



# Hygienisation, Gentrification, and Urban Displacement in Brazil

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**Abstract:** This article engages recent debates over gentrification and urban displacement in the global South. While researchers increasingly suggest that gentrification is becoming widespread in “Southern” cities, others argue that such analyses overlook important differences in empirical context and privilege EuroAmerican theoretical frameworks. To respond to this debate, in this article, we outline the concept of *higienização* (hygienisation), arguing that it captures important contextual factors missed by gentrification. Hygienisation is a Brazilian term that describes a particular form of urban displacement, and is directly informed by legacies of colonialism, racial and class stigma, informality, and state violence. Our objective is to show how “Southern” concepts like hygienisation help urban researchers gain better insight into processes of urban displacement, while also responding to recent calls to decentre and provincialise urban theory.

**Resumo:** Este artigo dialoga com debates recentes sobre a gentrificação e o deslocamento no Sul global urbano. Enquanto pesquisadores urbanos sugerem cada vez mais que a gentrificação está crescendo nas cidades do Sul global, outros argumentam que essas análises ignoram importantes diferenças no contexto empírico dessas cidades, e privilegiam a teoria Euro-Americana. Para responder a esse debate, esboçamos o conceito de higienização, argumentando que ele captura fatores contextuais importantes que são perdidos quando análises são feitas a partir do conceito de gentrificação. Higienização é um termo brasileiro que descreve uma forma particular de deslocamento e é diretamente informado por legados de colonização, estigma social e racial, informalidade, e violência do Estado. Nosso objetivo é mostrar como conceitos como higienização, enraizados no contexto do Sul global, ajudam os pesquisadores urbanos a melhor entender os processos de deslocamento, enquanto também responde a recentes intervenções exigindo a descentralização e provincialização da teoria urbana.

**Keywords:** gentrification, urban displacement, postcolonial theory, global South, urban theory, Latin America

## Gentrification Going Global?

Debates over gentrification in Latin America have grown enormously among scholars and activists in recent years. While gentrification was, until recently,

thought to be virtually non-existent in Latin America—along with most everywhere outside of Western Europe and North America—a flurry of new studies are today emerging (e.g. Betancur 2014; Janoschka and Sequera 2016; Leite 2015; López-Morales 2015). From Santiago (López-Morales 2016), to Buenos Aires (Rodríguez and Di Virgilio 2016), to Mexico City (Delgadillo 2016), to Rio de Janeiro (Gaffney 2016; Santos Junior and Novaes 2016), researchers are offering in-depth case studies of gentrification. Such developments are part of broader global trends in urban research and academic debate, where gentrification, today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is perceived to be global (Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Lees et al. 2015, 2016). So why is this happening, and what helps to explain it?

The key reasons why interest in gentrification is growing in Latin America are twofold. Firstly, Latin American cities, historically, were not thought to evidence the “specific economic, social and political forces that are responsible for a major reshaping of advanced capitalist societies” (Smith and Williams 1986:3). In other words, gentrification was understood to reflect specific relationships between capital, urban landscape change, and class conflict in cities experiencing a shift towards post-Fordism (i.e. European and North American cities), and “emerging” regions like Latin America were not thought to display these characteristics.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent trends in urban entrepreneurialism, however, as well as the financialisation of urban development, seem to have created structural conditions necessary for gentrification to emerge (Smith 2002).

Secondly, researchers have identified new empirical trends of urban development and displacement in Latin America that strongly resemble gentrification processes long seen elsewhere, while at the same time reflecting these cities’ specific histories and urban geographies. A good example comes from Santiago, Chile, where Ernesto López-Morales (2016) argues that, differently from the global North, the state plays a decisive role in “new-build gentrification” by adjusting building regulations to increase the capture of ground rent. Likewise, Jones and Varley (1999) in Mexico, and Silvana Rubino (2005) in Brazil, have identified city-centre revitalisation projects that tend to commodify space and increase consumption, but rarely lead the middle and upper classes to displace low-income residents. These findings resonate with a host of studies from other regions, suggesting that, while not identical to processes in Europe and North America, gentrification can now be found in cities all over the world (e.g. Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Harris 2008; Shin 2018). Noteworthy here is the work of Lees et al. (2016) who, drawing on Lefebvre (2003), have recently argued that gentrification is very much a “planetary” phenomenon. Pushing back against the idea that gentrification is diffusing outwards from a EuroAmerican centre, they instead propose that gentrification is multi-centred and may have long existed outside of Europe and North America (Lees et al. 2016:292–310).

This is not to say, however, that claims of global or planetary gentrification have gone uncontested (McElroy and Werth 2019; Smart and Smart 2017). Thomas Maloutas (2011:38), for example, cautions against the “contextual stretching” of gentrification theory, whereby the more researchers insist on seeing urban development through lenses of gentrification—and, thus, the more that diverse urban contexts are shoehorned into gentrification theoretical frameworks—the

more empirical nuance is likely to be overlooked, “lead[ing] to uninterestingly broad and theoretically less controllable constructs”. Similarly, Asher Ghertner (2014, 2015) argues that gentrification theory pays insufficient attention to questions of informality, non-private land tenure, and the distinct national and urban development histories and different state–society relationships that characterise many postcolonial contexts. Describing processes of urban restructuring in countries like India as gentrification, he suggests, risks conflating these contexts with those that are familiar to researchers of/from the global North. Likewise, they tend to focus on similar outcomes of urban capitalist development—such as the displacement of low-income communities from prime urban land, and the establishment of elite businesses, tourism and residential spaces—rather than the diverse causes and mechanisms that may drive these processes in different contexts (Ghertner 2014:1556).

While we acknowledge these debates merit further reflection, the purpose of this article is not to weigh in on them. Instead, our goal is to propose an alternative concept for analysing processes of urban displacement: one that appears similar to gentrification, but is distinguished by key features. This process is called *higienização*, or “hygienisation”, a Portuguese word that, in Brazil, describes a particular mode of urban displacement. The term exists also in Spanish—*higienización*—yet here we refer specifically to Brazilian notions of hygienisation, and to help illustrate our points and maintain consistency, we focus our empirical analysis on Brazil.

Why do we call attention to hygienisation, and why is it important, we argue, to distinguish this process from gentrification? On the one hand, there are significant empirical aspects that should not be overlooked when trying to understand cities in Brazil and other similar contexts. Hygienisation, as a concept, is directly informed by the socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions that shape Brazilian cities, and is especially attuned to colonialist legacies of racism and class stigma. In particular, it provides an important corrective to EuroAmerican concepts of urban displacement in contexts where state violence is linked with specific modes of urban governance, and where cities are characterised by widespread informality. This is to say that by mobilising the concept of hygienisation, we can observe many of the dynamics emphasised by critical gentrification theory, while also remaining attentive to important social and cultural factors that distinguish contexts like Brazil. In this way, the concept of hygienisation responds to recent postcolonial critiques showing how theories of “global” urban processes are often undergirded by EuroAmerican epistemologies (Jazeel 2016; McFarlane 2010; Slater 1992). Seeing urban transformation through the lens of hygienisation contributes to recent efforts to decentre urban theory (e.g. Parnell and Robinson 2012; Robinson 2006; Roy 2009), and helps to produce alternative, more contextually embedded explanations that can coexist with and provincialise EuroAmerican concepts like gentrification (cf. Smart and Smart 2017).

We begin, in the next section, with a discussion of hygienisation, its history and significance, and how we conceptualise it as a process. Many Brazilian cities have long and diverse histories of hygienisation, and we attempt to define the term as succinctly as possible, while also foregrounding its utility to urban researchers. We

then move on to consider specific examples of hygienisation in Brazil, illustrating how hygienisation works, and also drawing attention to particular attributes that distinguish it from gentrification. Our goal is to highlight the ways hygienisation connects to ongoing processes of urban development, and, as such, our case studies come from three separate Brazilian cities. First, in the Northeast, we consider the city of Salvador da Bahia, and the historic district of Pelourinho; then, in Rio de Janeiro, we examine the favela of Vila Autódromo, located next to Rio's Olympic Park; and, finally, in São Paulo, we focus on "Cracolândia" in the centrally located neighbourhood of Luz. Data for these case studies are drawn from secondary sources, and include a mixture of (mostly Brazilian) academic publications, news articles, online resources and activist websites. Following our cases studies, we move on to the final section of the article, where we reflect on the broader significance of hygienisation, what it offers to urban geographical debates, and how it contributes to growing critiques from postcolonial scholars. Our aim here is to provide better theoretical traction for researchers seeking to understand urban contexts like Brazil, where, we argue, particular attention must be paid to questions of informality, state violence, and colonialist legacies of social and racial stigma.

## What is Hygienisation?

To understand the term hygienisation, and to see its broader significance, it is useful to go back in time to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Brazil. At this time, the country was undergoing dramatic political, economic, and social transformations, accompanied by fervent internal debates about modernisation and reform. Brazil was the last country in the Western world to abolish slavery in 1888, and only a year later it transitioned from monarchical rule to a republican government. Sensitive that Brazil was perceived as "backwards" and "primitive", the new republican government sought to remould the country in line with modernist ideals popular at the time (Carvalho 1990). Brazilian politicians, military leaders, public policy and legal experts, intellectuals, and many within the upper and middle classes drew influence from Auguste Comte and European positivism (Nachman 1977). By the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, positivism had a strong foothold in Brazil, with proponents pushing for a host of changes intended to make Brazil resemble countries in Western Europe. This included an explicit racial dimension, where leaders of the new republic, inspired by eugenicist theories that linked modernisation with genetics, sought to "whiten" the population by incentivising immigration from Europe (Garmany and Pereira 2019).

Such ideas were also applied to the management of cities, as Brazilian architects, engineers, and urban planners, influenced by positivist thinking, harnessed ideals of "moral" and "social hygiene" in their work (cf. Abreu 1987; Almeida 2017). Like the human body, urban space was meant to be "hygienic": that is, free from ailments, well ordered, rationally understood, and carefully observed and maintained. As Matthew Gandy (2004:364) notes regarding the emergence of hygienism in Europe: "The hygienist city promoted by the 19<sup>th</sup> century public health movement conceived of urban space as an identifiable assemblage of

organs: a functional whole that could be shaped and controlled according to a rationalized conception of human will". In Brazil, hygienist interventions focused on combating infectious disease—in particular Yellow Fever—and targeted areas with high-population densities and poor public sanitation, which were viewed as sources of contagion (Abreu 1994; Chaloub 1996). Such areas were singled out not only for being unhygienic and hazardous to the general population; more broadly, they represented an underdeveloped and unenlightened past. As in other postcolonial contexts, "becoming modern" meant that Brazilian cities had to be rid of these signs of ill health and backwardness.

As detailed by numerous Brazilian scholars (Benchimol 1999b; Hershmann and Pereira 1994; Lima 2013; Machado et al. 1978), urban planning in Brazil became interconnected with medical science from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With this, bacteriologists, epidemiologists, and public health experts took the lead in housing and urban development policy. Rafael Almeida (2017:11) notes that in the capital city of Rio de Janeiro, particular emphasis was placed on informal dwellings (*casebres*), where "substituting them for hygienic houses was a priority for all those who longed for progress". So significant were hygienist epistemologies, argues Almeida, they help to explain how favelas (i.e. informal settlements) emerged as a specific discursive formation in Brazilian cities during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like bacteria on a petri dish, favelas were conceptualised as discrete and recognisable objects—real *things*, in the Foucaultian sense—distinguished by their material and pathological characteristics (cf. Czeresnia 1997). The remedy for such urban maladies, of course, was to expunge them, and throughout Latin America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, informal settlements were routinely razed in the name of public health (cf. Angotti 2013).

In Brazil, the most famous example of this comes from Rio de Janeiro, where Mayor Francisco Pereira Passos carried out a host of sweeping reforms between 1903 and 1906 (Abreu 1987). Pereira Passos had studied urban engineering in France during the 1850s, witnessing Haussmann's reforms in Paris. Upon taking office, he set about transforming Rio's city centre, constructing large boulevards and new buildings, and reforming public sanitation, sewerage, and zoning laws. Notoriously, he also demolished many of the *cortiços* (slum tenements) on explicitly hygienist grounds of promoting public health and rational zoning. This produced far-reaching consequences for the poor, who were displaced without alternative housing options, leading to the rapid proliferation of favelas over subsequent years (Benchimol 1999a). Notes Almeida (2017), as favelas grew rapidly along Rio's hillsides, hygienist urban planners soon began to see favelas—rather than *cortiços*—as the main threat to public health in the city.

As this example makes clear, the uptake of hygienism in Brazil took a radically different form than in Europe. Whereas in Europe it was driven by concerns over public well-being, sanitation and social morality, in Brazil it became a means to defend civilisation against backwards, infectious, unproductive, and dangerous racialised masses. Again, returning to Almeida (2017), hygienism not only changed the ways urban poverty and informality were conceptualised in Brazil: it helped establish "the favela" as a place of contagion, hazardous to the city if not quarantined and eradicated. Reflecting on these particular histories is important in

contexts like Brazil, and highlights the need for urban theory that can attend specifically to postcolonial legacies.

One sign of how this history remains relevant in Brazil today is the widespread use of the term *higienização* (hygienisation), both in popular language and by activists resisting urban displacement. Without further etymological study it is difficult to say for sure, but contemporary meanings of the word are almost certainly rooted in Brazil's Republican period, and reflect a distinctly postcolonial experience. This is to say that while ideas of urban hygiene may have originated in Europe, in Brazil they were transformed, and the concept of *higienização* emerged to reflect a particular form of postcolonial urban development. For early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban planners, it would likely have had positive implications connected to public health, order and progress. Today, however, in debates concerning Brazilian urban development, the term hygienisation is unambiguously linked with acts of social injustice. In the most basic sense, hygienisation refers to instances where low-income people are violently displaced from specific areas, often by the state or with cooperation from state actors, for purposes of urban beautification and the restoration of order. While hygienist theories of disease and bacteriology may no longer be the primary justification for such interventions, the term captures important historical continuities in the way the Brazilian state treats the urban poor: viz., as an infection harmful to the greater social body.

Hygienisation is thus a forceful concept in contemporary Brazil, calling attention to the ways poor people are pathologised by the state. Unlike gentrification, increased ground rent and investment opportunities are not necessarily key drivers. Hygienisation is first and foremost about restoring what is perceived to be proper urban order through population and landscape change. It highlights the state's role in systematically and violently removing low-income housing, people, and informal economies from certain areas, and how these actions are justified for reasons of urban development, social order, urban planning, public health, environmental protection, and other narratives emphasising "civilisation". As such, it accounts for modernist discourses in processes of urban displacement, whereby it is presumed the population will accept such measures as rational and necessary for development.

Also significant is how hygienisation represses *and reproduces* urban informality. Pereira Passos' reforms again provide a useful example. The proliferation of favelas in Rio following the destruction of *cortiços* was not only a by-product of state-led displacement: it was also actively cultivated by landowning elites, who would informally cede and charge rents on poor quality land. Politicians, meanwhile, used favelas as vote banks in exchange for *ad hoc* investments and protection from removal (Fischer 2008). In this way, broader social and political relations served to undermine, or at least constrain the success of hygienist agendas. A further example can be seen in ongoing attempts to rehouse very low-income populations in public housing. Such efforts often fail because residents are unable to keep up with new mortgage payments, utility and water bills, service fees, and so on. This tends to lead to, on the one hand, the so-called "*favelização*" (favelisation) of these areas, or, on the other, the eviction of these residents and their eventual participation in new land occupations (Brum 2012). This cyclical process,

whereby the urban poor continually reappear in ways that defy hygienist objectives—what Mauricio Abreu (1994:41) called the “dance of the favelas”—shows how such policies often fail precisely because they do not acknowledge deeper social realities in Brazil.

Curiously, despite common usage in everyday discourse, the term hygienisation has little in the way of academic lineage in Brazil. This does not mean that researchers are unconcerned with hygienisation: to the contrary, researchers have investigated the relationships between medical science and urban development in Brazil for years, noting the influence of hygienist agendas on urban public policy (Benchimol 1999b; Chaloub 1996; Herschmann and Pereira 1994; Machado et al. 1978). This work contributes to broader debates over urban inequality, informality, and the ways lower-income groups are subject to displacement and socio-spatial marginalisation (Abreu 1987, 1994; Bonduki 2010; Fischer 2008). But rather than debating processes of hygienisation *per se*, researchers have more often focused on hygienism’s legacy in Brazil and Latin America, and the relationships between urban planning and bacteriology (Almeida 2017; Czeresnia 1997; Lima 2013). More to the point, hygienisation is a popular term: it is understood and sometimes referred to by urban researchers, but it has not developed as a theoretical concept, nor inspired ongoing academic debate. In this respect it stands in contrast to gentrification, which originated as an academic term and has since been absorbed into the language of activists.

It is here we seek to make our intervention with this article: to argue that, in contexts like Brazil, urban researchers must account for processes of hygienisation (as well as gentrification) when seeking to understand urban displacement. Hygienisation is particularly significant, we argue, in that it remains a key term for describing urban displacement in Brazil, reflecting the ways it is deeply embedded in historical experiences and socio-cultural understandings of how and why such processes occur. As such, we argue that hygienisation offers great potential for making sense of urban development in contexts like Brazil, and provides a useful framework for researchers seeking to understand displacement and inequality in cities with high levels of informality, and where state violence is a central and direct feature of urban governance. To this end, we provide, in the next section, empirical examples of hygienisation from three Brazilian cities. Our purpose is to highlight the ways that researchers—by considering processes of hygienisation—can better understand and explain patterns of urban displacement. Following these empirical examples, we move on, in the final section, to consider the broader ramifications of our argument, and what it means for existing debates among urban researchers.

## Examples of Hygienisation in Brazil

To provide clear examples of hygienisation, and to illustrate how the term is useful for unravelling processes of urban social injustice, in this section we consider three specific cases. The first comes from Pelourinho, in the city of Salvador, capital of the state of Bahia, in the Northeast of Brazil. This case provides historical perspective, revealing processes of hygienisation across several decades. The

second comes from Vila Autódromo, a recent example of hygienisation in Rio de Janeiro that connects on several levels with the Passos Reforms detailed in the previous section. And, finally, our third example comes from São Paulo, highlighting an ongoing effort at hygienisation in the city's infamous "Cracolândia" (Crackland) district in the city centre, where the outcome is still uncertain.

### ***Pelourinho, Salvador da Bahia***

For insight into how hygienisation has unfolded historically, we first consider the northeastern city of Salvador, once the colonial capital of Brazil (until 1763), and still today one of Brazil's largest cities. Salvador is known as "the true center of Afro-Brazilian culture" (Romo 2010:9), a reputation that reflects, on the one hand, Salvador's cultural and economic history (viz. slavery and colonialism), and, on the other, concerted efforts to cultivate and market this image for tourism. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Pelourinho, the historic city centre. Pelourinho was made a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1985, and today millions of tourists visit the area to admire the colonial and cultural attributes. What lies behind Pelourinho's colourful façade, however, are decades of hygienist processes that produced the museum-like landscape one sees today (cf. Bonduki 2010).

During colonial times, Pelourinho was occupied by Salvador's elite. The city is one of the oldest in the Americas, and today Pelourinho maintains its original 16<sup>th</sup> century urban plan and several examples of Portuguese Renaissance architecture (Nobre 2002). It should not be overlooked, however, that slave labour played a significant role in the production of this urban landscape, and that in Portuguese, the word *pelourinho* means "pillory", or whipping post: a place where slaves endured acts of public torture and humiliation. That the district of Pelourinho takes its name from this object reflects the brutal history that produced the space.

Beginning in the mid-1800s, Salvador's elite began moving to newer neighbourhoods to the south, and municipal authorities turned their attention from Pelourinho, letting it dilapidate. By the 1930s, it had a reputation for disrepute, and in 1969, when the first official "recuperation" project for Pelourinho was launched—with the explicit intent of promoting urban renewal for the sake of heritage tourism (and not for the benefit of the local population)—many of the buildings were in serious disrepair (Cifelli and Peixoto 2012). That local residents were heavily stigmatised by municipal authorities during this process, and portrayed as delinquent to the broader city, was part of the political strategy, suggest Cifelli and Peixoto (2012). It helped City Hall win support for the initiative, linking heritage tourism with elite sentiment that Pelourinho needed rehabilitation from the impoverished black population that occupied it.

Still, by the 1990s, little had changed in Pelourinho, leading to intervention from Bahia's state governor, Antônio Carlos Magalhães (Sant'Anna 2003). Working to capitalise on UNESCO's World Heritage site recognition that came in 1985, and in coordination with regional efforts across the Northeast to induce tourism (see Garmany 2011), the state set about overhauling Pelourinho. According to Eduardo Nobre (2002:118), during the 1990s, 1350 structures were restored at a

cost of more than 76 million US dollars. The state also spent heavily on cultural events, live music, and shows to draw outside consumers. To force out the local population, new laws were established to prohibit the residential use of dilapidated and/or historically significant buildings. This accompanied a crackdown on informal businesses, and police targeted “undesirable” occupants in the historic district (Cifelli and Peixoto 2012:46). When these actions proved insufficient, the state adopted more heavy-handed measures: according to Ana Fernandes (2006), between 1992 and 2006, nearly 3000 low-income families were removed to other parts of the city.

Today, at first glance, Pelourinho appears to evidence clear examples of gentrification. There have been recent landscape upgrades, and, similar to other historic city-centre revitalisation projects in Latin America (e.g. Jones and Varley 1999; Rubino 2005), retail and entertainment space has expanded and now caters to higher-income clientele. But to see these changes solely through the lens of gentrification would be to overlook important bits of historical and geographic nuance. For example, these “upgrades” were hardly ever driven by investment opportunities, but instead by the state. Even when private capital proved reticent to invest, the state continued to push through reforms. As Márcia Sant’Anna (2003:49) observes, private investors seemed almost indifferent to urban upgrading in Pelourinho, and “property owners waited passively on new government investment”. Pelourinho’s transformation was first and foremost a state-led project, with lagging participation from private capital, banks, and development firms originally thought crucial to “the broader economic processes” of gentrification (Smith 1987:463).

Related to this was the state’s overwhelming focus on improving landscape features rather than urban infrastructure and social services (Nobre 2002). This is to say that middle and upper-class residents were not enticed to move in because improvements to local schools, hospitals, and urban infrastructure did not accompany state-led building upgrades. Subsequently, lower-income residents were pushed out not by increasing rents, but rather by the state itself, which made laws prohibiting their residential occupation and economic practices in Pelourinho, and then forcibly relocating them to other parts of the city. According to Anadelia Romo (2010:153), this period was marked by extreme state violence, as “residents who refused to sell at the given price were driven from their homes at gunpoint”. In this way, the state also repressed *and* induced urban informality, by prohibiting it in one space (the historic district), yet ensuring it was reproduced elsewhere—e.g. immediately to the west, in Cidade Baixa—when underlying structural forces went unaddressed (viz. inequality). Such patterns have long histories in Brazilian cities, where state efforts to evict low-income residents from central urban areas often result in ongoing cycles of expulsion and reoccupation (Abreu 1994; Brum 2012).

These examples help to show how hygienisation has long been at work in Pelourinho, yet for an even clearer illustration, it is important to see how these processes were justified in public discourse. Since at least the 1960s, the state worked to develop Pelourinho as a place for heritage tourism: somewhere for visitors to see and experience Brazil’s “authentic” colonial past. To accomplish this,

buildings perceived to evidence this legacy were refurbished, illustrating long-held Brazilian elite traditions for hyper-valuing Eurocolonial aesthetics (cf. Garmany and Pereira 2019). Likewise, the state began promoting specific Afro-Brazilian cultural attributes, but only those considered to be historically and culturally significant. For example, groups like Olodum, a percussion collective specialising in traditional Bahian rhythms, were celebrated, whereas contemporary musical genres like hip-hop were not. The more the space came to evoke Salvador's colonial heritage, the more the present-day, low-income, overwhelmingly black residential population came to be singled out. According to the state's historical narrative, these people were out of place, i.e. not the "true" inhabitants, and therefore detrimental to Pelourinho's legacy (cf. Bonduki 2010). Expulsion was justified not only to improve the economic health of the city—which is to say municipal officials feared the locals would scare away tourists—but also to preserve and rehabilitate Pelourinho's urban heritage (Collins 2015; Gledhill and Hita 2018).

The logic and the discourses of this process were blatantly colonialist and racist, and reveal also how fear and stigma remain tightly connected to poverty and blackness in Salvador. That many local residents were removed, by the state, *at gunpoint*, shows why the term hygienisation—which underscores how poor people are pathologised and likened to bacteria to help justify violent state intervention—is particularly apt in this context. Similarly, hygienisation captures the revanchist motivations at work, where state efforts to "clean up" Pelourinho had little to do with middle-class reoccupation of the city centre, but instead were driven by elites wanting to symbolically restore urban space and fortify the landscape against degenerate forces (i.e. the low-income black population). This resonates with other analyses of city-centre restoration in Latin America (e.g. Jones and Varley 1999), foregrounding the need for concepts like hygienisation that account for deeply rooted legacies of racism, colonialism, class-based stigma, and state violence.

### ***Vila Autódromo, Rio de Janeiro***

Turning now to Vila Autódromo—a small favela in the Barra da Tijuca region of Rio de Janeiro—one observes many of the core dynamics that characterise Rio's historical development since the Pereira Passos era, including persistent efforts at hygienisation. The settlement first emerged around 1970 as a community of fisherfolk on the banks of Jacarepaguá Lake (Freire 2013). At that time, Barra da Tijuca was still a rural area, protected from the urbanisation pressures facing Rio's South Zone by the natural barrier of the mountainous Tijuca rainforest. Around the same time, however, it was being sized up as a corridor for future middle-class residential development, and in the early 1970s, the military dictatorship opened up Barra to urbanisation with a massive development project of elevated roads and tunnels cutting through the mountains (Cavalcanti 2017).

A "Pilot Plan" for developing Barra was first drawn up by one of Brazil's leading architects, Lúcio Costa, who had earlier designed the layout for Brasília. Barra's design was similarly based on rational modernist planning principles. Unlike Brasília, however, which had been built on government-owned land, most of

Barra was owned by a few large developers (Cavalcanti 2017:219–220). This produced a highly speculative form of urbanisation, which steadily watered down many of the planning regulations proposed by Costa, and impeded the effective provision and coordination of public services and transport. In an extreme example of a pattern often seen elsewhere in Brazil, large developers not only failed to invest in infrastructure that could undergird sustainable future development: a lack of separation between public and private power also ensured the removal of state constraints to their speculation-driven profit model. More deliberately, the Pilot Plan built social segregation into the region's development. Like previous masterplans in Rio,<sup>2</sup> the Pilot Plan proposed a separation between the coastal strip, reserved for middle-class residential and commercial functions, and the inland Jacarepaguá district, which would contain industrial activities and lower-class housing (Maia 1998). In this way, the elites who built Barra sought to achieve a neat separation of social groups which had been frustrated elsewhere in the city.

By the 1990s, however, the middle-class coastal zone was reaching saturation, and developers began to look north to continue Barra's expansion. It was in this context that Vila Autódromo first began to face eviction threats (see AMPVA 2012; Freire 2013; Rio On Watch 2018). In 1993, city mayor César Maia, and local Barra da Tijuca mayor Eduardo Paes, initiated a legal process to evict the community on the grounds that it was a cause of "aesthetic and environmental damage" (Freire 2013:107), and then again in 1996, claiming it was an *área de risco* ("at risk area") vulnerable to flooding. These attempts, however, were overruled by leftist state governor Leonel Brizola, who, invoking squatters' rights legislation, granted the community *posse* ("right to remain") for 99 years.

Nevertheless, Vila Autódromo's struggles intensified the following decade, as Rio won bids to host, first, the 2007 Pan American Games, and, later, the 2016 Olympics. Much of the key sporting infrastructure for the megaevents was to be built on the site of the Autódromo Nelson Piquet (Racetrack), which bordered Vila Autódromo and had given it its name. As plans for the Olympics emerged in 2009—led by Eduardo Paes, now mayor of Rio de Janeiro—Vila Autódromo was again threatened with removal. Between 2009 and 2012, diverse reasons were given by the mayor's office for needing to remove the community. These included those already cited in the 1990s (that it was an at risk area and an environmental hazard), as well as claims that removal was needed for essential public infrastructure and to ensure security for the Olympic park.

Vila Autódromo's residents, who in 2010 numbered approximately 1250 (IBGE 2010), initially rejected these justifications, and were widely supported by expert opinion. The architects who designed the Olympic Park envisioned Vila Autódromo remaining in place, seeing no conflict with security or urban mobility requirements for the Games. In 2012, residents joined with planners from Rio de Janeiro's Federal University to develop an alternative *Plano Popular* ("Popular Plan") for on-site upgrading (AMPVA 2012), which ultimately won international acclaim, including a Deutsch Bank Urban Age Award (Rio On Watch 2018). Nonetheless, Mayor Paes insisted on pressing ahead with removal. Through a

mixture of legal threats and offers of resettlement in newly built public housing roughly one kilometre away, Paes succeeded in dividing the community, as many decided to accept the new apartments, and a steadily diminishing number continued to resist. In the end, roughly 20 families remained, living among the ruins of their departed neighbours' homes. These families eventually won the right to remain on the site, but on the condition their original homes were demolished and a strip of identical bungalows were built to replace them (Rio On Watch 2018).

Reflecting on processes of urban displacement, some striking aspects of this struggle stand out. Firstly, the justifications for eviction, the proposed plans for the site and the legal mechanisms deployed all shifted continuously over time, suggesting that the desire to remove the community transcended any concrete need to do so. Secondly, there were no strong technical or urbanistic grounds for removal that on-site upgrading could not resolve. So what of economic motivations? As Vila Autódromo's residents argued in their Plano Popular (AMPVA 2012:10), the rise in land values in the surrounding area, especially in the run-up to the Olympics, was fuelling development in the area. Assumptions of future real estate gains would have motivated land grabs wherever possible, and the "state of exception" surrounding the Olympics provided ideal cover (Richmond and Germany 2016). Still, economic motivations alone appear insufficient. The site was small and located next to vast tracts which were already on the market and mostly unsold. While the favela's presence may have slightly lowered the price at which neighbouring condominiums could be sold, the difference would likely have been negligible.

So, if not for technical or economic reasons, why did Paes' administration dedicate so much political capital to removing such a small favela? It seems impossible to believe he would have fought so persistently in the face of legal obstacles, media controversy and the opposition of residents and expert opinion for small and uncertain economic gains, *had that area not been a favela*. This is to say that, while speculative development in the region played a role—and the state was certainly acting to facilitate such speculation—the key motivation was not capturing increased ground rent, but rather cleansing a type of land use that both political and economic elites viewed as a stain on the surrounding landscape.

This was articulated in particularly stark terms by Carlos Carvalho, owner of Barra da Tijuca's largest land developer, Carvalho Hosken, in an unusually candid interview with the BBC (Puff 2015):

Since the 1970s ... [leftist politicians in Rio] wanted to turn lots of these areas into low-income occupations. But, like, favelas, not tidy low-income [*baixa renda arrumada*]. That whole time it was a struggle to defend property. There were attempts to invade lots of areas. One example of this is the favela Rio das Pedras, but my land is there next to it, clean. The truth is that the political process here in Barra is divided between those who want to get elected by tidying it up [*arrumar e se eleger*], and those who want to get elected by the poor by destroying it [*destruir e se eleger através dos pobres*], by being the father of the poor, with a false discourse, without doing what needs to be done.

Politicians like Eduardo Paes rarely speak in such explicit terms, but their determination to remove favelas from areas like Barra da Tijuca appears driven by the same hygienist logic. The fact that a small number of residents were eventually allowed to remain on site as long as the settlement ceased to be a favela and became, instead, a “tidy low-income” area seems to confirm this. By seeking to hygienise the landscape at great cost and for little concrete gain, Paes was reproducing a long hygienist history, struggling against the city’s social reality in a quest to put everything in its “right place”.

### ***Cracolândia, São Paulo***

If Pelourinho and Vila Autódromo represent, from the state’s perspective, somewhat “successful” examples of hygienisation, continued efforts in São Paulo’s Luz district—and, in particular, the area known as “Cracolândia”—have failed to achieve anything comparable. Lying just north of the city centre, Luz was an elite neighbourhood in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, enjoying prestigious cultural amenities and a privileged location next to the city’s main rail station. But the area went into a process of economic decline during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as São Paulo’s financial heart and the upper and middle classes increasingly relocated to the southwest. From the 1950s onward, Luz became famous for its seedy nightlife and prostitution (Rui 2016).

In the 1990s, the area became a magnet for São Paulo’s growing population of crack cocaine users, earning it the nickname *Cracolândia* (“Crackland”) (see Fábio 2017a; Rui 2016; Telles 2017). During this time, increasing numbers of consumers began to assemble in the streets to buy and smoke crack. By the late 2000s, they had formed a kind of itinerant mass of hundreds, sometimes well over a thousand, which is popularly referred to as the *fluxo* (“flow”). Individual users who make up the *fluxo* tend to either sleep rough in the surrounding streets, or otherwise live in the area’s numerous *cortiços* (informally occupied buildings) and cheap boarding houses.

The growing size and visibility of this population began to attract attention from both municipal and state authorities, particularly from 2005 onwards. Numerous violent police operations—most notably in 2005, 2012 and 2017—have sought to disperse the *fluxo* and forcibly direct its users towards rehabilitation services. These “operations” typically involve hundreds of police raiding the area using non-lethal weaponry like rubber bullets, batons and tear gas, making mass arrests and tearing down makeshift huts built by homeless addicts. The hygienist motivations behind these policies are self-evident. The 2005 intervention was called *Operação Limpa Cracolândia* (literally, “Operation Clean Cracolândia”). The 2012 operation, called *Operação Sufoço* (“Operation Suffocation”), was, according to the commanding officer, designed to cause “pain and suffering” so that users would “seek help” (Fábio 2017a). Most recently, in the 2017, a so-called “Mega-Operation” followed the election of João Doria as mayor, who had promised such interventions in his *Cidade Linda* (“Beautiful City”) marketing campaign. Still, every time Cracolândia has been violently dispersed, it has quickly reformed in the same vicinity.

As Vera Telles (2017) points out, the fundamental reason that such approaches fail is because the *fluxo* is a population of “urban refugees” who have fled to the centre from other areas where they face even greater risks. Users’ safety in numbers, and greater visibility compared to the poor peripheral neighbourhoods from which many originate, means they are less likely to be killed by police death squads or drug dealers to whom they owe debts (Rui 2016). The city centre also provides easier access to health services and the kind of low-skilled, casual odd-jobs that allow users to survive and sustain their drug consumption. Recognition of these deeper drivers has, on occasion, given rise to alternative approaches, such as the *Braços Abertos* (“Open Arms”) programme. Introduced by Mayor Fernando Haddad (2012–2016), *Braços Abertos* focused on harm reduction and territorial management rather than dispersal and forced internment. What remains consistent across time, however, is that hygienisation remains the state’s primary objective when it comes to engaging with Cracolândia.

Meanwhile, a range of different strategies have been adopted by different administrations to promote a common objective of regenerating the surrounding area (see Fábio 2017b; Souza 2011). In the late 1990s, several cultural institutions were established in the area funded by the state, or through public–private partnerships (PPPs), which it was hoped would spur a self-sustaining process of culture-led regeneration. When this failed, the *Nova Luz* (“New Luz”) project was unveiled in 2005, seeking to take advantage of new legislation on “Urban Concessions” to contract a private-sector consortium to carry out large-scale revitalisation. As the plans emerged, however, it became clear that large chunks of the existing building stock would have to be destroyed, and that the government had failed to carry out mandatory consultation processes with the local population. This led to the project being blocked in the courts and ultimately shelved. While plans have recently been announced to resuscitate *Nova Luz*, nothing on the same scale has yet emerged.

Still, some demolitions and removals and construction of new housing have been carried out in the area, betraying a clear attempt by the authorities to transform both the landscape and the population. A large shopping centre was demolished in 2007 (leading to an expansion of the *fluxo* on the abandoned land that was left behind), and the 2017 “Mega-Operation” was quickly followed by the destruction of an entire block, inhabited by some 200 families (Machado 2018). In the latter case, residents were not given sufficient warning or provided with alternative accommodation, leading to further demolitions being blocked. However, the authorities seem committed to destroying at least two more blocks and evicting their residents (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, since 2014, a new PPP has produced close to 1000 social housing units in the area. Together, the recent evictions and the criteria used to allocate new housing have followed a clear pattern: only 20% of the units are reserved for local residents, with 80% allocated to incomers (Fábio 2017b). Many existing residents, meanwhile, being informally housed and employed, lack the necessary documents to be eligible for government housing. They are also likely to earn less than the minimum income threshold of one minimum salary (about 250 US dollars per month). Such changes are clearly designed to transform the population from an undocumented one living in extreme

poverty, and many of whom are drug dependent, to a low-income, but formally employed working class.

So, are these changes likely to provoke gentrification? It should be noted there are some private interests based in the area, most notably Porto Seguro, Brazil's third largest insurance company, which has a large complex of offices neighbouring Cracolândia and has made some investments to try and improve local security and amenities. Meanwhile, in other central neighbourhoods, several high-rise blocks of studio apartments catering primarily to students and other marginal gentrifiers have recently sprung up, possibly signalling the start of processes that could bring higher-income residents to Luz. Such outcomes, however, are far from inevitable. There are major political and legal obstacles to carrying out the degree of creative destruction of the built environment that many believe is required. Meanwhile, crack use and homelessness remain widespread and deeply embedded in the city centre. Both factors seem to reinforce a reluctance among investors and potential gentrifiers to bet on the area's long-term improvement. Indeed, very little seems to have changed since 2009 when Frúgoli and Sklair (2009:131) wrote the following: "The neighbourhood of Luz presents a very ambiguous scenario, in which a large, heterogeneous and well-rooted population—almost totally characterized by its low-income and popular profile—practically precludes a rapid transformation of the urban landscape, along the lines proposed by the local government, unless a very large intervention occurs."

Under such circumstances, the concept of hygienisation is especially useful for understanding social dynamics and repressive state action in Cracolândia. Even though the necessary constellation of forces is not in place to produce gentrification, the state still insists on attempting to fight off the "infection" of Cracolândia. The extremely marginalised and vulnerable population who occupy the area are viewed not only as an impediment to economic development, but as an intolerable stain on the urban landscape; a threat to civilisation itself. Where market and bureaucratic mechanisms cannot effectively cure this malady, all that remains is to "cleanse" through violent dispersal. In this case, however, given the relative benefits the city centre offers to these "urban refugees", the state appears to be unable to wash them away.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Throughout this article we have worked to define and provide examples of urban hygienisation. Our purpose has been twofold: (1) to highlight specific characteristics of urban displacement in contexts like Brazil, where legacies of colonialism, racism, state violence, and informality must be accounted for; and (2) to provide researchers better analytical traction for seeing and making sense of urban displacement processes not fully captured by gentrification. The case studies in this article help to exemplify this, showing the need for new critical engagement and theorisation. To address this, we suggest that hygienisation provides an especially useful analytical lens, where lower-income residents are pathologised and singled out by the state—and subsequently characterised as morally suspect and out of place—so that their expulsion from a given space is justified according to

modernist discourses (e.g. for the greater social good; for progress and development; for the rational organisation of urban space and populations). By seeing urban displacement through an alternative lens like hygienisation, and by engaging different terms that compliment, yet also reveal, the limitations of existing EuroAmerican frameworks like gentrification, we argue that urban researchers are better equipped to grapple theoretically with key bits of empirical nuance that distinguish cities throughout the world.

In this respect, it is important to emphasise that hygienisation is not, of course, unique to Brazil, and that key features of this process can be found elsewhere. Researchers are most likely to find it in cities where postcolonial legacies of racism and social stigma are significant, urban informality is prominent, and urban governance is characterised by frequent state violence. To reiterate, hygienisation is defined by, *but not necessarily limited to*, the following attributes: (1) It is a process whereby low-income people are forced from specific urban areas, not necessarily for ground rent maximisation or investment opportunities, but primarily to impose/restore hygienic urban landscapes; (2) the state, and more specifically state violence, play central roles; (3) low-income residents facing displacement are frequently depicted as trespassers, perceived as out of place, and therefore pathologised and considered delinquent; (4) it tends to repress *and* induce urban informality, by smothering it one space, and then—rather than address the drivers of social inequality—ensuring it reemerges elsewhere; and (5) it is often justified according to modernist discourses that emphasise the greater urban good.

It is important also to recognise the ways hygienisation—as a term useful for considering processes of urban development and inequality in contexts like Brazil—contributes to ongoing debates among urban researchers concerned with legacies of racial and social stigma, displacement, and state violence. For example, as Jaime Alves (2018) argues, to understand contemporary patterns of inequality and violence in Brazilian cities, researchers must account not only for socio-spatial patterns of racial segregation; they must also consider the state's necropolitical governance of Afro-Brazilian space and populations. Such critiques contribute to emergent studies focusing on the racialised governance of cities in the global South *and* North (McElroy and Werth 2019; Picker 2017), highlighting specific links between modalities of state violence and the chronic displacement of low-income and marginalised urban populations (Elliott-Cooper et al. 2019; Ghertner 2014). Hygienisation helps provide a framework for understanding these processes, and draws attention to broader legacies of racialised politics, social cleansing, and state violence in cities.

At a more granular level, hygienisation helps researchers gain better purchase for critical investigations of urban displacement. On the one hand, hygienisation provides a useful framework for making sense of urban displacement processes that resemble gentrification, but are distinguished by empirical and contextual features. Again, this is especially significant in postcolonial contexts marked by extreme marginalisation, urban informality, and state violence. And on the other hand, it responds to broader postcolonial interventions in urban studies that call attention to how frameworks emphasising the spread of “global” processes are often built upon colonialist epistemologies (e.g. Roy 2011). To be sure, concepts like hygienisation and gentrification can be “complementary” (Doshi 2015:101)—

which is to say it is more useful to think about them as mutually coexisting processes rather than mutually exclusive ones—but it would be naïve to suggest there is equal engagement with these ideas in academic debate. Often this represents asymmetries in international academic research, where so-called “global” scholarly debates typically reveal EuroAmerican-centrist perspectives (Jazeel 2016; McFarlane 2010; Slater 1992).

It is here, we suggest, that the concept of hygienisation becomes more broadly useful to researchers in both the global South and North. As Smart and Smart (2017:519) observe, “the urban sprawl of gentrification talk” has become so pervasive in contemporary urban studies, it has “displaced and erased alternative idioms and concepts that may be more useful for describing and analyzing local processes of urban change”. Hygienisation represents one of these “alternative idioms”, and what it offers to urban researchers, we argue, is better insight into urban displacement, *as well as* critical reflection on processes like gentrification. In this sense, it also responds to Cindi Katz’s (1996) (still necessary) call for “minor theory”: ideas and academic practice that are interstitial, refuse mastery, and embrace limitation. Hygienisation is *not* an all-encompassing concept for explaining urban transformations, but one that is useful for interpreting particular moments and relational processes. It is useful, as Smart and Smart (2017:524) might say, for “trim[ming] back the tendency to cover over local conceptual diversity” in urban theory. Concepts like hygienisation can therefore help researchers to engage cities on more localised terms, and to provincialise urban theory by not necessarily deferring to EuroAmerican conceptual frameworks. We hope this work contributes to these debates, and provides academic researchers—as well as activists—better tools for examining and resisting urban displacement.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> One key exception is the work of Jones and Varley (1999), who in the 1990s identified processes of gentrification in Puebla, Mexico.

<sup>2</sup> Consider, for example, the 1928 *Plano Agache*, which proposed to spatially segregate the city according to both economic function and the social character of different neighborhoods. While this plan was not officially adopted, it formed the basis of much subsequent planning legislation (Fischer 2008:45).

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