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From regime protection to urban resilience? Assessing continuity and change in transnational security governance rationales in Guatemala

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes changing forms of transnational security governance and security expertise in Guatemala. It is argued that the dynamics of transnational security governance in Guatemala are directly related to the local appropriation of knowledge promoted by external security experts. As an expertise-based form of “intervention by invitation,” local political and economic elites engage in securitization strategies in order to invite external experts to intervene. In turn, through their intervention these experts provide resources that are “captured” and exploited by local actors to pursue their own interests. As a consequence, transnational security governance fails as it deviates from the original plans and programs experts try to implement. The analysis of these processes sheds light on how and why failure in the context of transnational security governance is productive. Failure, we argue, triggers a self-reinforcing interventionary feedback loop that aims at “fixing” the shortcomings of previous interventions by mobilizing new forms of external security expertise. In tracing the dynamics of this interventionary feedback loop over time, this article contributes to understanding of the role of experts and policy failure in the (re)making of transnational security governance.

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1. Introduction

In October 2014, Rudolph Giuliani, former mayor of New York City, gave a speech to leading representatives of the Guatemalan private sector and government about how to improve “citizen security.” In his speech, Giuliani promoted basic elements of his “trademark” policy advice: a “zero tolerance” policing (ZTP) approach to urban security governance. This approach was first implemented by the New York City Police Department (NYPD) during Giuliani’s first term as mayor (1994–1997). ZTP is based on insights generated by a “new generation of social scientists” that from the 1980s onwards started taking crime “serious” by arguing that in order to prevent crime, policing should “attack sub-criminal social disorder[s],” while these were presented as “quality-of-life offenses” (Dennis, 1998: 28). The most prominent example of this approach is the so-called “broken windows theory,” developed by criminologist Georg L. Kelling and political scientist James Q. Wilson (Kelling and Wilson, 1982), and which informed NYPD’s ZTP

approach. The latter “focuses on police presence and aggressive order maintenance enforcement often for minor misdemeanor behaviors to create a deterrent effect and dissuade those disposed to crime from committing those crimes” (Greene, 2014: 173). From the mid-2000s onwards, ZTP has been increasingly exported towards Latin America under the banner of *mano dura* (strong hand), or simply *tolerancia zero* (Becker and Müller, 2013; Davis, 2013; Mountz and Curran, 2009; Müller, 2012; Swanson, 2013), leading to a growing “securitization of urban space” (Becker and Müller, 2013; Gledhill, 2015; Müller, 2016) throughout the region. In the case of Central America, this was directly related to the growing presence, visibility, and concerns regarding street gangs (Cruz, 2011; Gutiérrez Rivera, 2013; Hume, 2008; Müller, 2015; Wolf, 2011; Zilberg, 2011).

While being “tough on crime” through repressive police action remained a core element of Giuliani’s proposals to improve citizen security, his presentation increasingly moved beyond the focus on public policing towards the direct involvement of local communities in governing urban security, by “appealing to the intellect and the heart” of the population—an effort that is therefore “beyond politics” (Giuliani, 2014).

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Giuliani's visit, in a paradigmatic way, illustrates current shifts in urban security governance rationales in Guatemala that are related to newly emerging forms of transnational security expertise, which call for supposedly more emancipatory, community-centered bottom-up approaches to urban security governance, often articulated in the language of "resilience." Broadly understood as "the capacity to absorb shocks and bounce back," the concept stresses "the important ability to move between different states of temporary equilibrium, like those characterizing periods of prolonged disturbance and crisis, while at the same time maintaining system functionality" (Duffield, 2012: 481). From its origins in 1970s systems ecology, resilience has recently expanded beyond the domain of natural sciences and gained increasing prominence in many areas of the social sciences (Walker and Cooper, 2011: 144). This includes the area of security studies, where the concept has become "the new super hero in town" (Dunn Cavelti et al., 2015: 3) for academics, security practitioners and consultants interested in promoting "urban resilience" (Coaffee and Lee, 2016; Koonings and Kruijt, 2015a; Kilcullen, 2012)—including Giuliani who already in 2008 promoted a "resilient society [of] active, engaged citizens" (Giuliani, 2008).

Situated within the context of the rise of "resilience-thinking," the at first sight contradictory coexistence in contemporary Guatemala of two strategies—scientifically grounded ZTP targeting those at urban society's margins through aggressive, and often violent, "order maintenance patrolling" (Punch, 2007: 18; Smith, 1998) and scientific community-centered resilience approaches that seek to empower the same communities repressive policing is meant to repress (Koonings and Kruijt, 2015b: 18; DeVerteuil, 2016: 69–70)—invites for an analytical assessment of continuity and change in transnational security governance rationales in the country by asking how and why scientific expertise "shapes the politics of security" (Rychnovská et al., forthcoming). Asking for the "why" is even more pertinent when considering that Giuliani's visit is only the most recent episode of over 130 years of U.S. police and security assistance to the country, which throughout most of this period was not based on scientifically grounded security expertise, nor was it considered as being "beyond politics." Rather, "professional competence" (DOS, 1962: 2) in the craft of "policemanship" (USICA, 1956: n.p.) and external advice by "persons with broad experience in police administration" (USICA, 1957: 2) was what qualified external police advisors and their expertise for a job in Guatemala. And the overall goal of such assignments was political in a straightforward way, namely to "[s]trengthen the capability of civil police and paramilitary forces to counter communist-inspired or exploited subversion and insurgency" (DOS, 1962: 2). Thus, the more recent *scientification* of transnational security governance in the country indicates changes regarding the issue of security experts' authority, indicating a shift from an authority grounded in practical experience to one grounded in the mastering of scientific security expertise.

The analysis of these changing forms of transnational security governance and security expertise in Guatemala over time is the focus of this article. We argue that the dynamics of transnational security governance in Guatemala are directly related to the local appropriation of security governance discourses, practices and resources provided by external security experts. As an expertise-based form of "intervention by invitation" (Nolte, 2012), local political and economic elites engage in securitization strategies (Buzan et al., 1998) that grant external security experts the right to authoritatively "speak security" in Guatemala. In turn, through their intervention these experts (re)define and even create "local" security needs, which are often then captured and exploited by local actors to pursue their own interests.

Through this focus, we contribute to the debate on transnational "geographies of governance" (Prince, 2012) by demonstrat-

ing that transnational security governance promoted by actors from the Global North is not simply "imposed" on states in the Global South. Rather it is negotiated, resisted and appropriated by local actors—and thereby substantially modified. This modification implies that—at least from the perspective of external security experts—the importation of security governance expertise often fails. Our analysis thus sheds light on how and why "policy failure" (Peck, 2011: 782) in the context of security governance in Guatemala has become the driver for a *self-reinforcing interventionary feedback loop* that aims at "fixing" the shortcomings of previous interventions by mobilizing new external security expertise.

This external security expertise, we furthermore demonstrate, is always embedded in a particular geopolitical context. While most of the twentieth century's external security expertise was "practical expertise" that aimed at countering insurgencies within a geopolitical Cold War framework, external security governance in Guatemala after the 1990s moved away from a political policing in the name of countering the communist "subversion" towards a seemingly apolitical form of security provision grounded in "objective" scientific security expertise. On closer inspection, however, there is a remarkable continuity with the counterinsurgent past. The new transnational security governance rationales ultimately render urban "at-risk populations" legible and governable in the name of security, and, at the same time, conceal the underlying politics of order-making. The latter, accordingly, reinforces existing patterns of sociopolitical exclusion and marginalization inherited from Guatemala's counterinsurgent past through a scientific depoliticization of security issues.

The article is structured as follows. We first develop an analytical framework for assessing the changing role of external expertise and its local appropriation in transnational security governance. Next, by drawing upon historical sources¹ we apply our analytical framework to the analysis of transnational security governance expertise and its local appropriation during Guatemala's "long Cold War" (Joseph and Grandin, 2010). In a third step, we analyze continuity and change regarding the role of external expertise and local appropriation in transnational security governance in contemporary Guatemala. In the conclusion, we summarize our main findings and elaborate upon their implications for a deeper understanding of external expertise in shaping the dynamics of transnational security governance in Guatemala.

Our analysis draws upon historical and contemporary policy documents as well as interviews with external and local security experts. The analysis of policy documents—past and present—allows us to reconstruct what Stoler (2013: 5) termed the "protracted imperial process that saturates the subsoil of people's lives and persists, sometimes subjectively, over a longue durée." In order to uncover this longue durée, reading contemporary and historical policy documents together with interview data allows for pointing towards the ways in which external—or in Stoler's words "imperial"—governance expertise was and continues to be "evaded and refused" by those on the receiving end (Stoler, 2013: 4). In other words, it enables us to assess how evasion and refusal—as well as appropriation—are productive in the sense that they allow for the continuity of external security governance exports despite their ongoing failures and what that means for the changing role of security expertise. To this end, we applied the method of Qualitative Content Analysis (Eto et al., 2014; Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2012) as a means for interpreting our data and developing a conceptually informed analytical narrative centered on these questions.

¹ Our research benefitted greatly from documents made available by the National Security Archive: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu>.

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