engenders.

It is also worth noting that, in contrast to their powerless position as a global force, poor single mothers nevertheless play a pivotal, albeit unmarked, role in global imaginaries and practices. This may seem counterintuitive. Globalization has been variously described as the increasing international interdependence of economic, political, and social forces; as the movement of finance, technology, people, and ideas across national borders; as the development of circuits of travel for technology, finance, people, and ideas that are outside of the control of national states; and as the decentering of state and interstate relations as the primary loci of activity. Poor single mothers do not leap to the forefront of any of these frames. They do not figure in the glittery high speed and high-powered transnational movements and developments applauded by pundits of globalization. Nor do they have a place in below- or above-the-state global social movements: they are not part of the antiglobalization movement, they do not demonstrate at WTO or G20 meetings, there is no poor mothers’ movement akin to the global indigenous or gay movements.

However, just as the practices of high-powered businessmen are often made possible by the housewives behind the scenes who do the child

care and entertaining and sustaining, so high-powered global finance and technology are made possible by territorially situated armies of low-paid and insecure workers—the metaphorical housewives of globalization who in a number of cases also happen to be actual women (Sassen 1996, 1998). Poor single mothers, then, may be seen as located in one particular space of globalization: that occupied by those who either people the ranks of low-paid labor or who are penalized for their inability to do so. The workfare ideologies and programs to which welfare mothers are subjected can thus be seen as one element of the global spread of neoliberal forms of labor market regulation; welfare reform here becomes one of the ways in which local economies are made to be more globally competitive. Thus welfare mothers are enticed/coerced into being the housewives of a global free market.

Poor single mothers are also an ideological keystone of the global travel of neoliberal constructs of the person. *Ideoscapes*, as Appadurai (1996: 36; emphasis in original) describes them, are traveling images that are “[o]ften directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it. These ideoscapes are composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including *freedom*, *welfare*, *rights*, *sovereignty*, *representation*, and the master term *democracy*.” Appadurai’s focus is on a particularly positive set of keywords, to which I would add the term *individual*, which, in an Enlightenment frame, refers to the *self-possessed* (that is, sovereign) and *self-actualized* bearer of rights and participant in democracy. This model of the person is closely tied to the idea of *freedom*, which, in the context of neoliberal globalization, concerns the freedom/right to participate in markets without hindrance of state interference (Clarke 2004; see also Harvey 2005; Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Smith 2007). Robertson (1992) argues in this respect that the increasing global circulation and influence of a definition of persons as self-sufficient, autonomous entities comprises a key feature of the current era of globalization. The force of this ideology is not necessarily revolutionary or liberatory, however, but may also—may, in fact, frequently—entail imposition. Workfare, as I discuss throughout this book, provides one example of the imposition of particularly pernicious forms of “individualism” and “freedom.”

Thus, just as an increasingly insecure and poorly paid segment of the labor force provides the foundation for the valorized aspects of economic globalization, so the poor single mother provides the (negative) foundation for the valorized aspects of the (globalized) neoliberal individual. In the context of the increasing movement and spread of free-market forms of social and economic organization, poor single mothers in pre-reform

welfare systems are retrospectively reconstructed as “dependent” on the state, and, by virtue of that dependence, as neither sovereign nor self-actualized. They represent one embodiment of the non-neoliberal subject, the nonenterprising, the non-self-sufficient (Kingfisher 2007a, 2007b); they travel as a negative image (Kingfisher 1999). The simultaneous travel of ideas of how to transform welfare mothers into ideal subjects—sovereign, independent, and free—is testimony to both the purchase and the asserted “naturalness” of the neoliberal model of the person, as well as to the labor involved in pressing such naturalness.

Neoliberalism’s Ideal Self

Welfare for poor single mothers thus provides an opportunity to trace the “active society” model, a keystone of neoliberal cultural formations, as it moves, via policy, across sites and through persons. Articulated by the OECD in 1990, this approach to state-market-individual relations entailed “fostering economic opportunity and activity for everyone in order to combat poverty, dependency and social exclusion” (OECD 1990: xi, cited in Walters 1997: 224). Where the welfare society distinguishes between those who have to engage in paid labor and those who do not, in an active society framework, “the market is the only true source for satisfaction of human desires and needs, just as participation in paid employment is the key to personal fulfillment, self-development and membership in society” (Walters 1997: 224). This represents a shift away from a conception of society in which the market has a place within a larger overall scheme, and towards one in which everything has to be put into market space—in which the market is the overall scheme. Governments drawing on this framework accordingly work to alter both the institutional and cultural terrain of action (Larner 2000; Schwartz 1997) in an attempt to rewrite relations between state, market, and society, as well as to change individual behavior and, by extension, notions of proper personhood and citizenship.

Building on the philosophies of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, the active society model asserts that “the wellbeing of both political and social existence is to be ensured not by centralized planning and bureaucracy, but through the ‘enterprising’ activities and choices of autonomous entities—businesses, organizations, persons—each striving to maximize its own advantage by inventing and promoting new projects by means of individual and local calculations of strategies and tactics, costs and benefits” (Rose 1992: 145). In this framework, the person is reconfigured as an active entrepreneurial agent, an expert in making self-interested choices and mitigating risk (Dean 2007; Fairclough 1991; Heelas 1991;

Miller and Rose 2008; Rose 1992). This neoliberal, active self, “[tuned] for production ... is ... highly motivated and energized, competitive, ambitious, goal-setting and strongly oriented towards free market rewards; and underlying all these are the ideas of individual autonomy and independence” (Heelas 1991: 77).

As I have noted elsewhere (Kingfisher 2002b; see also Kingfisher and Goldsmith 2001), the neoliberal, active-society model of the person is profoundly gendered, raced, classed, and historically and culturally specific. Insofar as they challenge the supposedly natural and universal status of this construct, poor single women—as women, as poor persons, and often as either members of racialized minorities or attributed their constructed negative characteristics—become targets for reform, for efforts to remake the person. As Heelas (1991: 72) claims, “Radical government must surely go to the heart of the matter—character reform.” In this sense, disciplining some, via welfare reform, provides a way of governing the whole; policing those on the margins becomes one mechanism for the construction and assertion of the normative. The harsher reforms of the 1990s instituted by the New Zealand and Alberta governments—complete with condemnations of the supposedly parasitic poor, rhetorics of responsabilization, work tests, and procedures enabling/coercing welfare recipients to engage in their own self-transformation while simultaneously providing mechanisms for the surveillance of that effort—are thus prime examples of active society approaches to the governance of the “marginalized,” as opposed to the “civilized,” who, in contrast, are capable of managing their own risk and therefore do not require policing and intervention (Dean 1995: 580). Later New Zealand reforms, which instituted a case management approach and highlighted the “expertise” that beneficiaries had *vis-à-vis* their own lives, did not represent a radical departure from this model, but rather put in place a softer version of the same trend. Here, case managers took on a pastoral role (Dean 1995: 575), assessing, guiding, counseling, and mediating.

The difference between these “harder” and “softer” approaches to welfare reform mirrors Dean’s (1999: 161–62) distinction between left-leaning “active society” models that “encompass but go beyond participation in the market to include participation in other social spheres,” and right-leaning “enterprise culture” models that are about the revival and extension of “the norms and values associated with the market.” These two forms represent different situated articulations of neoliberalism—as a philosophy, as a cultural system, as a model for social organization, and as a mode of governance—that build on the actively and self-directedly engaged person. Neoliberal models of the independent individual thus take on different forms and valences in different contexts; there is no

Neoliberalism, but only neoliberalisms. I return to this point below with respect to the idea of a global neoliberal policy regime, but first take a detour to outline, as concepts and methods, *translation* and *assemblage*—the processes by means of which the neoliberal independent individual of the active society emerges in particular forms in particular places among particular actors.

Translation and Assemblage

Collier and Ong (2005: 11) assert that global forms—here, neoliberal approaches to welfare reform—“have a distinctive capacity for decontextualization and recontextualization, abstractability and movement, across diverse social and cultural situations and spheres of life.” Such forms, they continue, “are able to assimilate themselves to new environments, to code heterogeneous contexts and objects in terms that are amenable to control and valuation” (2005: 11; see also Collier 2006: 400). How this assimilation is constructed—but also deconstructed and reconstructed—in specific contexts of engagement is the focus of this book.

Traveling policy, like globalization, is nothing new; nevertheless, it has been accelerating in recent decades to such an extent that it is now ubiquitous, almost mundane (Lendvai and Stubbs 2009). This increasingly frequent movement of policy across jurisdictions has generated a burgeoning literature devoted to its analysis. One strand of this literature, in keeping with mainstream policy science approaches, posits policy transfer as rational and technical, the artifact of systematic and deliberate learning and application (e.g., Dolowitz and Marsh 1996, 2000; Evans 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). Thus the term *transfer*. Interpretive scholars, however, whose work comprises a different and significantly smaller strand of literature on policy travels, favor the term *translation*. While both *transfer* and *translation* capture the movement involved in policy travels, they conceptualize it in profoundly different ways.

In models of transfer, policy packages are mechanically moved from one setting to another. Metaphors of conveyor belts (Lendvai and Stubbs 2006: 2) and conduits (Johnson and Hagström 2011: 366) are common here: documents, institutional structures, and agents of transfer carry policies across sites the way luggage handlers and conveyor belts in airports carry suitcases from one airline to the next, sending them off to destinations across the globe. The contents of the “suitcases” are unaltered by the means by which they travel. Policy transfer thus takes on the valence of “merely telling” (Freeman 2009: 441), or, to use a different image, the recitation of recipes for exact replication. From a translation perspective,

however, traveling policies are not the same as traveling suitcases, and they are not set recipes. Policies, rather, are about *ideas*, and ideas are complicated phenomena: they connect up with other ideas, have blurred boundaries, take on different valences in different contexts, shift and change. They are processes as much as things, belonging to the messy realm of human imagination and action.

The pleasure and amusement of the children's party game "telephone" is that messages change as they pass through persons: "Patty walked the dog" magically becomes "Pardon the hog." Translation approaches underscore and draw attention to precisely these kinds of changes and transformations, to the kinds of blurrings, partialities, and shifts that accompany mediated "knowing at a distance" (Freeman 2009: 430). The imagery of translation is thus not of a mechanical passing of closed suitcases from one handler to another, but instead points to the packing and repacking of the contents of suitcases as travelers, rather than handlers, move along their trajectories. Nor does translation offer up imageries of the exact replication of recipes. Rather, what is invoked is an idea of cooking—of human doing—as improvisation.

While models of transfer eschew this kind of messiness, translation approaches embrace it—not in mindless celebration of diversity, but in recognition that "messiness" provides a somewhat closer approximation to reality. In transfer approaches, as my metaphor of baggage handlers implies, people are simply carriers. In translation frameworks, in contrast, carriers are reconfigured as interested, invested actors with specific agendas who interact with similarly interested and invested actors on the "receiving" end of policy travels. Policy messages are, accordingly, *mediated* (Freeman 2009; Lendvai and Stubbs 2006, 2007, 2009; Newman 2006). In crossing boundaries—between various official and expert bodies, between themselves and texts, between institutional demands and various arenas of "real life"—participants in policy travels thus engage not only in the movement of meaning, but also in its construction (Freeman 2009: 437).

Meaning (or equivalence of meaning) is thus not prior to translation, but emerges *in* translation (Freeman 2009: 437; Lendvai and Bainton, forthcoming). This reflects, first of all, the polysemy of signs. Signs do not carry the same meaning with them everywhere they go; rather, there are shadings and specificities that have to do with local readings and local contexts—with what particular terms, ideologies, and frames are articulating with in specific cases (Clarke 2004: 37–38; see also Czarniawska and Sevón 2005; Freeman 2006, 2009; Hall 1985; Schram 2006). As Freeman (2006: 381) puts it:

The relationship between a sign and what it signifies is neither determined nor mechanical. What things mean is a matter of convention (a social construct) and it is invariably inexact. Meaning may be shared, but it is not identical. This fundamental epistemological uncertainty, this requirement that every utterance be accompanied by some hermeneutic move on the part of the reader or listener, is a source of innovation and creativity as well as error and failure. Translation—the processing of what you say into terms that I understand—is ubiquitous and imperfect.

As I explore in the following chapters, “work,” “mothering,” and “family” have a range of meanings that shift across time and space: constructions of “work” in Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, did not exactly match received constructions of “work” in Alberta; and policy experts’ constructions of “mothering” and “the family” in both sites were different from those of recipients. Here, the dangers involved in assuming that a word or concept means the same thing to all speakers of a language match those of translation across languages.

The emergence of meaning in translation also indexes power relations (Freeman 2009; Lendvai and Stubbs 2006, 2007; Newman 2006; Stubbs 2005). If traveling policies are marketed by agents of persuasion, then they are being marketed as better than other possibilities. Similarly, if policy experts on the receiving end of policy travels are “seekers out,” then they are “actively engaged in the *production* of the technologies associated with new vocabularies of power and ... [are] creative agents in the formation of new discursive ensembles” (Newman 2006: 13; emphasis in original). While not necessarily “seekers out,” those charged with implementing policy, as well as those targeted by it, are also actively engaged in the power relations constructed via translation. Lendvai and Stubbs (2007: 4) accordingly remind us, drawing on postcolonial theory, that translation is “the very working of power” (see also Lendvai and Stubbs 2009); it is not just about meaning making, but about meaning making in the interest of claims making. A similar point has been made by anthropologists reflecting on the translation work of ethnography (see, e.g., Asad 1986; Clifford 1997; Crapanzano 1986; Rubel and Rosman 2003). Given that translation “is always complicit with the building, transforming or disrupting of power relations” (Sakai 2006: 72), it is thus always worth asking, “what gets transferred, who gets to translate, and who are the losers and winners within a particular policy transfer situation” (Lendvai and Bainton, forthcoming). In sum, what is happening when policies move is a process of appropriation—a taking over, as much as a carrying over, that is intentional and productive (Freeman 2009: 434–35; see also Lendvai and Stubbs 2006: 4). In this process, new things can be created, things can be

lost or erased, and meanings are rarely permanently fixed (Freeman 2009: 432; Newman 2006: 2; Stubbs 2002: 322).

The work of translation involves processes of assemblage: understanding something newly emergent in light of what is received, framing an idea from elsewhere in terms of what is known here, connecting theoretical frames and practices in new ways—all in light of an array of agendas related to making sense of the world, devising programs of action, asserting power and control, or just getting through the day. Referring simultaneously to a pieced-together formation, or constellation, and to the processes of creating linkages across sites and formations (Phillips 2006: 18), assemblage thus comprises both the activity and product of translation; it is accordingly best characterized as “heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial, and situated” (Collier and Ong 2005: 12; see also Olds and Thrift 2005: 271; Ong 2005). The image of *collage* (Marcus and Saka 2006: 102) is particularly useful in capturing the situatedness and specificity of assemblages, although not so useful in capturing their instability, which, to draw on a popular concept from the globalization literature (Pieterse 2009), is perhaps better indexed by the concept of *hybridity*.

Deleuze and Guattari describe the general parameters of assemblage as follows:

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away (1987: 88; emphasis in original).

Although mutually constitutive, the machinic and enunciative elements of assemblages—always in-the-making, always on-the-move—can be delinked from their connection in one domain and rearticulated with machinic or expressive elements from different domains to compose new assemblages; in other words, they can be combined and recombined in myriad ways. For instance, as I discuss in more detail in chapter 4, welfare mothers disassembled the linkages between discourses of “independence” and state practices designed to move women off of welfare and into work. Instead, they imported “independence” into their own arenas, translating it into independence from men rather than from the state. The point here is that particular systems of meaning and practice, seemingly sedimented, can be actively disarticulated and rearticulated in new ways.

The axis of territorialization/deterritorialization includes both spatial and nonspatial social processes that “stabilize or destabilize the identity of the assemblage” (DeLanda 2006: 19). In being lifted from Aotearoa/New Zealand and rearticulated in Alberta, the NZ Model is simultaneously reinforced and stabilized, via its spread and currency, and destabilized, as bits and pieces are disarticulated and either left behind or rearticulated with bits and pieces of other formations in new and different ways. Similarly, when providers and recipients draw on the shared meanings, stories, and categories of their interpersonal networks (DeLanda 2006: 56–57) to engage with policy, they do so in ways that both reinforce and threaten policy mandates and their underlying philosophies.

Together, *assemblage* and *translation* point to the cut-and-paste processes of piecing together that are involved as policies travel up, down, and sideways. It would be a mistake, however, to envision these processes as involving freewheeling cutting-and-pasting by sovereign agents in completely open and unconstrained environments populated by unmoored, empty signifiers. Nor are translation and assemblage haphazard, as my reference to the children’s game “telephone” might imply. Although fluid and unstable, translation and assemblage are also constrained. Signs and practices can be disarticulated and set off on travels in any number of directions, and policy assemblages can indeed represent cut-and-paste experimentation, but what and how things are translated, cut-and-pasted, and experimented with is not completely arbitrary. There are always parameters, not the least of which is history: in this case, the history of how poverty and poor people have been conceptualized, of how social welfare systems have been structured, of how human nature has been characterized, and of economic practices. At the same time, constraints are not uniformly or predictably deterministic: “Structures exhibit tendencies—lines of force, openings and closures which constrain, shape, channel and in that sense ‘determine.’ But they cannot determine in the harder sense of fix absolutely, guarantee” (Hall 1985: 96). There may be tendencies, in other words, but they tell us more about past structures than about exactly where current practices and movements will lead (Hall 1986a: 41). Scholars of assemblage theory tend to agree with this orientation, underscoring the profound creativity and unpredictability of processes of assemblage (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Marcus and Saka 2006; Ong and Collier 2005; Venn 2006), even in the face of both constraint and the propensity of traces of what came before to reemerge (Hall 1985: 111). It might be most useful, then, to think of processes of translation and assemblage as occurring within contexts that are simultaneously constraining and enabling—that is, within certain parameters the contours of which may be shifted via the very processes of assemblage.

Freeman's (2007) discussion of policy production as bricolage points precisely to such constraints and enablements. In analyzing how policy makers interpret how they engage in the knowledge construction on which policy formation is based, Freeman outlines the complex ways in which different theories of learning—rationalist, organizational, and constructivist—come into play simultaneously and in overlapping fashion in real-life policy-making situations. He accordingly positions policy makers as Lévi-Straussian bricoleurs, and policy as “put together,” assembled from different bits and pieces, from different times and places, on the basis of a range of sometimes competing, sometimes overlapping epistemological frames—basically, a working with, building on, and making do with what is available. The *working with* is about possibility and creativity, while the *what is available* points to constraint.

Within these parameters of possibility and limitation, policy assemblages—like the translations of which they are composed—are always about one vision of persons and society as opposed to others, about one proposed solution to problems among myriad possibilities. In this sense, policy translation and assemblage represent attempts at hegemony—a cobbling together of practices and meanings with the goal of creating some kind of common sense regarding the nature of persons, the state, the market, or social support. Policy travels—translations and assemblages—are accordingly about power travels, whether with respect to officials and experts attempting to devise workable forms of governance, or to providers and recipients accommodating policy mandates or “talking back,” constructing counterhegemonies.

In sum, in contrast to the mechanistic and abstract metaphor of *transfer*, which only minimally situates policy travels in the social, *translation* and *assemblage* provide entry points into the rich complexity of ethnographic realities in which participants interact to jointly construct, assert, struggle over, challenge, and modify particular readings of their worlds. Far from positing reasoned linearity or uncontested top-down imposition, they invite us to theorize policy production as piecemeal, always in the making, and always about unfolding and shifting struggle.

Convergence and Divergence, Neoliberalism and Its Limits: Global Policy Regimes Revisited

When applied to neoliberalism—as cultural system, governing practice, or policy regime—the theoretical and methodological frameworks of translation and assemblage serve to position it as an activity rather than as a finished product. In addition, neoliberalism is theorized as unfolding

in specific, already-inhabited contexts, and as thus always already articulating with other cultural formations. Although it may be characterized by a particular “grammar” (Kingfisher 2002b), this grammar is constantly “disarticulating and rearticulating, disjunctive and contradictory” (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008: 120). Neoliberalism’s existence thus takes shape only in the fluid and multiple translations on which it depends for its movement, and it accordingly rarely realizes its totalizing desires (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Maskovsky and Kingfisher 2001; see also Kingfisher 2002c). Since various neoliberal assemblages “cannot be analytically reduced to cases of a uniform global condition of ‘Neoliberalism’ writ large” (Ong 2006: 14; see also Collier and Ong 2005: 12), we are enjoined to attend to concrete specificities—to avoid taking the so-called global neoliberal policy regime for granted, and to instead treat it as something that “needs to be explained in particular places and with reference to particular peoples, territories, states and cultural formations” (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008: 123–24). The New Zealand–Alberta case provides just such an opportunity for analysis of particular unfoldings and articulations—unfoldings and articulations, moreover, that I argue simultaneously buttress and trouble ideas and practices of a global neoliberal policy regime.

In policy studies, the question of homogenization and heterogeneity that runs through the globalization literature is reframed to ask whether the increasing global circulation of policy elites working to create a singular vision of state, society, and individuals is producing global policy convergence (sometimes referred to as *harmonization*); or whether, in contrast, we are witnessing hybridizations and *mélanges* reflective of unique local cultural conditions—that is, divergence. Are any such differences really only variations on a theme, or are they serious differences of the sort that preclude the possibility of a frame that we can with confidence refer to as a global neoliberal policy regime? It is important here to think of convergence and divergence not only in reference to policy travels across jurisdictions, but also in relation to the range of engagements with policy that happen in sites of policy implementation and reception. These are also sites of convergence and divergence that contribute to, or undermine, the consolidation of policy regimes.

On the one hand, if policy production and travel entail translation and assemblage, convergence is impossible. Insofar as the concept of translation “attracts attention to the fact that a thing moved from one place to another cannot emerge unchanged”—that “to set something in a new place is to construct it anew” (Czarniawska and Sevón 2005: 8)—we are enjoined to recognize policy travels as entailing processes of transformation rather than replication. Johnson and Hagström (2011: 372; emphasis

in original) go so far as to claim that translation “does not—*cannot*—lead to convergence, standardization or uniformity in any absolute sense.” Similarly, Lendvai and Stubbs (2007: 175) indicate that “a series of interesting, and sometimes even surprising, disturbances can occur in the spaces between the ‘creation,’ the ‘transmission’ and the ‘interpretation’ or ‘reception’ of policy meanings.” On the other hand, in tracing the emergence, travel, and various articulations of the NZ Model in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta, I encountered some remarkable convergences: convergences in the social constructions that informed reform policies in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta, convergences in how providers in both sites approached policy, and convergences in how recipients in two small cities on opposite sides of globe translated and assembled knowledges of policy, men, work, and parenting. These convergences were in some cases so close that terms and concepts were not just shared, but almost identical in meaning and the uses to which they were put (cf. Freeman 2006: 381). Some of these convergences reflect the near hegemony of neoliberal models of the person, while others index particular bureaucratic arrangements and structures of interaction.

Throughout this book, then, I situate my analysis in the spaces of in-betweenness where convergence and divergence are negotiated and produced: between Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta, between policy mandates and providers, between providers and recipients. In so doing, I endeavor to draw attention to the ongoing tensions between similarity and difference, providing an opportunity to step outside of an either/or binary and into the complexities of a both/and reality. My argument, in other words—despite the emphasis on transformation, hybridity, *mélange*, and improvisation afforded by the theoretical frameworks of translation and assemblage—is that we need to always also attend to patterns of replication and reproduction.

Situating Translation and Assemblage: Outline of a Travelogue

In the following chapters, I use the frames of translation and assemblage to gain insight into a range of policy-related phenomena in particular spaces and contexts of occurrence. First, I explore the transformation of objects as they are moved from one philosophical and political framework—Keynesianism—into another—neoliberalism. Brodie (2002:100) points out in this regard that the privatization characteristic of neoliberalism “involves much more than simply removing things from one sector and placing them in another. ... the thing moved is itself transformed into something quite different. Objects become differently understood

and regulated.” Translation, then, occurs as new governing frameworks emerge at particular historical junctures to transform how the world is constructed. This means that we need to attend to translation and assemblage across time as well as space. In both Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta, old models were transformed into new ones as objects—poverty, mothering, work, the poor—were retranslated in the light of new knowledges, new understandings of the nature of being human and of how the world operates, or should operate. Second, I explore translation as it occurred in the spaces through which the NZ Model moved from Aotearoa/New Zealand to Alberta, focusing specifically on the selectivity and power plays engaged in by the various players on both sides.

These two lines of exploration provide the frame for chapter 1, in which I focus on official policy production, tracing it through policy documents, community service reports, media, and scholarly reflection and analysis. I explore the emergence of the NZ Model in Aotearoa/New Zealand, its travel from Aotearoa/New Zealand to Alberta, and the outcomes of this travel for policy formation in Alberta as processes of translation and assemblage across both time and space. Situating the emergence of the NZ Model in Aotearoa/New Zealand and its indigenization in Alberta in the context of the unique welfare histories and cultural formations of each site, as well as in relation to the agendas of those both selling and seeking out the NZ Model, I focus on the transformations that inevitably accompany policy travels and explore the simultaneous construction of divergence and convergence with respect to a global neoliberal policy regime.

My goal, however, is to “study through” (Reinhold 1994; Wedel et al. 2005; Wright and Reinhold 2011)—to “follow the policy” (Shore and Wright 2011: 12; Peck and Theodore 2012)—by holistically combining insights into the processes of official policy production with analyses of its implementation and reception. With this agenda in mind, I devote the remainder of my travelogue to the translation and assemblage work of welfare providers, community service providers, and welfare recipients. Each group, situated differently in circuits of policy, possesses different kinds of knowledge of policy and of the worlds it attempts to reflect and construct. Each also has different degrees of and zones of power in which to affect things. Each group thus interacts with policy in unique ways, translating and assembling it in light of their own knowledges, experiences, and agendas. Johnson and Hagström (2011: 384) accordingly point out that “[t]ranslation processes generally operate on several levels simultaneously: in the interaction between individuals at micro level; within the framework of individual organizations and in the interaction at meso level; and under the influence of various economic, political, and socio-cultural structures at macro level.”

In chapters 2 through 4, then, I move to more territorially solid spaces of policy production: welfare offices, community service organizations, and the lives of poor single mothers. I chose as my research sites two small cities: Kingston, in Aotearoa/New Zealand; and Riverview, in Alberta.² Neither site is a metropolitan center—Kingston has a population of roughly 120,000 and Riverview 90,000—and neither is a location of official policy making. Situating myself in Riverview and Kingston thus provided an opportunity to address a gap in the policy and welfare reform literature related to scale by exploring how policies constructed in urban centers articulate in midsize centers. This focus serves to balance the prevailing emphases on large metropolitan areas in current research on neoliberalism and restructuring.

In chapter 2, I focus on the work of policy providers employed in the Riverview and Kingston welfare offices. As the executors of policy, welfare providers are the means by which new policy practices and the ideas informing them are put into place. Located in the borderland between the bureaucracy and the population it is designed to serve (and police), welfare providers are situated differently from policy elites, who neither interact directly with clients nor administer policy; they thus have different kinds of knowledges of how the welfare bureaucracy operates and of some of the determining features and vicissitudes of clients' lives. Providers translate policy mandates in light of these knowledges, assembling approaches to policy and to their clients that reflect the articulation of policy with the requirements of their institutional locations. These assemblages depart from as much as replicate official mandates and frameworks.

Circuits of policy movement and translation are composed not only of government elites and official providers, however, but also of an unofficial, amorphous constellation of providers working in a range of non-governmental organizations. Occupying a different kind of in-between space than welfare providers, community service providers assist clients in navigating the welfare bureaucracy and provide extra social and material support in an attempt to fill in the gaps left by deficient systems of official provision. In chapter 3, then, I explore community service providers' translations of welfare policy in the context of their institutional and societal locations. These locations provide unique positionings vis-à-vis both the state and welfare clients, offering different kinds of knowledge that articulate with agendas that serve to simultaneously criticize and buttress state interests.

Finally, in chapter 4, I turn to the translation and assemblage work of poor single mothers, exploring their engagements with dominant ideas embedded in policy concerning work, motherhood, independence, poverty, and the proper configurations of person, state, and society. I em-

phasize the women's uneven, contradictory articulation of the claims informing welfare reform and workfare, as they interact with policy on the basis of their own knowledges of parenting, employment, and relationships with men, coupled with the various (and often contradictory) interpretations of policy they receive from welfare and community service providers. I explore in particular how poor single mothers translated even that which they absorbed most uncritically (ideas about independent individuality, and about women's role as mothers) in ways reflective of their situated knowledges, in the process transforming the objects of absorption into something slightly, and, in some cases, radically different from what was intended by policy makers.

A Few Small but Important Caveats

The sequence I follow, from “horizontal” (Aotearoa/New Zealand to Alberta) to “vertical” (official policy-making centers, to welfare and community service providers, to recipients), and from more to less powerful actors simultaneously replicates and troubles top-down models of policy formation and implementation. It replicates them by following official lines of authority and dissemination, tracing policy as it is produced by powerful government actors and a range of policy experts and then administered by authorized agents of the state or of nongovernmental organizations, being received, finally, by supplicants for support. But in so tracing the movement of policy, top-down models are turned on their heads as various actors—officially authorized and not—not only replicate but sometimes also transform what they are receiving and transmitting. As it moves through various points of connection, then, policy shifts, such that at sites of “reception” its resemblance to “origins” reflects not intact replication, but instead ranges from family resemblance to diametric opposition.

Nor is the sequencing of chapters meant to indicate that national and provincial scales operate separately from—or, for that matter, unproblematically encompass—those of welfare and community service offices or of recipients' lives. There are temporal processes at work, to be sure, as new policy frames travel, but translation and assemblage are also ongoing processes occurring simultaneously at all scales, even as the translation and assemblage work of some players, at some scales, counts for more. Since movement itself tends to remain elusive, leaving us to work with traces of movement (Strathern 2004: 17), I have arranged the following chapters in a way that I think best allows for tracking processes of translation and assemblage that award agency to interlocutors while simultaneously

situating them in the institutional and discursive universes within which they operate.

Finally, rather than providing a complete accounting of neoliberal welfare reform in its totality, my goal is to follow specific lines of thought and practice, traveling both historically and contemporarily to provide a few modest insights into how policy is made and lived. A handful of key bits and pieces of the story of welfare reform in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta provide my mechanism for doing this. Thus I do not wish to give the impression that I intend to locate and delineate an original or singular source for global neoliberal welfare reform; neoliberalism was not born in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and both the New Zealand and Alberta governments drew on a number of schools of thought and practice, including those emanating from the United Kingdom and the United States, in designing their restructured welfare states. Nor is it my goal to exhaustively explain welfare reform in either Aotearoa/New Zealand or Alberta. Rather, I focus on a specific set of connections between Aotearoa/New Zealand and Alberta that provide a unique entry point into policy travels, emphasizing in the process various middle grounds—between the two sites, between previous welfare regimes and emerging ones, between gender regimes, between providers and the women they work with, and between women, men, and welfare systems. My focus, therefore, is on lines of articulation, and on heterogeneous and multiple forms, iterations, and manifestations of aspects of neoliberal welfare reform. This approach resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987: 21) rhizomic analysis:

Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four five, etc. It is not a multiple derived from the One, or to which One is added ($n + 1$). It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows. . . . The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots.

Rhizomes have multiple entryways and have neither genetic axes nor deep structures (1987: 12). If the interest is in the ontological status of a global policy regime, then the New Zealand–Alberta case provides one entry point (rather than a final answer). Structure—by which I mean some kind of organizational form and direction, rather than something absolutely determining and eternal—is emergent, heterogeneous, and always improvisational (see, e.g., Marcus and Saka 2006; Venn 2006).

And in these points-along-lines-of-connection that I explore here—the movement of policy frames from Aotearoa/New Zealand to Alberta, the translations and assemblages of policy made by various providers and poor single mothers—I am interested in dimensions and directions in motion. The *milieu* to which Deleuze and Guattari refer is about the middle, the in-between, but also about the environment: the conditions of possibility, the context, the air, that gives rise to and is produced by, in this case, neoliberal welfare reform, its permutations, and its limits.

This approach—tracing and following through particular threads while eschewing any attempt to provide a final, comprehensive, and thus closed analysis—serves to best capture the social life of policy as ongoing, open, and emergent translation and assemblage.

Notes

1. Throughout this book, I use *Aotearoa/New Zealand* when referring broadly to a place and a social system that includes, while simultaneously marking a tension between, both Maori and Pakeha (European) cultural formations, and *New Zealand* when referring more narrowly to the state and its practices.
2. Throughout this book I use pseudonyms for towns, community service organizations, and research participants. Although statistical and sociodemographic data are accurate, sources of official documents and reports on Riverview and Kingston have also been disguised.