

Seeking protection in mega-territories? When the state cannot protect its citizens

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The general context:

State informalization, fear, violence

“ *La policía representa el referente más directo de autoridad y las formas de ejercicio de la justicia de un país; por esto su presencia en la convivencia social resulta relevante, constituye el primer escalón de la relación entre ciudadanos y el sistema de procuración de justicia. El tipo de relación que la sociedad guarda con estos grupos es indicador de la percepción que la sociedad tiene del Estado y de su sistema de gobierno.* ”

(Alvarado, 2014: 276-277)



Mexico has 355 police officers/100,000 people (world average is 320)



46% of detentions will end up without sentencing - *Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública (Envipe) 2013*

If many marginalized youths do not see in the police institution
or the State a venue for protection,
where do they seek such protection?

Facing the incapacity of the state to equally distribute justice and
protection in this mega-territory,
how are micro-spaces of urban mega-territories regulated?

The hypothesis that **urban space constitutes a key mechanism for protection.**

Religion, and particularly urban adaptations of religious practices, has become an increasingly visible form of
protection in certain micro-spaces of the megacity.

Modalities of power

Impunity opens a large space of social relations between the moment a crime is committed and its eventual punishment.

These social relations unfold through different mechanisms (abuse, negotiation, protection)

Each of these mechanisms work with different modalities of power (domination, coercion, manipulation, persuasion, authority, seduction)

Abuse of power

- domination and surveillance
- coercion and repression

Negotiation

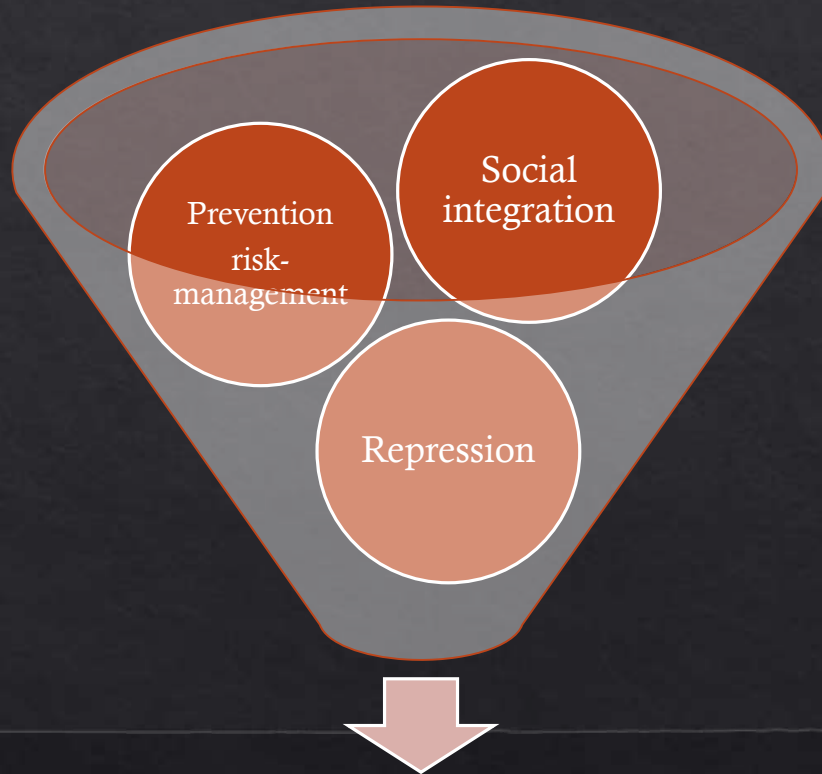
- manipulation
- persuasion

Protection

- authority
- seduction

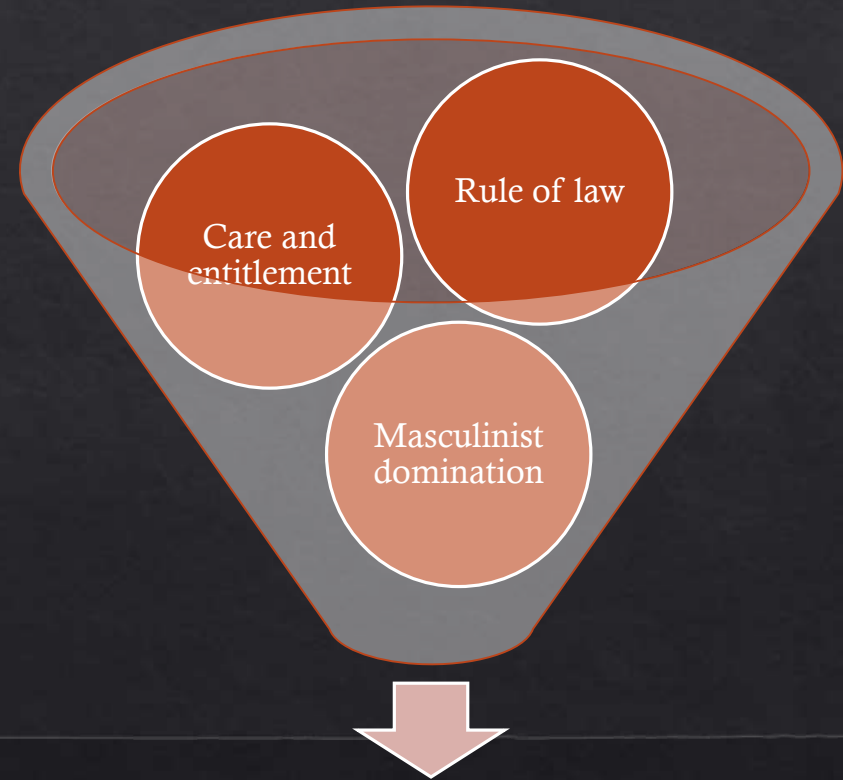
Policy focus

Transgression



Territorial governance

Protection



Territorial governance



However, with rapid urbanization, states are facing an increasingly complex sociospatial territory which is very difficult to protect.

How are these micro-spaces of urban mega-territories regulated?

Urban religious practices have become an increasingly visible form of protection marking micro-spaces of mega-territories.

“nos estamos enfrentando a una espiritualización de diversos espacios de socialidad, como la política, el trabajo, las relaciones de producción, donde lo humano y lo suprahumano se asumen en relaciones menos verticales e inaccesibles a cualquiera, y más horizontales.” (Galán-Castro y Martínez Trejo, 2016: 85).

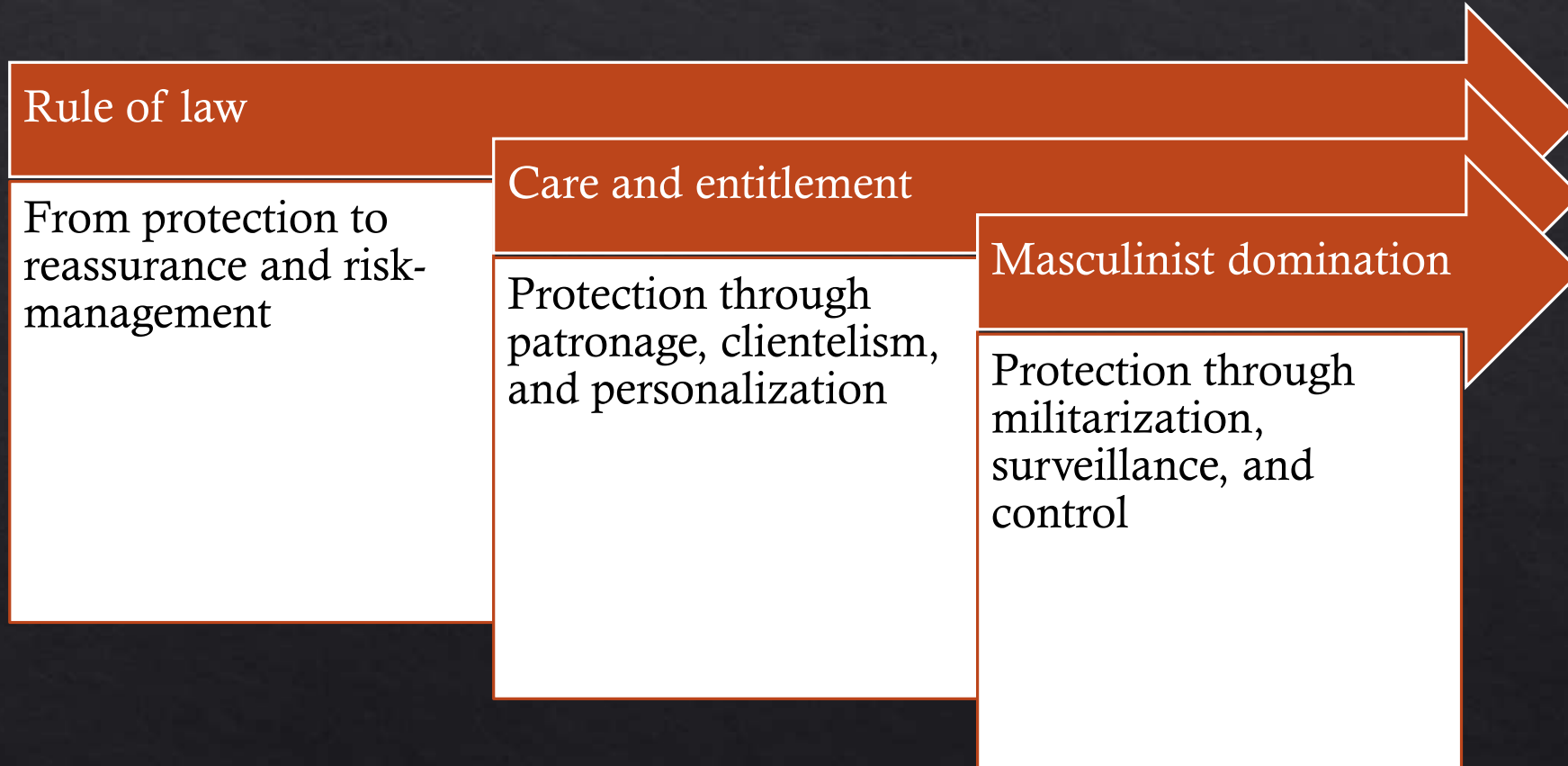
Why is that? And how does it manifest itself in megacities such as Mexico?



Understanding changes in our conception of protection

From state protection to care, spirituality, and paternalism

Different forms of protection to...



... protection by marking micro-spaces of urban mega-territories: Youthful spirituality



Marking micro-spaces for protection

Tepito



Territorial protection

« I feel that if they [youths] give importance [to their neighbourhoods] it's because they feel they have power, the power that their family gives them, and the power that the place or the situation gives them. They feel incredible, 'cause nothing can be done against them.» (police officer, Iztapalapa)



Focusing on transgression while analysing youths:

“esto ha ocultado al análisis la fuerte reproducción de algunos valores de la cultura tradicional, como el machismo o incluso la aceptación pasiva de una realidad opresora que se vive a través de una religiosidad popular profundamente arraigada en algunos colectivos juveniles.” (Reguillo, 2012: 28)

If urban micro-spaces are marked by religious artefacts or practices, and if youths inhabiting in these spaces further mark their bodies with such religious images, what does such logic protection mean for the state?

Personalized logic of protection

Example of San Judas Tadeo

- ◆ demand for individual protection
- ◆ In Catholicism, *amparo* means refuge or protection. Prayers serve to ask for “*un paro.*”
- ◆ A formal legal concept, “*amparo*” serves to protect the rights of individuals by giving discretionary power for judges to block the application of a law that would impede basic rights

Public logic of protection

Example of the Comision de Derechos Humanos

- ◆ The social category of discrimination is based on collective attributes such as gender, religion, ethnicity, and so on.
- ◆ Even if protection works from a personal case in specific situations, its logic is to protect an entire category of discriminated people and thus it depersonalizes the protection.

Conclusion

Citizens of the megalópolis cannot simply be protected through the modern logic of public state protection. Such logic does not work in many micro-spaces.

But Mexico has a long tradition of working with both personalized and public protection.

My hope is that by better understanding how these logics work together, we will be better positioned to develop innovative and flexible policies for Mexico.

