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DOI:

[10.1017/S0022216X24000063](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X24000063)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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Citation for published version (APA):

Torino, G. (2024). Mestizo Urbanism: Enduring Racial Intersections in Latin American Cities. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 56(1), 37-62. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X24000063>

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mestizo Urbanism: Enduring Racial Intersections in Latin American Cities

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(Received 21 July 2022; revised 10 November 2023; accepted 17 November 2023; first published online 21 March 2024)

Abstract

Across Latin America, there continues to be strong resistance to the claim that racism plays a role in the production of urban space. Deemed antipatriotic, this issue remains widely unaddressed in urban planning and geography. Based on qualitative research in Bogotá and secondary literature on other Latin American cities, this article explores the afterlife of *mestizaje* (racial mixture) as a racial-colonial project from the viewpoint of its materialisation in the city and society-space relations. In particular, it illustrates how racism in the city is transfigured as 'always something else' (e.g., culture, class, regionalism, displacement) through a variety of normative, discursive and operational devices. Thus, the article confronts the need to divest from the racial hegemony of *mestizaje* in urban planning and geography, suggesting that it is hindering the path towards more equitable urban futures.

Keywords: race; *mestizaje*; coloniality; neoliberalism; Latin American cities; anti-blackness

Introduction

Bogotá, La Candelaria historic centre. It is almost 2 p.m. and we had just finished a hearty *sancocho* (chicken stew) at Chucho's, one of Bogotá's go-to places for Pacific Afro-Colombian cuisine, as well as a local institution for Black political and cultural get-togethers in the city, especially during the 1990s and 2000s. This is where Afro-Colombian leaders met to discuss the drafting of the Law of Black Communities,¹ where the first students from the disadvantaged Chocó department to study in the capital would go for an affordable lunch and to build community in the predominantly Mestizo metropolis, and where, today, social

¹The Ley de Comunidades Negras, no. 70/93, which recognised the rights and cultural identity of Black Communities: <https://www.minagricultura.gov.co/Normatividad/Leyes/Ley%2070%20de%201993.pdf>, last access 25 Jan. 2024.

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and cultural leaders are to be found eating alongside curious tourists or hungry researchers who are always up for listening to the jokes and football news of the restaurant's jovial owner.

Chucho's restaurant is just slightly off the beaten track leading to the other Afro-Colombian gastronomic and cultural centres of Bogotá's city centre, such as 7th Avenue, or the so-called 'Pacific enclave' by 4th Avenue, where restaurateurs, hair stylists and other traders are to be found inviting passers-by to sample their fare or buy their wares. As I walk out of Chucho's, passing in front of the fruit carts of multiple Afro-Colombian vendors, I head towards the nearby office of one of the country's top city and regional planners, an urban expert with a stellar international career and a list of prosperous personal contacts including construction companies, politicians and municipal officers. Given her extensive planning expertise in both academia and practice, across South America and the United States, I am eager to share with her a few hypotheses that I had started to formulate in my research about the making of racialised sociospatial relations in Bogotá. Yet, as we start to talk about these issues, steaming cups of *tinto* (coffee) before us, Paula² looks increasingly sceptical.

'Racial segregation?! This is not the United States!' Her reaction to my question on the relationship between race-making and space-making in Colombian and Latin American cities seems, palpably, one of denial. Racialisation in and through the urban space is *just not* a Latin American issue, according to her and the majority of architects, urbanists and planning officers whom I interviewed. Deemed antipatriotic, racialisation often remains taboo in Colombia: the nation is one and, according to its Constitution, multicultural and pluri-ethnic.³ Consequently, racism continues to be widely unaddressed in national and, more broadly, regional urban studies and planning. It also continues to be mistaken for a discrete object: one limited to individual discriminatory acts rather than as structural relations between the making of space and society.

In Paula's office, in one of Colombia's most elite private universities, Black activists' many denunciations of structural racism in the city's spaces resonate sharply in my mind, as a reminder of the violence of Latin America's Mestizo politics. In fact, just a few weeks before, a Black social leader named Tomás had concluded a meeting of Afro-Colombian activists, artists and intellectuals organised by the Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas (National Conference of Afro-Colombian Organisations, CNOA) with a categorical accusation: 'They kill us and still they cannot see us.' What do the divergent perspectives of urban professionals, on the one hand, and of social leaders and activists, on the other, reveal and what do they conceal about Colombia's and Latin America's history of spatial violence and racial capitalism? And why is the relationship between race-making and space-making seemingly so tacit in Latin American studies and planning?

²All personal names used in this article are pseudonyms. None of these changes impacts the analysis.

³Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991, art. 7.

Echoing Edward Telles and Denia Garcia's resonant claim that all 'racial meanings are context dependent',⁴ this article approaches the questions above from a situated perspective rooted in the geographical and historical experiences of race-making in Latin America, with a particular focus on Colombia's most 'diverse' and 'cosmopolitan' city, Bogotá.⁵ While acknowledging growing debates on Indigenous urbanism in Latin America⁶ and the ways in which Indigenous urban livelihoods, knowledges and spaces are also constantly undermined by the politics of racial capitalism,⁷ this article takes an epistemological stance rooted in the experiences of Black urban dwellers and in a critique of anti-blackness as a specific form of racialised oppression in the Americas and beyond.⁸ Furthermore, while aware of specificities across the Latin American region (with its 'hemispheric' and transnational ecologies

⁴Edward Telles and Denia Garcia, 'Mestizaje and Public Opinion in Latin America', *Latin American Research Review*, 48: 3 (2013), p. 131.

⁵Claudia Mosquera Rosero, *Estrategias de inserción de la población negra en Santafé de Bogotá: Acá en Bogotá antes no se veían negros* (Bogotá: Instituto Distrital de Cultura y Turismo, 1998); Fatimah Williams Castro, 'Afro-Colombians and the Cosmopolitan City: New Negotiations of Race and Space in Bogotá, Colombia', *Latin American Perspectives*, 40: 2 (2013), pp. 105–17; Giulia Torino, 'The Governmentality of Multiculturalism: From National Pluri-Ethnicity to Urban Cosmopolitanism in Bogotá', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 28: 6 (2021), pp. 699–716.

⁶Philipp Horn, *Indigenous Rights to the City: Ethnicity and Urban Planning in Bolivia and Ecuador* (London: Routledge, 2019); Aiko Ikemura Amaral, Philipp Horn and Desirée Poets, 'Introduction: Indigenous Urbanisation in Latin America', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 41: 1 (2022), pp. 3–5; Dana Brablec and Andrew Canessa (eds.), *Urban Indigenities: Being Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2023).

⁷According to a recent municipal analysis of Bogotá's ethno-racial residential distribution, there were 37,266 Indigenous people in the capital city in 2014, as opposed to 69,091 registered in 2011. See Fernando Urrea Giraldo and Carlos Viáfara López, *Igualdad para un buen y mejor vivir: Información y visibilidad estadística de los grupos étnico-raciales en Bogotá* (Cali: Universidad del Valle, 2016). This data set also shows that there were 115,088 Afro-Colombians in Bogotá in 2014, whereas the latest national census (2018) enumerates only 66,934 Afro-Colombians. Indigenous and Black social organisations, alongside activists and sociologists, have complained that these numbers conceal much higher concentrations of the 'ethnic population' in Colombia, in general, and in Bogotá, in particular, due to factors that include: the racial bias inherent in the way the 'ethnic question' (*pregunta étnica*) is expressed or not expressed at all by municipal officers during the door-to-door census; individual choices to self-identify as 'Mestizo' to escape racial profiling and discrimination; the considerable residential concentration of (often, internally displaced) Afro-Colombian citizens on the edges of Bogotá, such as in Soacha, who, despite working in Bogotá, do not register in the municipal census; state underinvestment in conducting the national census. What is clear, in any case, is that Afro-Colombians are predominantly urbanised and socio-economically underprivileged: according to the national census of 2018, approximately 66.8 per cent live in the main urban centres and only 14.2 per cent in dispersed rural centres, while 86.1 per cent live in the lowest socio-economic strata. See Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas (DANE), *Censo nacional de población y vivienda 2018* (Bogotá: DANE, 2019). For a visualisation of the spatial concentration of Afro-Colombians in Bogotá and its correspondence with the city's lowest socio-economic strata, see Figure 1.

⁸Jaime Amparo Alves, *The Anti-Black City: Police Terror and Black Urban Life in Brazil* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2018); Adam Bledsoe, 'The Primacy of Anti-Blackness', *Area*, 52: 3 (2020), pp. 472–9; João Costa Vargas, 'Racismo não dá conta: Antinegitude, a dinâmica ontológica e social definidora da modernidade', *Revista em Pauta*, 18: 45 (2020), pp. 16–26.

of race),⁹ this article focuses on the shared history and similarities that different urban and national realities have in common across the region. First and foremost, as we shall see, these have to do with the influence of the racial ideology of *mestizaje* (racial mixture).

Overall, this article shows that the ideology of *mestizaje* racially informs contemporary urban knowledge and practices, highlighting the (in)capacity of Latin American urbanism to recognise its endogenous racialised designs and spatial politics. The article starts from a fundamental epistemic antagonism in city-making observed, in Bogotá, between the spatial knowledge of Black communities and that of urban experts and planning officers. It then examines the encroachment of what are here defined as the *normative*, *discursive* and *operational* devices that have concealed the presence of ‘race’ in city-making, and it locates them in the broader schema of *Mestizo urbanism*. I define the latter as the mainstream way of knowing and producing the city in Latin America, whereby the different manifestations of racism are hidden in plain sight as ‘always something else’ (culture, class, regionalism, etc.). To overcome this problem and resituate (an awareness of) the spatial workings of racism in Latin American urban space, governance and planning, the article finally suggests the need to name and, subsequently, divest from *mestizaje* as the underlying racial ideology of shaping and knowing the city.

By drawing on seven years of situated research in Bogotá, Colombia and Latin America, this work contributes new empirical and conceptual material to growing studies on the urban politics of race-making and space-making in the Americas and beyond. In line with a decolonial critique of knowledge production, it suggests that thinking about racial urbanities from Latin America can engender new ways of understanding the racialisation of space across the continent and in other world geographies, especially as various racial registers and ideologies are increasingly shifting towards Latin America’s.¹⁰ At the same time, this work highlights that particular local and regional forms of sociospatial division and violence are located, and need to be understood, within the global workings of coloniality and racial capitalism.¹¹

The overall research project from which this article stems involved participant observation, ethnographic diaries, oral histories, photography, critical analysis of municipal and experts’ discourses, documents and media representations, and 88 structured, semi-structured and in-depth interviews conducted by the author in Colombia (in Spanish). This article draws, in particular, on participant observation between August 2017 and August 2019, and on long-form interviews conducted over the same period in Bogotá with urban experts (in universities, governmental and non-governmental institutions), municipal officers,

⁹Sofia Zaragocin, ‘Geographies of the Global South and the Hemispheric Scale’, *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 0: 0 (2023), pp. 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20438206231179227>.

¹⁰Tanya Kateri Hernandez, ‘Multiracial Matrix: The Role of Race Ideology in the Enforcement of Antidiscrimination Laws, a United States–Latin America Comparison’, *Cornell Law Review*, 87: 5 (2002), pp. 1093–1187.

¹¹Edgardo Lander (ed.), *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales, perspectivas latinoamericanas* (Buenos Aires and Caracas: CLACSO, 2020); Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Press, 1983); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation* (London: Verso, 2022).

community leaders and social organisations, such as CNOA, the Asociación Nacional de Afrocolombianos Desplazados (National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians, AFRODES) and Cimarrón, which work for social justice and anti-racism in Colombia.

In the Wake of *Mestizaje*: The Presence/Absence of Race in Latin American Cities

It is well known that *mestizaje* shaped Latin American post-independence republics considerably during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The myth of racial harmony that it professed stemmed from the social, biological and cultural mixing that occurred in the region during and after colonisation. As a post-colonial ideology, often opposed to US imperialism and European colonial domination, *mestizaje* celebrated racial equality under the auspices of a mixed-race identity that allegedly united the descendants of European, Amerindian and African peoples in the same, ‘raceless’, society. Despite *mestizaje*’s purported claims to universal equality and syncretism, however, its paradox lies in the fact that the very ideology that assumed the task of dismantling colonial difference became the chief apparatus of social stratification in everyday life, ‘in both public and intimate spheres’.¹²

Peter Wade highlights how, unlike other post-colonialist processes of mixture around the world, *mestizaje* has been far less a subversive hybridity than an ideology of oppression: it was moved by a will to order along racial lines and a wish to homogenise guided by the ideology – but also the economic, political, cultural, intimate and social practices – of whitening, or *blanqueamiento*.¹³ In other words, *mestizaje* promoted a racialised fabulation constructed upon a form of White supremacy that, while claiming to account for the nation as a whole, was far from representing and protecting its pluri-ethnic heterogeneity. Moreover, as Telles points out, through its romanticised narratives *mestizaje* enabled Latin American states to evade any legal accountability towards, and representation of, their inherently pluri-ethnic nations.¹⁴ It would not be until the 1980s–90s that Latin American states took up that accountability, through a series of constitutional reforms aimed at recognising nation-states as multicultural and pluri-ethnic.¹⁵ In Colombia, this famously happened with Article 7 of the 1991 Constitution, which for the first time introduced radical changes in respect of ‘ethnic and cultural diversity’.¹⁶ Above all, it ‘eliminated [the] assimilationism’ that had

¹²Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), p. 95.

¹³Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Wade, *Race and Ethnicity* and ‘Rethinking *Mestizaje*: Ideology and Lived Experience’, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 37: 2 (2005), pp. 239–57.

¹⁴Edward E. Telles, *Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁵Tanya Katerí Hernández, *La subordinación racial en Latinoamérica: El papel del Estado, el derecho consuetudinario y la nueva respuesta a los derechos humanos* (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 2013).

¹⁶Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991, art. 7.

characterised nationhood until that moment, whereby Black communities had to undergo 'integration' into the (Mestizo) nation.¹⁷

In the wake of its official demise as a regional ideology, however, *mestizaje* has continued to mark everyday social practices.¹⁸ In other words, while national ideologies and legal frameworks progressively transitioned from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism, making increasingly more space for multicultural communities, as elsewhere in the world, the ideology of *mestizaje* maintained significance across the region and failed to be superseded.¹⁹

This article argues that a way to understand the afterlife of *mestizaje* as a racial-colonial project is to look at city-making processes in the region. Yet this is something that has seldom been done. Primarily, this means interrogating how race-making is linked to space-making. Indeed, at the centre of this article is the claim that the racial ideology of *mestizaje* has been materialised in the physical landscapes of Latin American cities, as well as in their planning policy and everyday practices of city-making. We are, however, faced with a question: If Latin America's modern racial geographies have not been inscribed in law, how do racial dynamics shape cities? Indeed, the racialisation of space may be seen as a paradox in Latin American cities, since it is the physical and symbolical embodiment of social markers and divisions on the grounds of something as elusive (and, as we shall see, often disguised) as Latin America's racial ideology. For example, as Wade poignantly shows, *mestizaje* has not simply excluded or marginalised Black and Indigenous peoples through nation-building processes based on whitening; it has also provided spaces for inclusion. These are, however, usually conditional, controlled and limited: a geography of simultaneous 'presence and absence'.²⁰

In fact, while the majority (over 82 per cent) of Afro-Latin Americans now live in cities, they still do 'not benefit proportionally from the privileged economic conditions of cities'.²¹ Rather, they live 'often relegated to areas with poor access to services and jobs, and exposed to higher levels of pollution, crime, violence, and natural disasters'.²² Urban Indigenous groups are in a similar situation, with nearly half of them residing in cities where they 'tend to live in conditions that are less secure, less sanitary, and more disaster prone than those of non-Indigenous urban residents'.²³ However, research on the racialisation of space in Latin America has mostly been confined to non-urban milieus. While there is a growing literature in the humanities

¹⁷Jaime Arocha, 'Inclusion of Afro-Colombians: Unreachable National Goal?', *Latin American Perspectives*, 25: 3 (1998), p. 70.

¹⁸Charles R. Hale, 'Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central America', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 28: 1 (2005), p. 25.

¹⁹Peter Wade, 'Afro-Latin Studies: Reflections on the Field', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 1: 1 (2006), pp. 105–24 and 'The Presence and Absence of Race', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 44: 1 (2010), pp. 43–60; Telles and Garcia, 'Mestizaje'.

²⁰Wade, 'The Presence and Absence'.

²¹Germán Freire *et al.* (eds.), *Afro-Descendants in Latin America: Toward a Framework of Inclusion* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018), p. 65.

²²*Ibid.*

²³The World Bank, *Indigenous Latin America in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015), p. 6.

and social sciences on the racial making of urban dynamics in the region,²⁴ Latin American urban scholarship and urban professionals have often failed to draw attention to how race plays a crucial role in city-making – from everyday space-making to state interventions and urban planning – rather than merely in the making of social inequalities of which the city is the background. Consequently, this article investigates how the afterlife of *mestizaje* racially produces the urban and, conversely, how the urban becomes a key tool for the neoliberal management of racial difference and the maintenance of a racial–colonial social order through space.

In the next section, we turn our gaze to the city to ask how the geographies of *mestizaje* contribute to reproduce and conceal racialised divisions and violence in the time and space of cities, and how the myth of the raceless Latin American city still stands. The premise is a call to question the mainstream spatial imagination that influences how Latin American cities are understood, that represents them as raceless, and that moulds the foundations of urban knowledge, policy and practices, hindering the path towards more equal urban futures and a democratised access to the city.

The Myth of the Raceless City of the South and the Racial City of the North

Of all the internationally acclaimed planning effervescences that Colombian cities have witnessed since the turn of the century,²⁵ Paula cannot fathom how my research interest fell onto something that is, according to her, as irrelevant and

²⁴Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Odile Hoffmann, Olivier Barbary and Elisabeth Cunin, 'Ciudad y etnicidad: Configuraciones de la etnicidad negra en la ciudad', in Françoise Dureau *et al.* (eds.), *Ciudades y sociedades en mutación: Lecturas cruzadas sobre Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado, 2007), pp. 237–92; Olivier Barbary and Fernando Urrea (eds.), *Gente negra en Colombia: Dinámicas sociopolíticas en Cali y el Pacífico* (Cali: Universidad del Valle, 2004); Dureau *et al.* (eds.), *Ciudades y sociedades en mutación*; Zaire Zenit Dinzey-Flores, *Locked In, Locked Out: Gated Communities in a Puerto Rican City* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Lea Geler, 'Categorías raciales en Buenos Aires. Negritud, blanquitud, afrodescendencia y mestizaje en la blanca ciudad capital', *Runa: Archivo Para las Ciencias del Hombre*, 37: 1 (2016), pp. 71–87; Austin Zeiderman, 'Submergence: Precarious Politics in Colombia's Future Port-City', *Antipode*, 48: 3 (2016), pp. 809–31; Alves, *The Anti-Black City*; Antonio Sérgio Alfredo Guimarães, 'Racialisation and Racial Formation in Urban Spaces', *Social Identities*, 25: 1 (2019), pp. 76–90; Tathagatan Ravindran, 'Geographies of Indigenous Identity: Spatial Imaginaries and Racialised Power Struggles in Bolivia', *Antipode*, 51: 3 (2019), pp. 949–67; Ángela María Franco Calderón, *Marginalidad oculta: Políticas de vivienda social y vivienda gratuita en Colombia* (Cali: Universidad del Valle, 2020); Lea Geler, Carmen Yannone and Alejandra Egido, 'Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires en el siglo XX. El proceso de suburbanización', *Quinto Sol*, 24: 3 (2020), pp. 1–26; Silvia Amaral *et al.*, 'Memoria y reparación integral de la comunidad afrouuguayaya en tiempos de terrorismo de Estado', 2021, available at www.gub.uy/institucion-nacional-derechos-humanos-uruguay/sites/institucion-nacional-derechos-humanos-uruguay/files/documentos/noticias/Memoria%20y%20Reparacio%CC%81n%20comunidad%20Afro_WEB.pdf, last access 31 Jan. 2024; Stella Zagatto Paterniani, 'Ocupações, práxis espacial negra e branquidade: Para uma crítica da branquidade nos estudos urbanos paulistas', *Revista de Antropologia*, 65: 2 (2022), pp. 1–25.

²⁵From Medellín's famous 'social urbanism' to Bogotá's 'pedagogical urbanism'. See Rachel Berney, *Learning from Bogotá: Pedagogical Urbanism and the Reshaping of Public Space* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017).

invisible as the relationship between race-making and city-making. In her own words: 'How many people are we even talking about? The entity of the issue, besides that Afro-Colombians are diluted in space and *almost not to be encountered anywhere*, makes the question [of the racialisation of space] one that has just not been relevant' (emphasis added). 'I think you are mistaken', she concluded, 'I have never gotten into ethnic [*sic*] issues nor do I know anyone who does.'

To Bogotá's urban planners the fact itself that Black urbanites are, in Paula's words, 'almost not to be encountered anywhere' – that is in the spaces of the city that people like Paula inhabit and navigate – does not constitute foundational evidence of 'the issue' in and of itself but, vice versa, a proof that 'the issue' does not exist at all. However, a few steps away from Paula's office and the government's buildings – for example, by the 7th Avenue, or by the equally trafficked TransMilenio stations of the city centre, or the busy 'Pacific Enclave' nearby the 4th Avenue – Afro-Colombian informal vendors, restaurateurs, hair stylists and other traders are to be found every day. It seems, therefore, that 'not encountering them anywhere', as Paula claimed, has more to do with an arbitrary selectivity than an actual lack of presence.

Paula's decision to depoliticise race by framing racial inequality as 'ethnic issues' is also worth noticing, as it has been a mantra in the responses that I received from the urban experts I interviewed. While in Latin America ethnicity is often folklorised and turned into cultural capital in the neoliberal system,²⁶ and cities increasingly regulate 'diversity' according to the needs of the neoliberal market,²⁷ race and racism remain synonyms with the unspeakable among most planning officers, urban experts and architects. From this perspective, it is inconceivable to argue for the racialisation of access, sociospatial violence, apportionment of rights, and inequality in Latin American cities. As Paula cared to remind me, 'this is not the United States' where, according to her and many others, racism *does* shape the American city.

Furthermore, by defining Latin America's racial issues as 'ethnic issues', urban experts are evoking a common myth: that the race ideology and spatial configurations of post-Jim Crow cities in the United States represent a universal model, which univocally determines what the racialisation of cities *can* look like in the Americas. Problematically, such a myth unequivocally refuses any engagement with the sociospatial relations between race-making and space-making in urban Latin America. According to that logic, it must follow that the city is not shaped by racism. Indeed, urban experts like Alan Gilbert assert that, in Latin America, the 'ghetto' is of the socio-economic rather than the racial kind and that, if 'ghetto' had any meaning at all in the region, that would be the one of affluent gated communities.²⁸ A similar colour-blind approach, which denies the role of racism in shaping the urban, is not an exception.

²⁶Hale, 'Neoliberal Multiculturalism'.

²⁷Melissa M. Valle, 'The Discursive Detachment of Race from Gentrification in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41: 7 (2018), pp. 1235–54.

²⁸Alan Gilbert, 'On the Absence of Ghettoes in Latin American Cities', in Ray Hutchison and Bruce D. Haynes (eds.), *The Ghetto: Contemporary Global Issues and Controversies* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2012), pp. 191–224.

Yet, some Latin American scholars have countered similar views from early on. In Brazil, Telles affirms: ‘Whereas extreme segregation in South Africa and the United States has led to a high degree of race consciousness and corporate organisation, moderate segregation and the absence of clearly-defined racial categories have led to their relative absence in Brazil.’²⁹ More recently, Jaime Alves has shown that the Brazilian city itself cannot be understood outside of the necropolitical violence that it operates on Black bodies – or, as he emblematically puts it: ‘if the city were a text, black blood would be the ink’.³⁰ In Colombia, patterns of ‘ghettoisation’ of Black urban residents in Cali have been observed and analysed across all socio-economic levels since at least the 1990s.³¹ In more recent years, Ángela Franco Calderón has showed that residential segregation persists in the distribution of Black and Indigenous residents in popular neighbourhoods ‘even in projects promoted by the government’, such as Llano Verde in Cali, ‘despite the fact that the need to formulate specific policies to prevent racial discrimination has dominated political discourse during the last decade’.³² In Argentina, Black residents in Buenos Aires were pushed increasingly more towards spatial and social invisibility through a process that Lea Geler, Carmen Yannone and Alejandra Egido define as ‘suburbanisation’, with profound racial implications.³³ In Uruguay, Black urban communities have endured displacements and evictions throughout the second half of the twentieth century, until our present days.³⁴ In Puerto Rico, Zaire Dinzey-Flores explores how housing segregation cements race, gender and class inequality, creating ‘a codified cartography of privilege and disadvantage’, whereby the aesthetics of race matches that of architecture.³⁵

In these and more cases, it is also important to signal how patterns of racial segregation in Latin America are often driven by the interlinking of race *and* class hierarchies in space. While the next section will delve more in detail into the implications of this intersection in Bogotá, it is worth recalling here Wade’s observation: ‘To invert a famous phrase of Stuart Hall’s – that “race is the modality in which class is lived” – one could say that [in Latin America] “class is the modality in which race is lived”’.³⁶ Further to that, we can add that space is the modality in which the entanglement of class and race is sustained and lived.

Despite the growing literature mentioned above, capital cities and other major cities in Latin America continue to be normalised as Mestizo. On the one hand, this is due to the history of cities like Bogotá, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Santiago and São Paulo as primary receptors of rural migrant populations coming from different areas within each country, driving the process of urbanisation in the region. On the other hand, cities became hotspots of *mestizaje* through national

²⁹Edward E. Telles, ‘Residential Segregation by Skin Color in Brazil’, *American Sociological Review*, 57: 2 (1992), p. 195.

³⁰Alves, *The Anti-Black City*, p. 60.

³¹Olivier Barbary *et al.*, *Afrocolombianos en el área metropolitana de Cali: Estudios sociodemográficos* (Cali: Universidad del Valle, 1999).

³²Franco Calderón, *Marginalidad oculta*, p. 108.

³³Geler *et al.*, ‘Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires’.

³⁴Bolaña, ‘Memoria afrodescendiente’.

³⁵Dinzey-Flores, *Locked In, Locked Out*, p. 5.

³⁶Wade, ‘Afro-Latin Studies’, p. 111.

projects of, simultaneously, whitening and modernisation. Crucially, such projects were often driven by architecture and planning schools rooted in Euro-American urban models, many of which have been deeply enmeshed in racial ideologies. For example, between the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, the pseudo-science of eugenics considerably influenced architecture and urban planning in Latin America, alongside Europe and the United States.³⁷ As Fabiola López-Durán emphasises, Latin America was ‘the only region in the “developing” world where eugenics was systematically implemented and institutionalised’, and the built environment played a central role in such an experiment of ‘social engineering’.³⁸ This was aimed at controlling people through the control of space and at avoiding the ‘decay of [Latin American] races’, as the Andean doctor Miguel Jiménez argued in 1918.³⁹

As historically Black regions of Colombia such as Chocó and the Pacific Coast were long deemed by the Europhiliac elite (historically residing in Bogotá) to host ‘the savage black race ... insolence, appalling laziness, and scandalous shamelessness’,⁴⁰ it is clear how racialisation and geography have been deeply interlinked in mainstream national imaginaries. In that context, then, modernising the nation was not only an inherently racial process but also one that had to be done in and from major cities, and especially from the capital. There, from the 1940s, the idea of the ‘Athens of South America’ (with its clear allusion to Hellenic ideals of beauty and civilisation) was created, and new masterplans for the city were designed, including the most revered by local architects and urban planners: the one designed by Swiss-French modernist architect Le Corbusier.⁴¹ His vision for Bogotá, which continues to be uncritically celebrated in many schools of architecture and planning in the country, was deeply rooted in eugenics, ‘as a viable doctrine wherein the built environment would be put to work in the so-called remaking of humankind’,⁴² to be shaped on the civilising image (and mission) of White Euro-descendant elites. The sociospatial segregation of cities that accompanied urban modernisation in Colombia and Latin America, then, reveals the conscious social project of White elites to create spaces (and, in particular, spaces of racialised privilege) devoid of Black and Indigenous populations.

This form of *urbanity as whiteness* underpinned much of modernity in the region and continues to animate much architectural and urban knowledge in design and planning schools, while hiding behind the normalisation of cities as Mestizo. This has, at least, two major implications, that will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. First, urban planners and mainstream urban studies

³⁷Introduced by the British scientist Francis Galton in 1883, the notion of eugenics derived from the Greek *εὐγενής* (*eugenēs*; ‘well-born’). It encompasses a set of racialised scientific beliefs aimed at the exercise of biopower through the control of human genetics, in order to ‘improve the human race’ and encourage ‘fit’ individuals to pass on their genetic heritage.

³⁸Fabiola López-Durán, *Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2018).

³⁹Wade, *Race and Ethnicity*, pp. 50–1.

⁴⁰In Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture*, p. 13.

⁴¹Fabio Zambrano Pantoja, ‘De la Atenas suramericana a la Bogotá moderna: La construcción de la cultura ciudadana en Bogotá’, *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 11 (Feb. 2002), pp. 9–16.

⁴²López-Durán, *Eugenics in the Garden*, p. 18.

continue to deny (the implications of) city-making as a racial–colonial project, often on the basis of the myth of racelessness purported by *mestizaje*. Second, racial patterns of city-making in the United States have been used to corroborate the denial of racialisation in urban Latin America. From this perspective, Latin America is then discursively employed as ‘exception’ (of racial harmony) in the Americas.

Given the overall absence of normative racial classification systems in post-colonial Latin America, racial boundaries across the region have historically been more ambiguous than in the United States.⁴³ Inevitably, this gave rise to different spatialisations of structural racism. Yet, while designed divisions and hard boundaries are usually conceived to be the indicators of urban segregation, in Latin America they consistently mark socio-economic (more so than racial) divisions. Consequently, urban experts and planners have often refuted the idea that race and racism play any role in shaping urban inequality and divisions. This article suggests that a change in such an epistemic approach is needed. I want to make the case that it is soft boundaries (such as racialised access to resources and opportunities, epistemic oppression and erasure, psychological and physical violence, symbolic invisibility, territorial stigma, policing, environmental injustice, forced displacement and targeted surveillance), more so than hard boundaries (such as walls, fences or redlining), that best articulate the racialisation of the urban space in Latin America. This is perhaps best emblematised by the summary that Tomás made at the end of the meeting hosted by CNOA, that was reported in the introduction to this article: ‘They kill us and *still they cannot see us*. And *we don’t know who we are fighting against*’ (emphasis added).

From this perspective, despite the undeniable existence of racial ghettoisation in some Latin American cities or urban areas,⁴⁴ it emerges that the racialisation of space in the region is more than just the normative or physical enclosure of people with shared (real or invented) characteristics in a bounded space, like urban planners usually concede. In the afterlife of *mestizaje*, the spatial workings of racialisation are often ambiguous, their boundaries are mobile, and as such they are more difficult to encompass under the limited predispositions of current urban planning frameworks (materialist, normative, bi-dimensional, state-centred, colour-blind). As such, urban planners continue to conceal the racialised workings of spatial violence through a series of tools, criteria and discourses that dissimulate the relationship between racism and space as ‘always something else’. By means of the situated analysis of Bogotá’s urbanism, the following section discusses some of them, with the aim of disentangling how *mestizaje* intervenes into the making of the contemporary city.

⁴³Edward Telles and Tianna Paschel, ‘Who Is Black, White, or Mixed Race? How Skin Color, Status, and Nation Shape Racial Classification in Latin America’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 120: 3 (2014), p. 865.

⁴⁴Barbary *et al.*, *Afrocolombianos*; Barbary and Urrea (eds.), *Gente negra en Colombia*; Dinzey-Flores, *Locked In, Locked Out*; Natalia Duarte Mayorga *et al.*, *Raza y vivienda en Colombia: La segregación residencial y las condiciones de vida en las ciudades* (Bogotá: DeJusticia, 2013); Reinaldo José de Oliveira and Regina Marques de Souza Oliveira, ‘Origens da segregação racial no Brasil’, *Amérique Latine Histoire et Mémoire*, 29 (June 2015), available at <https://journals.openedition.org/allim/5191>, last access 25 Jan. 2024.

Paradigms of Dissimulation

While Colombia's capital city is usually addressed as the country's melting pot, where peoples of all regions, ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds share the same municipal space, urban diversity takes place in Bogotá without either equality or real sociospatial integration.⁴⁵ The following three sub-sections illustrate that a series of spatial domains conceal and help to perpetuate the racialisation of space in the city. I describe such practices as *normative*, *discursive* and *operational*. The argument is that, by analysing them empirically and conceptually, we can better expose the workings of 'race' and racism in the city, recognise endogenous racial dynamics in the making of space, and progressively overcome the class determinism and colour-blindness of dominant urban studies and planning in the region.

Normative: Urban Planning

At the beginning of my research, I had the opportunity to meet Patricio, one of Latin America's leading experts on urban segregation, who was visiting Bogotá for a series of keynote lectures. Yet, not unlike Paula, during our meeting Patricio felt pressured to remind me that, in Latin America, 'urban segregation takes the form of socio-economic enclaves, gentrification at most'. As he advised me to change the focus of my research, away from a focus on racialisation, he told me: 'It is quite racist to focus on [the segregation of] Black people alone, in such a multicultural society.'⁴⁶ It would be much better to explore urban segregation from the socio-economic perspective of class division: *estratos*, you know?

Estratos indicate formal zonal divisions developed along class lines that officially sectorise the urban space of Colombian cities (6 indicates the urban areas with the highest indexes of life quality and 1 the lowest). This socio-economic system, known as *estratificación*, accounts for the normative definition of spatial segregation. It is officially defined as 'a classification into strata of residential properties that must receive public services [and] it is carried out mainly to differentially charge household public services, allowing the allocation of subsidies and the collection of contributions in this area'.⁴⁷ However, as Consuelo Uribe-Mallarino stresses, 'although socio-economic *estratificación* was implemented as a targeting mechanism of subsidies for the poorest households to enable them to have water, electricity, sewerage, gas and telephone services, the policy has deeply affected the way social differences are collectively evoked'.⁴⁸ In other words, while *estratificación* was introduced with the scope of alleviating urban poverty, it has come to define a particular sociospatial modality of internal hierarchies,

⁴⁵Urrea and Viáfara, *Igualdad para un buen y mejor vivir*; Torino, 'The Governmentality of Multiculturalism'.

⁴⁶In so asserting, he seemed to fall into at least two of what Hernandez, 'Multiracial Matrix', calls the four precepts of Latin America's race ideology: (i) racial mixture is a solution to racial problems; (ii) fluid racial classifications are indicators of racial progress and colour-blindness of racial harmony; (iii) racism is an individual but not structural problem; (iv) focusing on race is racist.

⁴⁷See DANE, 'Estratificación socioeconómica', available at www.dane.gov.co/index.php/servicios-al-ciudadano/servicios-informacion/estratificacion-socioeconomica, last access 31 Jan. 2024.

⁴⁸Consuelo Uribe-Mallarino, 'Estratificación social en Bogotá: De la política pública a la dinámica de la segregación social', *Universitas Humanística*, 65 (March 2008), p. 140.

classifications, relations and urban imaginaries that transcends its initial planning scope. By now, *estratificación* classifies people more than buildings: urban dwellers commonly refer not only to their households but also to themselves (their morality, civility, education, systems of value, culture, social relations, sense of belonging, clothing, vocabulary, appearance and sometimes even personal identity) as being ‘*de estrato* [1/2/3/4/5/6]’.

Undoubtedly, this system of classification continues to be considered a class-based category devoid of any racial inflection, as a plethora of municipal publications testify.⁴⁹ However, its *de jure* raceless dimension conflicts with the *de facto* condition of Colombia’s deeply racialised social inequality.⁵⁰ Colombia is the third country in the Americas for concentration of Afro-descendant residents (after Brazil and the United States), 75 per cent of whom are urban residents.⁵¹ Black urbanites in Bogotá are often simultaneously Afro-descendant and internally displaced, human-rights activists and the urban poor, community leaders and single mothers. Embodying blackness in the predominantly Mestizo and epistemically White capital city entails inhabiting the urban through a multiplicity of racial yet mostly invisible spatial borders, while often being associated with racialised and colonially inherited notions of poverty, debauchery, decay and immorality. Belonging, in Bogotá, thus gets defined by an entanglement of embodied racial-colonial taxonomies that intertwine with hierarchies based on class, gender and regionalism, all of which are reflected in the making of space in the city.

One of the few nation-wide studies that document the relationship between race-making and space-making in the country reports:

Colombia is a racially and socio-economically segregated country at the macro-regional scale. Specifically, the distribution of Afro-Colombians in the country is concentrated in the [two] coasts, most of all in the Pacific coast ... [where] the distribution of the Afro-Colombian population corresponds to a lower quality of life. This pattern is consistent due to how these areas have been populated since colonial times: during the last decades of the colonial rule, the centre-periphery political model was strengthened, leaving the Andean interior [of the country] to the slave owners, while delimiting the coasts – especially the Pacific coast – for [the living of] Black slaves.⁵²

Furthermore, the higher percentage in the concentration of Black citizens in specific areas of the country has been inversely connected to the concentration of

⁴⁹Mery Isabel Parada Ávila *et al.*, *La estratificación en Bogotá D.C. y estudios relacionados 1983–2004* (Bogotá: Departamento Administrativo de Planeación Distrital, Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2004); Secretaría Distrital de Planeación (SDP) and Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, *Segregación socioeconómica en el espacio urbano de Bogotá D.C.* (Bogotá: SDP, 2007); Departamento de Estadística, Universidad Nacional de Colombia and SDP, *Segregación socioeconómica en el espacio urbano de Bogotá D.C.* (Bogotá: SDP, 2013); SDP, *La estratificación en Bogotá: Impacto social y alternativas para asignar subsidios* (Bogotá: SDP, 2016).

⁵⁰Barbary and Urrea (eds.), *Gente negra en Colombia*; Urrea and Viáfara, *Igualdad para un buen y mejor vivir*; Duarte *et al.*, *Raza y vivienda en Colombia*.

⁵¹DANE, *Censo nacional 2018*.

⁵²Duarte *et al.*, *Raza y vivienda en Colombia*, pp. 24–5.

socio-economic means: 'In socio-economic terms, the country has a high concentration of wealth in the central and Andean regions, while the coasts, the plains, and the Amazon have the worst quality of life indices.'⁵³

A similar pattern is to be found in other Colombian and Latin American cities, especially in Brazil.⁵⁴ In Cali, one of Colombia's most prominent cities for Black concentration and urban culture, the sociospatial pattern of inequality indicates that 74 per cent of Afro-Colombians live in the city's popular settlements; the opposite can be said for the city's wealthier neighbourhoods (middle and upper classes), where only 7.5 per cent of Afro-Colombians live.⁵⁵ In Olivier Barbary's own words: 'the process of residential concentration of the populations seems to follow a strict racial hierarchy that systematically associates the poorest urban contexts with the darkest skin tone of the population'.⁵⁶ In Salvador, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, racial segregation is profoundly enmeshed with class segregation, just like in Bogotá and Cali. Researchers in Brazil have noticed that even after the abolition of slavery 'the Black population continued to cover the same [urban] areas, positions, and functions' and that cities like Salvador are marked by a sharp spatial differentiation: the 'Cidade Alta' (wealthy, touristy and valorised), inhabited by the majority of White urbanites, is segregated from the 'Cidade Baixa' (peripheral, poor), inhabited by a Black majority.⁵⁷

In Bogotá, too, the highest concentrations of Black urbanites coincide with the lowest strata (1 and 2) and socio-economic margins of the city, as indicated upon juxtaposition of the two maps in [Figure 1](#).

From an initial look, it emerges that the boroughs of Bosa (18.7 per cent), Suba (15.1 per cent) and Ciudad Bolívar (10.6 per cent) house the highest concentrations of Black residents, followed by San Cristóbal (9.9 per cent) and Engativá (8.7 per cent). These boroughs concentrate, simultaneously, the majority of the poorest urban dwellers. Due to socio-economic deprivation and scarce state presence, these urban areas are also widely known for their low access to public health, green areas and healthy public spaces, formal employment, transportation and infrastructure, as well as for high violence rates. Similarly to Cali, in Bogotá we can observe that, while White-Mestizo residents also inhabit the poorest areas of the city, only a very marginal fraction of Black residents live in the upper strata.

While the percentage of Black residents in the overall urban population of Bogotá is considerably inferior to Cali, and Black presence in the two cities has a different genealogy,⁵⁸ the mainstream imagination of *mestizaje* that, simultaneously, conceals *and* reproduces the racialisation of space is at work in both cities,

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁴For a more detailed and thorough comparison of various indexes and patterns of racial segregation in Cali, Bogotá, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, see Jaime Amparo Alves, 'Biópolis, necrópolis, "blackpolis": Notas para un nuevo léxico político en los análisis socio-espaciales del racismo', *Geopauta*, 4: 1 (2020), pp. 5–33.

⁵⁵Barbary and Urrea (eds.), *Gente negra en Colombia*, p. 182.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Oliveira and Marques de Souza Oliveira, 'Origens da segregação racial'.

⁵⁸Fernando Urrea Giraldo and Waldorf Botero-Arias, 'Patrones sociodemográficos diferenciales en Bogotá y Cali, con base en el censo de 2005, y la presencia de clases medias negras en las dos ciudades', *Sociedad y Economía*, 18 (2010), pp. 85–112.

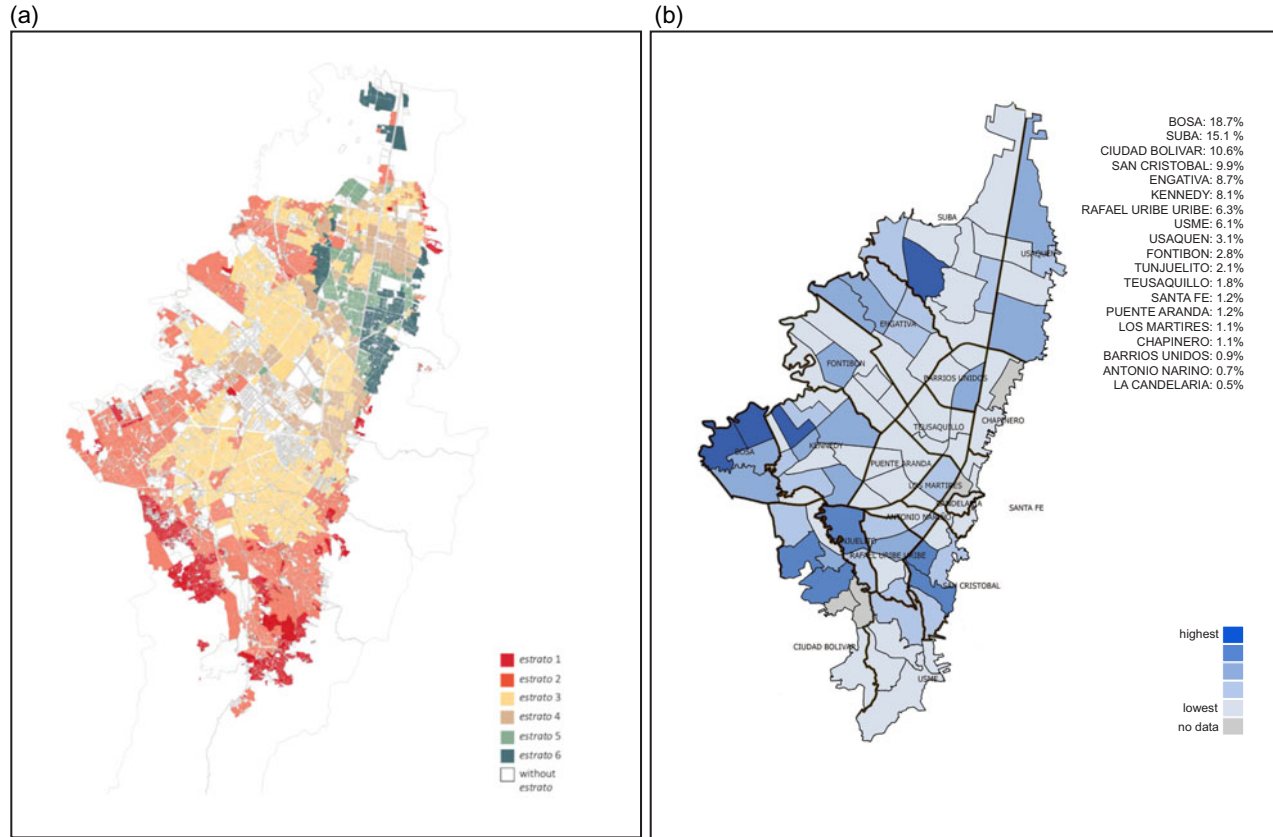


Figure 1. (a) 'Estratificación' (division of the city into zones; see text for clarification) in Bogotá; (b) Afro-Colombian Residential Concentrations in Bogotá
 Source: G. Torino, 'Racial and Relational Urbanisms: The Spatial Politics of Afro-Colombian Emplacement in Bogotá', unpubl. PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2020, p. 108.

and so is *estratificación*. As the latter is based upon the assumption that socio-economic difference bears no relation to racism (according to a colour-blind acceptance of poverty and social inequality), it consequently ignores the structural relationship between race-making and space-making, making it incidental. Therefore, we can conclude that *estratificación* is a tool that renders invisible, but does not eliminate, the racial component inherent to structural socio-economic disadvantage and class segregation.

By now, the problem underlying Patricio's approach mentioned at the beginning of this section – namely, to deploy *estratificación* to account for the alleged racelessness of urban inequality in Colombia – should appear clearly: it lies in his assumption that urban inequality and segregation are only driven by class hierarchies, rather than recognising how the two have been deeply rooted in structural racism. This approach, which recognises only class hierarchies and corresponds to the mainstream view of urban professionals, is best accounted for in the early studies of sociologists Olivier Barbary and Fernando Urrea, who show that the distribution of social groups by place of residence in Colombia is indeed racialised.⁵⁹ This structural correspondence between race and class in determining spatial inequality is summarised by Wade's observation, previously recalled in this article, that '[...] class is the modality in which race is lived'.⁶⁰ In Bogotá, as elsewhere in Latin America, urbanisation has been the modality in which the entanglement of class and race (alongside, as we saw, coloniality and modernity) is lived and their structural inequalities are reproduced.

While Patricio's approach to urban inequality was challenged in this section, urban planners continue to deny the co-production between racism and space and hide it behind the veil of class determinism. Indeed, scholarship on Latin American cities and urban inequality has also contributed to strengthening such a colour-blind class determinism, by focusing almost entirely on socio-economic dynamics.⁶¹ The next section expands upon these official imaginaries, showing how they have played a key role in the denial of the relationship between racism and space in Bogotá.

Discursive: Urban Imaginaries

Since the multicultural turn in urban planning discourses in Bogotá,⁶² the concealment of racism in the space of the city has been operated in more subtle and yet more complex ways than before. In what follows, I discuss some of the main discursive patterns that urban planners and experts employed during the interviews that I conducted with them, to sustain their views that racism plays no role in Bogotá's city-making.

⁵⁹Barbary and Urrea (eds.), *Gente negra en Colombia*.

⁶⁰Wade, 'Afro-Latin Studies', p. 111.

⁶¹Francisco Sabatini, 'The Social Spatial Segregation in the Cities of Latin America', Inter-American Development Bank, 2006; Jorge Rodríguez and Camilo Arriagada, 'Segregación residencial en la ciudad latinoamericana', *Revista Eure*, 29: 89 (2004), pp. 5–24; María Carman, Neiva Vieira da Cunha and Ramiro Segura (eds.), *Segregación y diferencia en la ciudad* (Quito: FLACSO, 2013); Naxhelli Ruiz-Rivera and Paul van Lindert (eds.), 'Urban Segregation in Latin America', Special Issue of *Habitat International*, 54: 1 (May 2016), pp. 1–2.

⁶²Williams Castro, 'Afro-Colombians'; Torino, 'The Governmentality of Multiculturalism'.

Historical erasure. There is a notoriously anti-historical yet commonly held narrative, among the Mestizo majority, about the presence of Afro-Colombian dwellers in Bogotá: that ‘there are no Black people in Bogotá’,⁶³ or that ‘Afro-Colombians are just arriving in Bogotá’.⁶⁴ I refer to a similar pronouncement as anti-historical because historical evidence has testified Black presence in the city as early as its foundation in the sixteenth century, suggesting that Black people were involved in the construction and population of the modern city alongside White-Mestizo people.⁶⁵ Claims of the absence of Afro-Colombians in Bogotá are based on colonially inherited notions of belonging to the modern, civilised and allegedly White capital city – the cultured ‘Athens of South America’ that we described before – where there *cannot* be Black communities, since blackness in the national imaginary has been strongly associated with the *topos* (tropes) of the non-urban, the underdeveloped, the uncivilised.⁶⁶

Placelessness. Urban experts often resort to another common discursive formation that contributes to displace blackness: that ‘Afro-Colombians who live in Bogotá are displaced’, or that ‘Afro-Colombians are not from Bogotá’. Once more, Bogotá comes to be considered as the *urbe* (city) where Black citizens do not belong – despite being celebrated, simultaneously, as the multicultural capital city. This paradigm also essentialises blackness as placelessness, a synonym of the internal displacement, in the wake of a fifty-year-old conflict that has disproportionately affected Black communities.⁶⁷ Such a narrative de-racialises structural marginality and makes it incidental; that is, due to the extraordinary nature of the internal armed conflict rather than the ordinary violence of racism. Notions of an alleged origin or authenticity of supposedly ethnic and non-ethnic groups in various regions of Colombia are woven in complex ways in the narratives that emblematised this discourse. Ultimately, they all point to the problem highlighted in the previous paragraph: that the geographical *topos* in Colombia remain racially constructed.

Regional determinism. There is, then, the complex racial geography of Colombia’s strong regionalism. It is to be found in claims such as: ‘[Afro-Colombians are discriminated against] not because they are Black, but because they are from the Atlantic / the Pacific region’. This narrative, as others before, is rooted in the dissimulation of ‘race’ as something else – in this case, the belonging to a different regional territory. One response given to me by an urban planner in Bogotá seems to be a fitting example here: ‘Nobody wants to

⁶³See also Mosquera, *Estrategias de inserción*.

⁶⁴That is, following the massive post-2000s displacements from rural regions that were largely due to the country’s state, para-state and guerrilla violence.

⁶⁵Rafael Antonio Díaz, *Esclavitud, región y ciudad: El sistema esclavista urbano-regional en Santafé de Bogotá, 1700–1750* (Bogotá: Centro Editorial Javeriano, 2001).

⁶⁶Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture*; Diana Bocarejo, ‘Emancipation or Enclosurement? The Spatialization of Difference and Urban Ethnic Contestation in Colombia’, *Antipode*, 44: 3 (2012), pp. 663–83; Duarte *et al.*, *Raza y vivienda en Colombia*.

⁶⁷Santiago Arboleda Quiñonez, ‘Los afrocolombianos: Entre la retórica del multiculturalismo y el fuego cruzado del destierro’, *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 12: 1 (2007), pp. 213–22; Ulrich Oslender, ‘The Banality of Displacement: Discourse and Thoughtlessness in the Internal Refugee Crisis in Colombia’, *Political Geography*, 50 (Jan. 2016), pp. 10–19.

live next to a *costeño*,⁶⁸ and that usually means Black, but that is not because we [White-Mestizo *bogotanos*] are racist!' On the one hand, the claim is inaccurate because, due to the idiosyncratic history of *mestizaje* in the Caribbean region, *costeños* are far less likely to self-identify as Afro-descendant than Colombians from the Pacific coastal region. But this observation is far less relevant when compared to a second one, namely that the planner's claim illustrates a typical racialising attitude of White-Mestizo *bogotanos* towards anyone who comes from *la costa*, who is not only deemed to be 'Black' (regardless of their actual self-identification) but also, and most of all, discriminated as 'not urban and civilised enough', and thus racialised.

Class determinism. Perhaps the mantra-like response par excellence that I received from my institutional interviewees after positing the problem of racialisation in the urban space of Bogotá is emblematised by this quote: '[Afro-Colombians are discriminated against] not because they are Black, but because they are poor.' We already saw, in the previous section, that Black urbanites live for the greatest majority in Bogotá's socio-economic margins, in correspondence with the lowest strata. Yet, urban professionals and scholars have repeatedly asserted that such a correspondence is not due to the country's structural racism. According to them, ethnic groups are part of a raceless and homogeneous population: the 'urban poor'. When compared with the ground-breaking studies on the racial structuring of society conducted at the turn of the century across Colombia by the Cali-based sociologists Barbary and Urrea,⁶⁹ the planners' posture outlined above appears purely ideological. In fact, Barbary and Urrea conclude that 'it is the factors linked ... to the *racially hierarchical insertion into social classes* – which are part of the capitalist modernisation process of Colombian society in its long history – that have the most outstanding weight' in determining social exclusion and inequality in Colombia (emphasis added).⁷⁰

Cultural determinism. Widely common are also justifications of the uneven insertion of Black urbanites into the social and spatial hierarchies of the city that are moved from a perspective of cultural determinism: 'it is not race, it is culture'. Such a posture reduces the racialisation of space to a cultural tendency to be gregarious. On the one hand, it recognises the tendency of many Black individuals to migrate to cities like Bogotá following kinship networks, and to congregate in particular areas within neighbourhoods on the basis of mutual aid, shared spatial practices, and ethnic knowledges. On the other hand, however, this posture fully disregards the reasons behind the fact that those networks almost entirely lead to strata 1 and 2 of the city, rather than to wealthier residential areas. Indeed, during an interview, a senior member of the Bogotá Department of City Planning claimed that 'Afro-Colombians *want* to be segregated' (emphasis added). A two-pronged bias is hidden in this view. First, there is the incorrect idea that Black segregation in Bogotá is limited to ethnic self-segregation and regionalist tendencies – that is, Black segregation as mere convivial congregation. Second, there is a belief that Black segregation stems from a lack of capacity, modern entrepreneurialism, or

⁶⁸ Colombians from the Caribbean coastal region.

⁶⁹ Barbary and Urrea (eds.), *Gente negra en Colombia*, p. 182.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

will to enter the mechanisms of the neoliberal city. However, as the following subsection shall clarify, racism in Bogotá is systemic and, as such, it operates across all six socio-economic strata.

Operational: Everyday Transactions

Alongside the official and structural strategies of dissimulation just discussed, ordinary practices of dissimulation are also at play. These are meaningfully emblematised by cultural approaches to property. In particular, this section explores rental practices and housing-market discrimination in Bogotá. In Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America, scarce access to housing has been a critical political conundrum for many years.⁷¹ However, the housing market is particularly inaccessible for Black urbanites.⁷² This is due not only to their (structurally) disproportionate presence in the lowest economic strata, as we have already seen, but also to White-Mestizo residents' common practice of avoiding Black presence in 'their' neighbourhoods.

Inscriptions such as '*aquí no se arrienda a negros*' ('we do not rent to Blacks') or '*aquí se arrienda pero no a negros*' ('for rent but not to Blacks') were reported by Black residents outside some houses for rent in the neighbourhoods of Bello Horizonte (San Cristóbal Sur), Santa Rosa (Suba) and Egipto (La Candelaria), among others across Bogotá's working-class districts. While the municipal government recently adopted a more open position against racism in Bogotá,⁷³ denunciations of the overt denial to rent an available room or apartment to Black urbanites continue to abound across all six strata.

The story that Betty, an Afro-Colombian resident of Bogotá's downtown, recalls while sitting with me in the living room of her house dates to the early 2000s and clarifies the above. The episode took place in the neighbourhood of Belén (La Candelaria) when she was a young teacher in a public university of the city. She had been asked to facilitate the arrival of a Brazilian colleague and set off to find him an apartment for rent in the city centre. After finding a seemingly suitable location she proceeded to arrange a viewing. Soon after arriving at the property, however, she was immediately told by the owner that the apartment was no longer available. Strangely, the sign 'FOR RENT' was still on the door. Once home, Betty arranged a new viewing but, this time, through a White-Mestizo friend. After attending the viewing the friend called Betty: the owner had agreed to rent her the apartment.

The practice of the owner described by Betty resonates in dozens of similar accounts and experiences collected during my fieldwork and contributes to explaining the micro- and macro-scale absence of Black urbanites in specific areas of the city or, vice versa, their concentration in others. Such non-normative bans are emblematic of the racialisation of access to housing in Colombia. Earlier qualitative studies on racialised residential segregation in another Colombian city, Medellín,

⁷¹Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), *Urbanización y políticas de vivienda en China y América Latina y el Caribe* (Santiago: United Nations, 2014); Alan Gilbert, *Housing in Latin America* (Washington, DC: Inter-American Development Bank, 2001).

⁷²Duarte *et al.*, *Raza y vivienda en Colombia*; Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture*.

⁷³For example, through the #RacisNO municipal campaign.

show how ‘discrimination in the housing market is typical of Latin American racial discrimination against blacks in general’.⁷⁴ Even in Bogotá, racial discrimination in the housing market is not part of an official institutional guideline. It is, in this sense, ‘nongeneralized’:⁷⁵ there is no legal framework that discourages White-Mestizo owners from having Black tenants, or that prohibits the latter from living in certain parts of the city or, vice versa, that obliges them to live confined within specific settlements.

The lack of such a legal system has induced many commentators, from public officers to urban experts, to deny the existence of discriminatory housing practices in Latin America. But while housing discrimination operated by falsely denying that a rental unit is available is to be also found elsewhere in the world,⁷⁶ what is specific about the Latin American case is a common attitude of denial or disguise about it. For example, while social campaigns and legal tools have emerged to denounce and tackle this problem in North America,⁷⁷ in Latin America these practices widely fail to be recognised as racist and, instead, are often labelled as legitimate individual preferences or cultural choices. Once more, we can recognise the workings of the ideology of *mestizaje* at play, in the dissimulation of ‘race’ as culture and of racism as cultural choice.

Even if only approximately 3 per cent of the overall Black population of Bogotá live in the upper socio-economic strata,⁷⁸ wealthy Black residents are also targeted by everyday practices of racialisation in the housing market. While the racist rental signs mentioned earlier were to be found mostly in working-class districts, housing discrimination in upper strata can take more cunning forms. This is the case of Claudia, an Afro-Colombian professional in her forties who works for one of Colombia’s top universities and lives in one of the most coveted residential areas of *estrato* 6, Rosales. Claudia tells me that it was not easy for a Black woman to find an apartment for herself in Rosales and that she repeatedly gets ‘mistaken’ for a housemaid by her White-Mestizo neighbours. Similarly, Lucía, an Afro-Colombian professional in her thirties who lives in the upmarket neighbourhood of Virrey Park, reports of a courier who was reluctant to hand her the delivery, for it was ‘the owner’ who had to sign the receipt. Despite Lucía being the owner, the courier assumed that the Black woman could only be the housemaid of such a wealthy household. Not too dissimilarly from working-class residents, upper-class Black residents are often marked as not belonging to neighbourhoods of *gente bien* (‘civilised and respectable people’) through everyday practices of social exclusion or marginalisation that perpetuate the ideology of ‘good and civilised’ districts as White(r) urban areas. These practices form an often concealed, internalised, yet pervasive sociocultural pattern in Bogotá and other Latin American cities.

However, this residential discrimination also contributed to the rise of what a Black social leader from Bosa⁷⁹ describes to me as *micro-territorios afros*

⁷⁴Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture*, p. 219.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Vincent J. Roscigno, Diana L. Karafin and Griff Tester, ‘The Complexities and Processes of Racial Housing Discrimination’, *Social Problems*, 56: 1 (2009), pp. 49–69.

⁷⁷Such as in the Fair Housing Acts (in the United States) and the Ontario Human Rights Code (in Canada).

⁷⁸Urrea and Viáfara, *Igualdad para un buen y mejor vivir*.

⁷⁹A southwestern, mostly working-class, borough of Bogotá.

(Afro-Colombian micro-territories). These indicate not merely the concentration of Black families and communities within certain districts but a whole spatial network of anti-racist solidarities that enables Black residents to carve out space for themselves in the city. Bosa's social leaders offer an emblematic example of this, when they tell me: 'We have had to start weaving *compadrazgo* [comradery] in the neighbourhoods. Therefore, [since they do not normally rent to us,] as soon as they vacate any [house or room], we immediately notify a *comadre* [comrade] so that she can move in.' While these forms of grassroots resistance and 'people as infrastructure'⁸⁰ contribute at least partly to counteract the racialisation of the city, they also highlight the power of normative, discursive and operational strategies to reproduce racism in and through the urban space.

Unlearning the City: Beyond the (White) Mestizo Gaze

Since the racialisation of the urban space continues to be denied and camouflaged as 'always something else' (e.g., class segregation, cultural preference, regionalism, the outcome of internal displacement) through a variety of normative, discursive and operational constructions, it is relevant to further investigate the geographic imagination at the basis of these mainstream views in urbanism. This step is necessary if we are to expose the many ways in which racism operates in city-making. After all, as bell hooks puts it, 'how can we organize to challenge and change a system that cannot be named?'⁸¹ Or, to recall once more the words of Tomás, how can we fight if 'we don't know who we are fighting against'?

We already saw that contemporary planning frameworks, maps, official discourses and everyday urban practices are underpinned by the racial ideology of *mestizaje*. This, as I argued, contributes to sustaining the myth of the raceless Latin American city, on the one hand, and to reproducing both structural and everyday racism while disguising it as 'always something else', on the other hand. We can recognise in the Mestizo gaze the imaginary responsible for hiding in plain sight the racialisation of space in Latin American cities. Consequently, I define *Mestizo urbanism* as a way of knowing the city, analysing, representing and producing its space, and determining which urban knowledge counts, that is deeply enmeshed in the racial ideology of *mestizaje* (with its underlying social project of whitening), despite and within the most recent constitutional turn based on pluri-ethnicity and multiculturalism. Based on the evidence explored in this article, the conceptualisation of Mestizo urbanism in Latin American cities can benefit from four initial considerations.

First, this is a way of knowing the city that flattens different spatial knowledges and experiences through the universalising syncretism of *mestizaje*. It privileges a spatial episteme that sanctions the city as raceless while denying the multiple ways in which racism (and especially structural racism) continues to act as an organising and differentiating principle in the urban space.

Second, Mestizo urbanism posits non-White-Mestizo territories as non-places, both regionally and within the city. While neoliberal cosmopolitanism celebrates

⁸⁰ Abdou Maliq Simone, 'People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg', *Public Culture*, 16: 3 (2004), pp. 407–29.

⁸¹ bell hooks, *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* (New York: Atria, 2004), p. 25.

diversity and multiculturalism in the city, mainstream urban knowledge continues to invisibilise or stigmatise Black districts, thus denying their inhabitants the 'right to the city'.⁸² The power system operated by Mestizo urbanism acts simultaneously as a condition of inclusion and exclusion of racialised dwellers in the space of the city. For example, while Black bodies and labour are needed for the functioning of the city (through jobs that, in Bogotá, are often limited to those of guards and custodians, construction workers, waitresses, cooks and housemaids),⁸³ they are also spatially separated by their structurally racialised insertion into the city's system of class segregation and through everyday practices that deny their belonging to the city. This points to what Wade recognises as the (conditional) inclusion *and* (racialised) exclusion of Black people operated by *mestizaje*.⁸⁴

Third, Mestizo urbanism relies on racial displacements as a form of urbicide. While racial displacements can take many forms across Latin America, in the case of Colombian cities displacement entails both internal displacement (from the countryside or small rural towns to bigger cities like Bogotá, Cali and Medellín, and usually connected to the country's post-conflict politics) and 'double displacement' (between the city's margins, at times even multiple times). Consequently, urbicide is intended here as the killing of a sense of community that goes hand in hand with Afro-Colombian ethnocide, from the regional to the urban.

Fourth, understanding the workings of Mestizo urbanism means to shed light not only on the relationship between everyday discriminatory acts and the making of the urban space, but also on the spatiality of structural racial-colonial inequalities. For example, by introducing the term *ecogenoethnocide* (eco-geno-ethnocide), Afro-Colombian sociologist Santiago Arboleda Quiñonez argues that the structural marginalisation of Black Colombians ought to be understood as the product of 'old' colonial hierarchies and 'new' necropolitical governance at the same time, rather than in historical disarticulation between the two.⁸⁵ In other words, we can assert that the marginalisation of Black Colombians is, simultaneously, a product of: (i) the transatlantic slave trade in colonial Americas and its afterlife, marked as it is by missed or scarce integration into the mainstream economy, and (ii) post-colonial spatial governance and everyday violence operated on Black populations across the country, region and continent.

While Arboleda Quiñonez reasons on the national and regional territorial scales, we can argue that similar dynamics are visible in Latin American cities.⁸⁶ In cities like Bogotá, where Black residents are disproportionately concentrated in the lowest income districts, it is imperative to understand the making of uneven geographies under Mestizo urbanism as the product of: (i) historical and structural processes of

⁸²Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

⁸³César Rodríguez Garavito *et al.*, *La discriminación racial en el trabajo: Un estudio experimental en Bogotá* (Bogotá: Dejusticia, 2013).

⁸⁴Wade, 'The Presence and Absence'.

⁸⁵Santiago Arboleda Quiñonez, 'Rutas para perfilar el ecogenoethnocide afrocolombiano: Hacia una conceptualización desde la justicia histórica', *Nómadas*, 50 (April 2019), pp. 93–109.

⁸⁶Alves, *The Anti-Black City*; Geler *et al.*, 'Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires'; Bolaña, 'Memoria afrodescendiente'.

racial–colonial marginalisation (that are marked by racial capitalism and the after-life of slavery), (ii) contemporary discrimination (e.g., housing market) and necropolitics (e.g., racialised displacement and ‘double displacement’) against Black people, and (iii) the racially unequal access to the city under a neoliberal urbanism that economically captures ‘ethnic’ cultures while reproducing the sociospatial marginalisation of Black and Indigenous dwellers.⁸⁷

How, then, can Latin American cities move beyond Mestizo urbanism? First, the presence of *mestizaje* in the making of the city and of mainstream urban knowledge needs to be named and recognised. Second, urban studies and planning need to divest from *mestizaje*. In a recent essay, urbanist Ananya Roy reasons on the need to ‘divest from whiteness’ in US urban planning and to ‘break the silence in our disciplines and classrooms by naming white supremacy’.⁸⁸ While in Latin America this move seems even harder to make, given the dissimulation of racism as always something else ‘divesting from whiteness’ in Latin American cities can be translated into the unlearning of Mestizo urbanism and its underlying White supremacy. Entering this ‘radically unsafe space’,⁸⁹ where racialised power gets exposed, entails re-thinking, among others: (i) governmental and non-governmental planning practices, policies, participation strategies, tools of representation and ‘experts’ knowledge; (ii) academic curricula, grammars, and qualitative and quantitative research methods, and (iii) dynamics of spatial production and access to the ‘right to the city’ (housing; labour), just to name a few.

From there, the city can be re-learned. Such re-learning should start, above all, from those urban practices and knowledges that, having been excluded from the regime of visibility of modern urbanism, have come to constitute a ‘dissident common sense’.⁹⁰ In Raquel Gutiérrez’s definition, the ‘common’ does not refer to a form of legal property but to the re-design of social life that ‘re-appropriate[s] previously expropriated material wealth and political capacities’.⁹¹ Relatedly, Agustín Laó-Montes maintains that, if race and racism have long ‘inscribed and configured the fundamental institutions [...] key categories [...] and chief processes [...] of the modern-colonial, capitalist, world-system’, then ‘the historical agency of Afro-descendants and Black racial politics must be considered as a scenario of struggle and alternative propositions, an important ground for the general definition of the political realm’.⁹² As Black and Indigenous populations are now primarily urban, we need to imagine those alternative propositions from the city.

⁸⁷Torino, ‘The Governmentality of Multiculturalism’.

⁸⁸Ananya Roy, ‘Divesting from Whiteness: The University in the Age of Trumpism’, *Society & Space* (Nov. 2016), available at www.societyandspace.org/articles/divesting-from-whiteness-the-university-in-the-age-of-trumpism, last access 25 Jan. 2024.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰Veronica Gago, ‘Rebuilding a Dissident Common Sense. An Interview with Raquel Gutiérrez’, July 2013, available at www.churchland.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Interview-with-Raquel-Guti%C3%A9rrez-Aguilar.pdf, last access 31 Jan. 2024.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²Agustín Laó-Montes, ‘Cartografía del campo político afrodescendiente en América Latina’, in Claudia Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, Agustín Laó-Montes and César A. Rodríguez Garavito (eds.), *Debates sobre ciudadanía y políticas raciales en las Américas negras* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2010), p. 288.

In the city, Black spatial agencies present an *oppositional* force to problematise and unmask the racial project of *mestizaje*, on the one hand, and an *operational* force to critically maximise the opportunities opened by the pluri-ethnic constitutional turn, on the other hand, while proposing alternatives against racial capitalism and coloniality. Thus, re-learning the city entails asking new questions for space-making. What can Black and Indigenous notions of relational place and spatial commons (e.g., '*territorio*') do to unsettle the neoliberal order of the city? What would a different approach to urban planning (as the collective managing of the commons) look like from a decolonial and non-racialising perspective? Could this approach fit the planetary demands posed by climate change and structural inequality better than the neoliberal, racial, gendered, classist and individualistic urban models that we inhabit and reproduce?

Ultimately, I am convinced that a similar process will extend the present understanding of 'the urban' and its sociospatial dynamics in Latin America and, consequently, help democratise city access. Further to that, it will locate missing geographical sites and knowledges onto the global map of theory-making which, despite important recent efforts,⁹³ largely continues to be dominated by a handful of hegemonic experiences and theorisations that limit our collective understanding of the relationship between race-making and space-making in different cities around the world.

Conclusion

By discussing how the myth of the 'raceless' Latin American city at the basis of urban experts' knowledge and official narratives is rooted in the racial (White) project of *mestizaje*, I hope to have shown how racism endures as a system of differentiation and separation in and of space in Latin American cities. While this might have been more apparent in the colonial city, the normalisation of capital cities and other metropolises as 'Mestizo' reveals the enduring ways in which urbanism entangles with racialising projects of social differentiation even in the age of multiculturalism. The perspectives on city-making presented in this article – from Tomás' denunciation of the concealed workings of racial violence to Paula's denial of the racialisation of the urban space – portray a complex scenario in which racism in the neoliberal city takes up many different guises. For the sake of analysis, I organised them in three main paradigms, which I summarised as *normative*, *discursive* and *operational* devices respectively, showing not only how each of them continues being underpinned by the ideology of *mestizaje* but also how they become tools for the neoliberal management of racial difference and the maintenance of a racial-colonial social order in space.

Divesting from *mestizaje*, as I suggested, requires naming and recognising these different 'guises' for what they truly are – that is, reviewing the ways in which spatial

⁹³Carl H. Nightingale, *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Giovanni Picker, Karim Murji and Manuela Boatcă, 'Racial Urbanities: Towards a Global Cartography', *Social Identities*, 25: 1 (2019), pp. 1–10.

inequality, the right to the city, marginalisation, segregation and other spatial dynamics are racialised through and through. It also requires constructively divesting from this mode of knowing Latin American cities, for example by starting to rethink cities from the alternative praxes, spatial imaginations and politics of place-making operated by Black communities at and from the urban margins. Ultimately, recognising how the lived politics of 'race' and racism in Latin American geographies has become widely urbanised means to understand and rethink the political realm in its inherently urban dimension.

Acknowledgements. The author would like to thank the many interlocutors who, between 2016 and 2022, accorded her their time and shared their views on city-making in Colombia and Latin America. Different versions of this article benefitted from the generous camaraderie and insightful comments of Jaime Alves, Ángela Franco Calderón, Matthew Mahmoudi and Shreyashi Dasgupta. The author also thanks the *JLAS* editors and the three anonymous reviewers for their excellent comments and constructive criticisms, which helped to make the article sounder and more incisive. The research from which the article stems was jointly funded (2016–19) by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and King's College (University of Cambridge). Further grants from the Society for Latin American Studies (SLAS) supported travel expeditions. The author extends her gratitude to Peterhouse (University of Cambridge) for granting her the time to write this article during a stipendiary Junior Research Fellowship (2021–3).

Urbanismo mestizo: Intersecciones raciales persistentes en ciudades latinoamericanas

A lo largo de Latinoamérica, todavía hay una fuerte resistencia al reclamo de que el racismo juega algún papel en la producción del espacio urbano. Considerado antipatriótico, este tema permanece ampliamente ignorado en la planeación urbana y la geografía. Basado en investigación cualitativa en Bogotá y en literatura secundaria sobre otras ciudades latinoamericanas, este artículo explora la persistencia del mestizaje como un proyecto racial-colonial desde el punto de vista de su materialización en la ciudad y las relaciones sociedad-espacio. En particular, ilustra cómo el racismo en la ciudad es transfigurado 'siempre como otra cosa' (por ejemplo, cultura, clase, regionalismo o desplazamiento) a través de una variedad de instrumentos normativos, discursivos y operativos. Entonces, el artículo confronta la necesidad de despojarse de la hegemonía racial del mestizaje en la planeación urbana y la geografía, sugiriendo que bloquea las posibilidades de futuros urbanos más equitativos.

Palabras clave: raza; mestizaje; colonialidad; neoliberalismo; ciudades latinoamericanas; anti-negritud

Urbanismo mestiço: Interseções raciais persistentes nas cidades latino-americanas

Em toda a América Latina, continua a haver uma forte resistência à afirmação de que o racismo desempenha um papel na produção do espaço urbano. Considerada antipatriótica, esta questão permanece amplamente não abordada no planejamento urbano e na geografia. Com base em pesquisas qualitativas em Bogotá e na literatura secundária sobre outras cidades latino-americanas, este artigo explora a persistência da mestiçagem como um projeto racial-colonial do ponto de vista de sua materialização na cidade e nas relações sociedade-espacio. Em particular, ilustra como o racismo na cidade é transfigurado 'sempre como outra coisa' (por exemplo, cultura, classe, regionalismo, deslocamento) através de uma variedade de dispositivos normativos, discursivos e operacionais.

Em seguida, o artigo confronta a necessidade de se despojar da hegemonia racial da mestiçagem no planejamento urbano e na geografia, sugerindo que está dificultando o caminho para futuros urbanos mais equitativos.

Palavras-chave: raça; mestiçagem; colonialismo; neoliberalismo; cidades latino-americanas; antinegitude