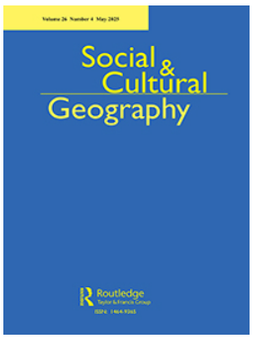

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In the interstices of ubiquity: respatialising Bogotá through black relational territories

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ABSTRACT

Through a narrativization that connects heterogeneous and often undetected social lives in Bogotá, Colombia, this article charts the rhizomatic spatial crossings of continuously mobile urban trajectories, the often-unsettled forms of dwelling that they inhabit, and their capacity to make place despite the dismantling of community cohesion and the necropolitical forms of urbanity operated by racial capitalism and coloniality across Latin America – what the article refers to as *relational territories*, drawing on a rich scholarship on Black Geographies of the everyday and Latin American 'territorios'. From there, the article explores how paths are being charted out of the racial-colonial maze of Latin America's city-making, through multiple forms of ordinary resistance/re-existence that create life in the interstices of ongoing necro-politics . Ultimately, the article shows how this pluralistic repertoire mobilized from the urban margins not only points to the difficulties of emplacement for Afro-descendant dwellers in Latin American cities but also to the possibility of respatialising the urban from the decolonial relationality of Améfrica.

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Dans les interstices de l'ubiquité : la respatialisation de Bogotá à travers les territoires relationnels de la population noire

RÉSUMÉ

Avec une mise en récit qui relie les vies sociales hétérogènes et souvent inaperçues à Bogotá, en Colombie, cet article trace les intersections spatiales rhizomatiques des trajectoires urbaines qui sont continuellement mobiles, les formes d'habitation souvent instables dans lesquelles elles résident et leur capacité de faire de la place malgré le démantèlement de la cohésion communautaire et les formes nécropolitiques d'urbanité qu'engendrent le colonialisme et le capitalisme raciaux en Amérique latine (ce que l'on appelle ici les territoires relationnels) en s'appuyant sur l'abondance de travaux sur la géographie de la population noire qui traite du

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quotidien et des « territorios » d'Amérique latine. De là, l'article explore la manière dont les directions sont cartographiées à partir du labyrinthe colonisateur et racial de la fabrication de villes latino-américaines, par des formes multiples de création de lieux, de résistance et de réexistence ordinaires. Finalement, l'article montre comment ce répertoire pluraliste mobilisé des marges urbaines dévoile les difficultés de l'emplacement pour les habitants des villes d'Amérique Latine de souche africaine, ainsi que la possibilité de respatialiser l'urbain en partant de la relationnalité décolonisée de l'Améfrique.

En los intersticios de la ubicuidad: Reespacializando Bogotá a través de territorios relacionales negros

RESUMEN

A través de una narración que conecta vidas sociales heterogéneas ya menudo desapercibidas en Bogotá, Colombia, este artículo trazalos cruces espaciales rizomáticos de trayectorias urbanas enconstante movilidad, las formas de vivienda a menudo inestables quehabitan y su capacidad para crear un lugar a pesar deldesmantelamiento de la cohesión comunitaria y las formasnecropolíticas de urbanidad operadas por el capitalismo racial y lacolonialidad en América Latina, lo que el artículo denomina *territorios relacionales*, basándose en la exuberante investigación sobre las geografías negras de lo cotidiano y los "territorios" latinoamericanos. A partir de allí, el artículo explora cómo seestán trazando caminos para salir del laberinto racial-colonial dela construcción de ciudades en América Latina, a través demúltiples formas de resistencia/re-existencia ordinaria y creaciónde lugares. Finalmente, el artículo muestra cómo este repertoriopluralista movilizado desde los márgenes urbanos no sólo apunta alas dificultades de inserción de los habitantes afrodescendientes enlas ciudades latinoamericanas sino también a la posibilidad dereubicar lo urbano desde la relacionalidad decolonial de América Latina.

Dis-/placing blackness in Bogotá

It was the usual cold drizzle that welcomed Esmeralda upon her arrival to the Andean capital city of Bogotá. The warmth she had left behind was that of Cali, Colombia's third main city. However, Esmeralda[1] was not born in either one. The meaning of homeplace for her still resounds in the roaring of the river of a rural town, Ciudad Suárez, in the region of Valle del Cauca, which is known for having been riven by decades of internecine war between paramilitary and guerrilla groups. There, during the years of Alvaro Uribe's presidency, the historical massacre that is famously known as the 'False Positives' caused numerous disappearances and assassinations amidst Colombia's most invisible citizens – those whom the first black vice-president of Colombia, environmental activist Francia Márquez, has often called the country's *nadies* (nobody). Among them were half of Esmeralda's sons and her husband.[2]

Esmeralda's story is an emblematic example of the forcible condition of being on the move that has punctuated the history of people of African descent in the

Americas with stories of visceral violence and uprootedness, from the trans-Atlantic slave trade to Colombia's internal war and environmental extractivism, all of which have disproportionately affected black communities, their livelihoods, and their spatial ontologies (Arboleda Quiñonez, 2019; Escobar, 2008; Oslender, 2016). Esmeralda's is an individual as much as a collective story of decades of political struggle, social organizing, and tireless fights for women's and Afro-Colombians' justice, peace, and reparations.

While she jokes that it was 'a miracle' to help her survive the paramilitary killings of Ciudad Suárez, it was in fact a functioning network of neighbours' solidarity that helped her flee. After that, she hid with her family for some years in the highly stigmatized district of Aguablanca, in Cali. There, she joined the city's bustling popular economy with her micro-trade of *chontaduro*, until she could save enough money to travel to the capital city.[3] Both in Cali and Bogotá, Esmeralda repeatedly crossed her path with that of many other internally displaced black families and, particularly, women who also had lost loved ones to paramilitary and guerrilla violence.[4] The rhizomatic spatial crossings of these continuously mobile trajectories, the often-unsettled forms of dwelling that they inhabit, and their capacity to re-produce territorial spaces of life despite the dismantling of community cohesion and the necropolitical urbanities shaped by racial capitalism and coloniality are the subject of this article.

To excavate the connections between them, the article analyses them in dialogue with one another, as 'relational territories' (Torino, 2020): disparate, yet ever-present, openings from which the intersectional violence of city-making and racialized capture are lived and opposed, generatively. To frame this repository of praxes as territories, the article draws on two main conceptual frameworks and on ethnographic fieldwork in Bogotá. As the first conceptual framework, territories are explored here as spaces of anti-racist manoeuvre against capitalist and colonial necropower (Fanon, 1991 [1961]; Mbembe, 2003). In Latin America's long history of racial-colonial violence and domination, *territorios* have long been spaces of tactical operability for black, indigenous, and peasant communities (Asher, 2009; Escobar, 2008; Haesbaert & Mason-Deese, 2020; Halvorsen & Zaragocín, 2023; Hooker, 2005; Ngweno, 2007). These have often included practices of insurgence, fugitivity, and maroonage (Berman Arévalo, 2021; Bledsoe, 2017; Zavala Guillen, 2021), as radical alternatives to deliberate practices of ethnocide and epistemicide (Arboleda Quiñonez, 2019).

As the second conceptual framework, black urban territories are conceived here as 'ignored interstice[s] of ubiquity', drawing on Inírida (Morales, 2003) p. 645, proposition that Afro-Colombian cultural contribution to the nation has long been invisibilised. Morales suggests that visibilising such liminalities is 'necessary to understand the root and meaning of Afro-descendancy and, consequently, the process of construction and re-construction of ethnic identities in the urban context' (*ibid.*). While drawing on this notion, I want to stress how the reciprocities, exchanges, networks, and spatial praxes that are exemplified by the spatial stories exposed in this article serve as political and ontological – rather than merely cultural or ethnic, as in Morales (2003)– disruptions of the normativity that coloniality and racial capitalism put in place in Latin American cities. This article will build the case that, in their pervasiveness and abiding ability to reproduce, these *interstices of ubiquity* articulate the modalities and possibilities of collective urban

life within and beyond existing economic, political, and ontological structures of racial-colonial capture.

The article also draws on two years of longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork (July 2017-July 2019) in three marginalized and, especially in first two cases, hyper-impoverished areas of Bogotá which, not coincidentally,[5] also have the highest percentages of Afro-Colombian residents: Altos de Cazuca, the west of Suba, and downtown Bogotá (in particular, the neighbourhoods of Santa Fe and La Candelaria). Since 2017, I have made daily and weekly visits to social and economic organizations run by Afro-Colombian women and men, participated in community meetings, and walked those sectors extensively, often together with residents, activists, and social leaders who reside and work there.

As a white European woman who called Bogotá home for a decade, my research agenda is driven by socio-spatial justice and radical re-imaginations of collective urban lives. Due to both my positionality and the nature of this research, building and maintaining trust during the research process was a laborious act of love, humility, openness to vulnerability, honesty, patience, necessary discomfort, and allyship. Never linear, it required at all times to critically and proactively engage with, and work against, what Gloria Anzaldúa calls *desconocimientos*, namely 'the ignorance we cultivate to keep ourselves from knowledge so that we can remain unaccountable' (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 2). This included coming to terms with, unlearning, and whenever possible instrumentalising my own social privilege in Colombia from an oppositional locus (Hooks, 2015 [1990]), raising and answering difficult questions, listening without preconceptions, and sharing the anger and grief of many people across Bogotá's geographies of uneven power.

At first, many Afro-Colombian research participants were understandably inquisitive and suspicious of my presence. However, an attitude of honest disclosure and dialogue, as well as my sustained presence in spaces of grassroots activism and community organization of the city, and in neighbourhoods that had been historically disregarded, stigmatized, and avoided by many academics, media, and institutions alike, contributed to building and cementing mutual trust. After that, many became the most generous supporters of this research and some are now trusted friends. They also facilitated the contact with an extensive and diverse network of social leaders and organizations, activists, artists, midwifes, shopkeepers, school teachers, restauranteurs, traditional healers, internally displaced survivors of the armed conflict, social workers, the mothers of 'disappeared' and incarcerated youth, priests, and other urban residents who contributed invaluable views to this work.

The longitudinal, walking-based, and multi-sited ethnographic methodology that grounds this research was particularly helpful in digging out connections across the city. This becomes especially visible in the storytelling format of the present article, which seeks to mirror the oral and material histories of unsettlement and the practices of journeying of the protagonists of the research. As such, in the article each ethnographic story evolves into the following one, weaving a thread of places, people, and historical events into an interlinked yet by no means exhaustive picture of contested urban life in Bogotá, amidst racialized violence and ordinary resistance. These accounts point towards the existence of a functional and dynamic, yet often underground and discontinuous, relational human infrastructure across the city (Simone, 2004) that is centred upon the

social, cultural, affective, and political work of informal workers, internally displaced people and, largely, women.

Through this narrativization, the article seeks to accomplish three main tasks. First, to think relationally about the urban margins (Lancione, 2016) as they produce and extend black territories across and beyond the municipal boundaries of Bogotá. Second, to ask how these urban extensions (Simone et al., 2023) that stem from the spatial agency of marginalized social groups are, in turn, *respatialising* the city. That means to ask how they are re-producing the urban otherwise. As it is clarified in the next section, this conceptual framework is drawn from Black and Afro-Latin American geographical studies and seeks to show how black spatial agency in Colombia intervenes in the making and stitching-back-together of relational territories in metropolitan spaces, like Bogotá's, that are structurally segregated by class (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008), racially divided in space (Duarte Mayorga et al., 2013; Urrea & Viáfara, 2016), and where Afro-Colombians have arrived from different spaces of the country: often rural, often internally displaced, and usually deemed not to belong to the cosmopolitan capital city (Mosquera, 1998; Torino, 2024; Williams Castro, 2013). While these spatial practices operate within and through the 'periphery' (economic, social and, oftentimes, physical), they extend far beyond it. This, as the article shall argue, suggests the existence of a different imaginary of producing and inhabiting the urban that works against extractive logics of neoliberal policy and individualized 'multicultural cosmopolitanism' (Torino, 2021). Third and finally, the article asks what it means to provincialize power from these extensive urban margins. This will require imagining an ontological shift from 'peripheries' to 'territories' and asking what such a shift entails for the predominant racial-colonial ontology of city-making in Bogotá (and elsewhere in Latin America).

Ultimately, then, this article points to how blackness in the city is simultaneously captive of extractive capitalist logics and the racial residues of coloniality, on the one hand, and generative of relational forms of inhabiting the urban, on the other hand. To this end, terms like black, white, and mestizo are to be read here in inverted commas rather than capitalized. While acknowledging the capitalized use of these terms (especially in different contexts from the Latin American, such as the Anglo-Saxon), this article moves from the understanding that race is an invented social category (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Du Bois, 1903/2008; Hall, 1980) and a product of historical violence and coloniality. Rather than focussing on individual identifications, then, the article interrogates blackness and whiteness as knowledge systems (Fanon, 1986/1952; Gilroy, 1993; Hills Collins, 1990/2009; Wynter, 2003), and race-making as a power structure that shapes unequal access to privilege and space in human and non-human worlds. When a greater focus on identity (especially spatial and territorial identities) is required in the text, the article employs the term Afro-Colombian.

Then, if race has been a pivotal instrument in the socio-spatial making of, and living in, Bogotá and other Latin American cities through the relentlessly unequal distribution of resources, civil rights, and opportunities, what does it mean to rethink Latin American metropolises like Bogotá through the relational politics and spatial praxes of some of their most marginalized urban dwellers? What can black territorial ontologies do to chart different paths of urban collective life? In approaching these questions, the following sections bring attention to the ways in which dwellers living at the margins build a kind of social and political subjectivity that subverts the subaltern place they were historically

forced to occupy, by means of 'place-based critiques, or, respatializations' (McKittrick, 2006, p. 11).

Extended spatial relations, beyond the urban/rural divide

An important admonition has been raised by scholars of Black Geographies: that blackness cannot be merely synonymous with racialization in scholarly analyses. Among them, Katherine McKittrick's (2011, p. 960) invigorating proposition of reimagining 'how we are intimately tied to broader conceptions of human and planetary life [that] demonstrate our common and difficult histories of encounter' has long been a call for a political and poetic act to re-conceptualize 'geographies of dispossession and racial violence not through the comfortable lenses of insides/outsides or us/them… but as sites through which co-operative human efforts can take place and have a place' (*ibid*.).

Similar approaches have tried to resituate discourses on collective life away from dichotomous and essentialist grounds and to promote, instead, accounts where blackness can unsettle the modern-colonial edifices that have often entrapped the imaginative operability of city-making (Simone, 2012). In Colombia and Latin America, the fields of scholarly analysis that fall within the remit of b/Black Geographies (Alves, 2018; Berman Arévalo, 2021; Vargas, 2020), Afro-Latin American Geographies (Asher, 2009; Mollett, 2017; Y. Mosquera, 2022; Ngweno, 2007; Oslender, 2016; Zavala Guillen, 2021), and Améfrican Geographies (Alves & Vargas, 2023; Gómez, 2019; Gonzalez, 1988) have expanded tremendously over the last two decades, often propelled by new constitutional turns that recognized for the first time the ethnic and cultural rights, and the collective land ownership, of Afro-descendant citizens. In Colombia, this was famously attained through Law 70, or Law of Black Communities (Ngweno, 2007; Paschel, 2010).

In drawing on these compelling debates, the article is also inspired by works such as Beth Ruth Lozano's research on ordinary, but not less revolutionary, acts of 'epistemic insurgency' (Lozano Lerma, 2016) operated through poetry, nurturing family networks, midwifery, and other quiet forms of marronage that extend since the colonial age. This epistemic approach complexifies notions of resistance as loud, often masculine, performative acts, articulating instead more nuanced accounts of the territorial operations of spatialized power and agency in Afro-Latin America (see also: Berman-Arévalo and Valdivia, 2022).

Even in the majority of these accounts, however, there continues to be a marginal focus on cities and urban space-making, as black geographies in Latin America continue to be predominantly associated with the *topos* of the non-urban. Exceptions in recent years have included the works of Jaime Alves (2014, 2018), Austin Zeiderman (2016), Aurora Vergara (Alves & Vergara, 2018), Melissa Valle (2017), Zaire Zenit Dinzey-Flores (2013), and Geler et al. (2020). These studies have advanced the qualitative understanding of the ways in which race-making and city-making are deeply interlinked and co-dependant in the production of Latin American geographies. Notwithstanding, the prolonged association between blackness and the non-urban in Latin America often continues, if unwillingly, to reinforce the colonial binary that has long separated and opposed the rural to the urban (Duer & Veglió, 2019), the latter still seen as the prerogative of modern(–colonial) and white(–mestizo) subjects and power. Therefore, this article puts particular

emphasis on the urban realm, showing how counter-hegemonic forms of imagining and producing space and place can and do stem from the city – especially from its epistemic and social margins, in the ordinary interstices of everyday life, from where, simultaneously, extended relations between the city and rural territories are drawn, in a relational continuum.

Journeying to emplacement: the making of relational territories

Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar highlights how displacement can be said to be 'an integral attribute' of modernity (Escobar, 2003, p. 162) and of our contemporary age of dispersion, temporary assemblages, and unrelenting fluxes. In the Colombian context, displacement must be understood within a colonial and racial matrix that has affected black and indigenous people disproportionately (CODHES, 2010). Afro-Colombian author Mary Grueso emblematically enshrines the lived experience of racialized displacement in this poem:

Y llegan al estuario de la bahía	And they arrive at the estuary of the bay
Sin cabezas o sin brazos o sin piernas	Without heads or without arms or without legs
O simplemente una cabeza que no sabe,	Or simply a head that doesn't know,
Donde quedó su cuerpo	Where their body is
Mutilado por una sierra inclemente	Mutilated by a merciless saw
Que ha transmutado su oficio en el tiempo.	That has transmuted their trade in time.
Y los otros . . .	
	And the others. . .
Se mueren de tristeza	They die of sadness
En las ciudades,	In the cities,
Los que alcanzaron a salir con suerte.	Those who managed to get out with luck.
Pero ante esta sociedad indiferente	Before this indifferent society
De humillaciones, desprecios,	Of humiliation, contempt,
Y silencios . . .[6]	And silences. . .

(in Cuesta Escobar & Ocampo Zamorano, 2008, pp. 87–88)

While deeply acknowledging this reality, in line with McKittrick's admonition mentioned above this article moves beyond narratives of black displacement that reinforce a mono-focal image of loss and despair – even as such loss and despair are, every day, painfully shaping the dwelling experiences of racialized communities across urban and rural geographies. Far from removing responsibilities from the state and the elites, this choice does not mark a celebration of the resilience of the urban and global vulnerable but, rather, a political recognition of their agency and efforts to live with dignity despite structural forces that persistently work against them, and which may suggest the impossibility of such a life to unfold. It is also a decision informed by the refusal to add yet another voice to the long list of representations that, as a young black activist, filmmaker, and friend told me in 2018, keep portraying Afro-Colombians as victims without agency. In his own words:

> Where do you want to place your "camera"? Because here [in Colombia] they just want to celebrate the tragedy. When I was younger, I experienced a lot of racism, on the streets, at school, at work. But I [chose] to heal myself. To the able to focus on those artistic, cultural and socio-political manifestations that, in Colombia, black people did achieve and continue to achieve. To move my people forward and to avoid a continuous revictimization.[7]

In answer to his initial question, the following series of 'curvy stories' (Simone, 2004, p. 307) of journeying to and across the city of Bogotá focus on the existence of a pluralistic and often untapped repository of knowledges and capacities long hindered by the racialized edifices of Latin American urbanism and that is used by Afro-Colombian residents to carve out spaces for themselves and for life in the capital city. In so doing, the racialized association between blackness and displacement in Colombia is replaced, here, with the generative association between black territories and relationality. The latter, as the next section shows, is forged upon reciprocities and holistic forms of socio-natural space-making that, taken together, re-centre black spatial consciousness and agency in the city.

Travelling through the asides

When Esmeralda first arrived to Bogotá she arrived, as do many other internally displaced Afro-Colombians, in what is infamously known as Bogotá's 'periphery of the periphery': the district of Altos de Cazuca (see Figure 1). The Caracolí-Robles urban continuum, which connects the neighbouring municipality of Soacha to the outskirts of Bogotá, is one of the most socially stigmatized areas of urban Colombia and Latin America. Other urban 'slums', as Cazuca is often pejoratively described, are represented as spaces of insecurity and decay, but Cazuca is consistently constructed as *the* epitome of depravation and urban dystopia, often in relation to the stigma associated with its high percentage of internally displaced residents, many of whom are Afro-Colombians. Perhaps more than anywhere else in Bogotá, in Cazuca the association between blackness and displacement contributes to shape a racialized geographical imaginary of insecurity and urban decay. It is then not a coincidence that it is one of the few national outposts of the *Defensoría del Pueblo* (Ombudsman's Office), which oversees the defence of the human rights of individuals and communities in Colombia.

Figure 1. Residential street in El oasis, Altos de Cazuca. (Photo by G. Torino, 2018).

While Cazuca certainly has its own history of coming about, this is hardly discernible nowadays due to the incessant fluxes of bodies, stories, construction materials, layering, and erasures that have been accumulating over the past two decades.[8] As such, the feeling of impenetrability that characterizes the district is not merely connected to its hardly accessible and mountainous topography and the maze of its streets, but also to its very origins. Cazuca is geographically located just beyond the jurisdictional border that separates the municipality of Soacha from Bogotá, at the South-Western border of the Colombian capital city. Nevertheless, its administrative boundaries do not do justice to the continuity of entangled cables, pipes, roads, self-built houses, bodies, and circulations that keep Cazuca firmly sutured to Bogotá — unevenly, like a transplanted but vital organ. Little in the built environment announces the threshold between Caracolí (Bogotá) and Los Robles (Soacha). The only indicators are the changing colour of the street signs and the suddenly incongruous progression of the streets and avenues numeration, alongside the less intense commercial activities on the two parallel main streets that cut through the mountain on which Cazuca's settlements lie. Public coverage of electricity, water and gas stops by the invisible municipal border, where pirate connections to Bogotá's infrastructural system become plentiful. But as one walks to the least accessible areas of Cazuca, sliding on the mud up and down the hills on rainy days, a social landscape emerges that is hard to be found elsewhere in Bogotá, due to the uncommonly high concentration of black dwellers.

Quantitative data on Afro-Colombians in Cazuca are scarce and unreliable, including from official censuses. Until the late 2000s, the Afro-Colombian social organization AFRODES used to carry out a periodical survey of black Internally Displaced People (IDP). After the organization closed their local outpost in Cazuca due to security concerns, Padre Mario, an energetic elderly priest resident in the area, has been one of the few people to carry out some kind of survey. He employs a heuristic approach by visiting the homes of his Afro-Colombian neighbours every six months or so. According to his estimate, up until mid 2018 about 30% of the local population was Afro-Colombian. If his estimate is near correct, Cazuca's Afro-Colombian percentual concentration would be twice the highest to be found in any other borough of Bogotá.

In 2011, illegal armed groups started to force out of the district the numerous human rights activists, NGOs, and other social organizations that had been previously active there. By 2018, there was barely any institutional presence left.[9] Rare exceptions are represented by an outpost of the Defensoría del Pueblo and a handful of religious and community activists who, unshakeably, continue to pursue social projects with Cazuca's youth and residents. Living in Cazuca means navigating an urban environment marked by the lack of public provisions, institutional abandonment, a considerable income disparity with Bogotá's average, extremely low levels of formal education, the lack of jobs and the primacy of *rebusque*,[10] unhealthy hygienic conditions, very high levels of pollution, a persistent geological condition of high risk, the lack of green areas and public spaces, the absence of basic housing provisions, and where drug trafficking and homicides are the norm, including in broad daylight. Garbage often remains uncollected, open drainage scars the unpaved roads, and street dogs are 'more numerous than humans', as a local pun goes.

When the bus that usually leads residents up the mountains of Bogotá's southernmost border approaches the last stop, on the typically grey Andean afternoon of 19 June 2019, after a two-hour ride started downtown and three bus changes, the rain has not ceased to fall and a slippery mix of mud, garbage, and dirty water covers every walkable surface

Figure 2. Main street in Los Robles, Altos de Cazuca. (Photo by G. Torino, 2018).

(Figure 2). From the last stop, Tres Esquinas (Caracolí), one must make their way on foot, via a shared car, or by motorcycle up the hill that leads to Cazuca. As I cross the ill-known Calle 19, I remember an event that happened a year before. It was the week of the annual celebration of San Pacho,[11] which has been for years one of the main Afro-descendant events taking place in Cazuca. Every year, Cazuca's black community leaders, alongside members of the Comboni Fathers and the Pastoral Afro,[12] organize several social gatherings for this celebration.[13] That year, Padre Mario had organized the latest of his ambitious social projects: a civic gathering to collectively build the first garbage chute of the area. As we were helping to gather people to join, Juana looked uncertain: ' . . . *pero no es re peligroso ahí?!*' ('isn't it extremely dangerous over there?'[14]).

Juana is an Afro-Colombian woman who had recently arrived to Cazuca with her daughter from Tumaco. Yet, despite being still 'new' to the area, she was already familiar with the stigma attached to the Calle 19 –a sector historically inhabited by black residents and shopkeepers – though she seemed unaware of the racialized trope that, according to some, originated the stigma.[15] As many others who have been internally displaced, she entered the capital city via Cazuca, in the hope of being relocated soon enough to a more stable home and a safer district. When they first arrived in the neighbourhood of La Isla (Cazuca), Juana did not know anyone except Padre Mario. Coincidentally, they had been neighbours in Tumaco too, both moving from one aside to the other: Mario by choice, Juana by necessity. It took time for Juana to get to know other neighbours, for initially the only space of social interaction was the little *chiva*[16] that drove her and the other women of Cazuca to their workplaces in Bogotá. During her first years in the city, Juana had found work as a domestic worker in a wealthy neighbourhood of the North-East. Every day, it would take her about three hours to get to work and three to get back. However, as it often happens, she was eventually removed from that stable job and is now called only a few times per year.[17]

A growing scholarship has indicated that black female employees in Colombia find themselves working in domestic service much more than white-mestizo women of a similar class background (Rodríguez Garavito et al., 2013). The origin of this racialized and gendered social relation can be traced back to Colombia's slaveholding past and its afterlives. An emblematic example of this was reported in the Colombian magazine *Hola* where, in 2011, the image of Cali's richest, white-mestizo, family served in the background by two black domestic workers, under the title of 'The most powerful women of Cali', provoked a nation-wide scandal. As analysed by Tamara Walker (2017), the construction of this image 'adhered to and called forth a visual tradition that dated back to … when masters and slaves appeared together in various genres of portraiture' (Walker, 2017, 199), marking a long visual tradition which often erased the political subjectivity and agency of black peoples in Latin America.

Juana's daughter is now sixteen, the same age at which her brother was jailed in the infamous prison of La Picota, soon after they had arrived in Bogotá. She also is the same age at which Juana's oldest son disappeared (or, rather, '*lo desaparecieron*': they *made* him disappear) in Tumaco. Probably, as Juana reveals, one of the thousand cases of Colombia's False Positives. After that day, Juana's family was forced to find refuge elsewhere. Just like Esmeralda, they went to Cali first. Then, they arrived in Bogotá. She is now renting a tiny room with her daughter, in one of the least desirable but cheapest parts of Cazuca. To fit together, she sleeps on the floor while her daughter sleeps on the single bed that occupies most of the room. The owner of the apartment, a middle-aged mestizo man who lives in the room next to hers, attempted to sexually abuse her soon after she had moved in. However, Juana decided not to report him, as that would most likely entail losing the only rent opportunity that she and her daughter found in Bogotá.[18]

The rent gap between black and white-mestizo tenants is often a further deterrent and a way to effectively, albeit unofficially, sectorize the urban districts where Afro-Colombians end up living. For example, while Juana pays a thousand Colombian pesos (about GBP 25) per month for a tiny single room, Mario (who is white and a man) pays two thousand pesos (about GBP 50) per month for an entire house, with three rooms, a kitchen, and a living room.[19]Even in such a socially controversial district – the city's and country's asides par excellence, where the racialized necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003) of Colombian internal displacement are most visibly materialized – the stigmatized construction of blackness constitutes an immense boundary for the ability of Afro-Colombians to rent a room, let alone an apartment and, consequently, to create a sense of place. Despite and beyond these limitations, dwellers at Bogotá's margins continue to reproduce, both spatially and socio-economically, not only the city but also black territories, as the next session illustrates.

Extending the urban within and beyond city

A film emblematically entitled 'La Playa D.C'.[20] (Arango García, 2012) narrates the life of two brothers who endure the difficult life of internally displaced teenagers in one of Bogotá's most marginalized districts. The geographies captured by the story of the protagonist, Tomás, mirror the everyday spaces inhabited by the black teenagers of Cazuca. Like many of them, Tomás, arrived in Bogotá with his single mother from a rural town in the Pacific region, internally displaced by the Colombian armed conflict.

After being suddenly and unapologetically thrown into the urban frenzy of the neighbourhood's drug-infested life and Bogotá's economic exclusion, social invisibility, and racialized violence, it is in the capital city that he discovers what racism means and how blackness is stigmatized. Painfully negotiating safety, belonging, and the transition to adulthood, Tomás moves across the unfriendly scenarios of Bogotá, having to rapidly interiorize the subterranean practices, material know-how, and mental cartographies that make black life in the city uneasy but, at least, possible.

As it often happens to other black men and women in the city, downtown Tomás is systematically checked by police, stopped and harassed. However, the bustling informal economy of the city centre offers a chance at finding a source of income. Complicated stories of hope and violence are intertwined in the space between the 'periphery' of internally displaced families that he has left behind and the 'central' margins of the city that he finds downtown, just a few steps away from the heritage colonial centre of La Candelaria, the financial district, and the upper-class urban development of the private university district (*ibidem*). Bogotá's city centre is an opaque amalgam where all the many social realities of Colombia exist, juxtaposed yet often untouching, and where everyone passes through, often provisionally.

At first, Tomás pairs up with Chaco to clean the wheel rims of the cars of passers-by, a common makeshift practice that generally ensures the cashing of a few thousands' *pesos* every day. Soon enough, however, he starts working as a barber apprentice (*ibidem*). Here the story of the film crosses paths again with the social reality of many young men and women inhabiting the interstices of Bogotá, such as Lucho and Daniel, who arrived in the capital city in their early teens and started to work in the city centre's barbershops in order to make a living.[21] As elsewhere, *barbería* (hairstyling) has been a way not only to learn a profession that grants a legal income and a cultural device to perpetuate ancestral knowledge[22] but also a social device to get young urbanites out of the street and away from drug trafficking.

Just like the fictional Tomás, the non-fictional Salomé, a talented Afro-Colombian hairstylist in her 30s, did her apprenticeship in the Galax Centro. After all black shopkeepers were systematically evicted from the mall, in the early 2010s, the *trenzadora* opened her own salon, a few blocks away.[23] It is a long-standing customer of Salomé's salon, María Isabel, who introduces me to her, on yet another rainy Andean morning. To get there, we cross the maze of Santa Fe's informal market and streets bustling with life, where everyone seems too busy moving, shouting, pushing, bargaining, persuading, smoking, eating, selling, buying, sweeping, loitering, swearing, filling up every cranny of time and space.

María Isabel is a black feminist activist and a long-standing resident of the city centre, who moved to Bogotá in the 1980s to participate in one of the country's most important negotiating tables: the one between Colombia's black communities and the government, where the famous Law 70 was drafted.[24] She is a habitual customer of the restaurants, *pescaderías*, and hair salons of the so-called Pacific Enclave. Those early cultural and economic establishments were essential to create a 'black sense of place' (McKittrick, 2011) in the white-mestizo capital city. They were the places *par excellence* for the social and political exchanges of the first migratory waves of young black men and women who had arrived from the tropical regions to the cold Andean capital. One in particular remains a cultural and social institution, albeit slightly dislocated from the Pacific Enclave: the restaurant of Don Chucho, in the heritage district of La Candelaria.

It is after our umpteenth, generous lunch at Chucho's that María Isabel walks me for the first time to the labyrinthine mall where Salomé's salon is located. As we

enter her shop, Salomé is sweeping the last hair off the floor and tells us she has time for a chat. From the plastic-coated sofa of her tiny shop, one can observe the many hairstyles that she offers to her customers. A dynamic woman in her late thirties, she was born in Bogotá soon after her parents had arrived from Quibdó to find better economic opportunities in the capital city. She now has a son of her own, seventeen, and a husband of her age, with whom she lives in the nearby municipality of Soacha. 'The lower part, though, not the upper one!' she takes care to point out. The upper part, on the mountains, is where violence and various illicit traffics get harsher. It is where her neighbourhood enters in proximity with Cazuca, both geographically and in terms of social dynamics, stigma.[25]

Salomé moved to the current mall in the early 2010s, after water and electricity 'suddenly shut down' in the Galax Centro, as she recounts. A not-so-subtle way for white-mestizo shop owners to force black shopkeepers to pack up their stuff and move elsewhere. 'Are you the owner or are you renting?' The question is met with sardonic look. 'The owners here are *mestizos*. They don't let more *afros* come here'.[26]

Black women come from all over Bogotá and even from nearby municipalities to get Salomé's services and specialized hair products.[27] But her salon is also used as a multifunctional space to share the latest news on events in Bogotá and in the *pueblos* (towns of origin), to update one another on the evolving episodes of their families and neighbours' anecdotes, seek advice on complicated matters, distribute leaflets, learn about the latest parties, or just look for the affective solidarity of other women.[28] While Salomé washes, moisturizes, pulls, and intertwines braids, precious informational networks are woven alongside the hair. By the time her impeccable hairstyling is done, functional threads of knowledge that articulate black life in the city were also woven together. Hairdressing salons and barbershops in Bogotá, much like the city's traditional Afro-Colombian restaurants, are thus not only micro-entrepreneurial activities that situate and visibilise black popular economies. They are also spaces of juxtaposed spatialities and temporalities that help strengthen urban identities and to craft ways of knowing the city (Matsipa, 2017).

These material and immaterial exchanges make Salomé's salon, as well as several more commercial spaces that evolve around food, health, and beauty in the city, more than locations for social encounters and the performance of specific services. They enable the production of territorial networks – between the capital city, on the one hand, and the rural *pueblos* and smaller cities, especially in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia, on the other hand – that inscribe black presence in the white-mestizo capital city. This making of place is both socially and geographically relational. Geographically, it extends the cultural, social, and territorial bonds of the Colombian African diaspora to the capital city, often across rural and urban geographies, from the Pacific coast to the Andean region. Socially, it defies the flattening of black subjectivities and systems of knowledge to a racialized formula and, similarly to the following story, represents an aesthetics replete with political significance.

Quilting as relational urbanism

The first time that I visited the Costurero to meet Esmeralda, the place looked deserted. Upon arriving to the Centre of Remembrance, Peace and Reconciliation

(where, at the time, the Costurero was based), the imposing architectural design of the building, the multiple private security guards patrolling the entrances, and the silence that descended upon this part of town were palpably at odds with the surrounding neighbourhood, and the proximity with the cemetery made it all the more feel like a city of the dead. Which, in some ways, the Centre is, as the design project is part of Bogotá's Central Cemetery. Yet, once one makes their way into the entrance of the building, descending as per architectural design into it (Figure 3), a wholly different scenario unfolds. Bright textiles and laughter fill the room, with a myriad of different fabric cuts, mismatched buttons, and rolls of sewing threads covering tables and floors. Capable hands are at work all around (Figure 4). The atmosphere is relaxed, joyful, intermitted with songs.[29] Little did I know, back then, what stories were written in colourful threads all over those canvases (Figure 5).

Alongside its convivial exchanges, the Costurero is first and foremost a space of repair, where the victims of Colombia's intersectional violence undertake a collective process of *sanación* (psychophysical and social healing); where internally displaced women re-create a sense of place for themselves and their families; where disappeared family members live on, through the stories embroidered by this collective of women on the textile canvas that populate the otherwise spectral Centre of Remembrance; where the *cantos*,[30] *medicina tradicional*,[31] threading, and cooking talk about an agenda that is political rather than only cultural.[32] As one ritornello which is often sung in the Costurero goes:

Dicen que a las mujeres	They say they will silence us,
Nos van a callar.	The women.
Reclamando mis derechos	But I will not stop
No voy a parar.	Claiming my rights.
Las mujeres en Colombia	Women in Colombia,
No nos vamos a callar.	We shall not be silent.
Las amenazas de mata	The death threats
Tenemos que denunciar.	We must denounce.
Las mujeres algun día	Some day, women,
Al mundo lo cambiaremos.	We shall change the world.
Ese pensamiento de todas	Together we will achieve
Unidas lo lograremos.[33]	That dream of all.

As it is visible from the images above, the *telas* that are made in the Costurero are artistic and political archives of the forgotten and, largely, untold stories of the Colombian conflict: those lived in first person by the women and youth that make this collective, who reunite every week to embroider and tell their own version of the story of Colombia's long stream of violence, often conflicting with (or, at the very least, complementing) official state narratives of 'peace' in 'post-conflict' Colombia.[34] In this sense, the omnipresent songs, laughs and needles are more than tools for a recreational activity: they become a 'platform of affective solidarities' (Simone & Pieterse, 2017, p. 5), where the encounter of different life trajectories, stories of struggle and resistance, and subjectivities come together to create a sense of belonging.A Bogotá-based yet rhizomatic social collective that now counts on diasporic extensions worldwide – from France to Canada, from Brazil to England – the Costurero was started almost two decades ago by and for Afro-Colombian women, and then expanded to welcome and involve a wider social

Figure 3. The centre from the outside. (Photo by G. Torino, 2018).

Figure 4. Hands at work. Image courtesy of the *Unión de Costureros*. (Photo by P. Ángel).

constituency, including indigenous and white/mestizo communities, schools, visitors, and other social organizations, among others. As Esmeralda recounts:

> More [internally displaced] women who had heard about this collective started showing up – they were indigenous, white, *mestizas* … How could I turn them away? This is not what this process of healing was about, exclusion. It was about healing society as a whole. We are a free civic action, by the people and for the people. … Then pupils from schools across Bogotá

Figure 5. Mothers displaced with their children. (Photo by G. Torino, 2018).

> started joining, international Human Rights advocates and media, academics … We opened our doors to anyone who wanted to hear our stories.[35]

As its social meaning unfolds one *puntada* at a time, the Costurero is configured as a space to stitch back together, both metaphorically and literally: the *relatos de dolor* (stories of pain) and psychosocial wounds inflicted on families and individuals by a yet unfinished string of violence; the personal and collective paths diverted by the internal war; the broken family bounds that often seem irremediably lost; the often oppositional forms of difference created within, due to, and in spite of the country's multicultural narratives since the 1990s; the vividly coloured canvases that collect embroidered accounts of the fragmented lives of Colombia's victims, and that in September 2022 covered for the first time the highly symbolic Palace of Justice, in downtown Bogotá (see Figure 6).[36]

The spatialization of the Costurero at the centre (both geographical and symbolical) of the capital city enhances the power of this grassroots assemblage. While the distance allowed by having safely escaped to the capital city does not prevent Colombia's war survivors from continually reliving the pain of loss and trauma, nor does it exonerate its members from being harassed by Bogotá's police, it nonetheless provides a platform to reconstruct important personal (hi)stories, process them collectively, and share them with the rest of society.

Crucially, the Costurero also represents '*una expansión del territorio*' (an extension of the territory): a way of mobilizing the Latin American political, social, and cultural notion of 'territory' from the city and thus extending the experiences and knowledges matured in Afro-Colombian rural territories to the metropolitan capital city. According to Esmeralda, in fact, '*todo es territorio*' ('everything is territory').[37]As such, territory is and can be

Figure 6. The *arropamiento* (lit. 'dressing up') of the palace of justice. (Photo by G. Torino, 2022).

everywhere. In line with a political critique to the workings of the municipality's neoliberal multicultural agenda (centred of the celebration of *individual*, and often essentialised, identity politics), what it at stake in the Costurero is *collective* existence in an inherently pluri-ethnic society. This is spatialized in the capacity to (re)make territory, no matter where.

In fact, to Esmeralda and the women of the Costurero, territory is 'anywhere someone arrives, and where someone is'.[38] It is, in other words, an ontological relation: between blackness and womanhood, rural villages and the metropolitan city, human and non-human beings, power and care. It means to have a place, an opportunity to belong. In this sense, territory is not merely a prerogative of the rural milieu. In the case of Bogotá, populations often arrive following internal displacement; consequently, practices of making place emerge as attempts to stitch back together a loss of place. In this context, making territory appears to be an incredibly dynamic enterprise: not bounded to the fixity of one specific locale but, rather, translocal.

In this way, the Costurero also destabilizes the typical modes of encountering displacement and blackness in the capital city. Blackness is mobilized in the Costurero as a system of knowledge, political denunciation, social reproduction, and health (Figure 7), rather than of exclusionary, incarcerated, victimized, and fixed ethnic identities. It is, in this sense, a *fugitive* system (Harney & Moten, 2013), insofar as it disrupts attempts from different political and social factions (institutional and not) to reinforce ethnic and, even more so, racialized fixedness, as well as to capture and manipulate its aesthetics and politics. In fact, Esmeralda told me on many occasions of how the municipality had tried to co-opt their activities by 'putting their logo on them' and claiming ownership of all the work (physical, artistic, political and, not less importantly, emotional) that the women of the Costurero had put in making the

Figure 7. Communal space. On the whiteboard, Spanish words and their Portuguese translation stemming from an online transnational exchange between Afro–Colombian and Afro–Brazilian women activists: 'black', 'fugitive', 'rights', 'books', 'not existing', 'we have the right to be happy'. (Photo by G. Torino, 2018)

telas.[39] This is not an uncommon practice in Bogotá, but it is one that the Costurero has managed to consistently reject.

Disenclosures: respatialising the city from its interstices

Racialization has been a pivotal instrument of socio-spatial making in Latin American cities, through the relentlessly unequal distribution of resources, civil rights, and opportunities. Yet, while the city repeatedly discriminates, incarcerates, polices, surveils, and violates black subjects, it also constitutes a place from which marginalized citizens can sometimes better liaise with the state and advocate for justice, and from which more intersectional networks of solidarity and place-making can emerge, as the everyday praxes of the Costurero illustrate.

The stories explored so far suggest that, beyond the visceral difficulty of emplacement for black urbanites in Bogotá, relational territories are in the making all the time. There are numerous Esmeralda's ordinarily producing territories (making place) across the city, whether or not they are acknowledged by mayors, urban planners, municipal officers, journalists, social movements, and those normatively recognized as experts. For those who move through the asides of Bogotá, their relational modes of space-making are ubiquitous: mundane strategies of emplacement that operate within and despite the racial geographies that daily attempt to entrap and limit their potential for social change.

These urban territories exist not only in connection to ethnic and regional identities, but as circulatory relations that extend from the territories of the Colombian Pacific (and, to some extent, Caribbean) to Bogotá's metropolitan urban margins. However makeshift, fragile, tenuous, and transitional these 'oppositional aesthetic acts' (Hooks, 2015 [1990], p. 145) can be, they represent a shield from and an alternative to racial capitalism and coloniality: a means to learn 'dignity [and the] integrity of being' (Hooks, 2015 [1990], p. 41), relationally.

In tracing this pluralistic repository of spatial and life trajectories mobilized from the margins of the city, this article sought not only to bear witness to the difficulties of emplacement for black residents in Latin American metropolises like Bogotá, but also to suggest the possibility of rethinking, reconfiguring, and *respatialising the urban as a whole*, starting from their spatial praxes and ordinary forms of resistance. In other words, the call here is for the need to relearn Latin American cities from the relationality of black territories. Drawing on geographer Kathrine McKittrick's use of the term 'respatialisation' (2006, p. xix), I am referring to the possibility for 'connections [to be] made alterable' (*ibid*.: xxxi) through an opening up of the meaning of city-making. This redrawing of connections necessarily entails a 'recentering' (Ngugi, 1981, p. 87) of non-mestizo and non-white consciousnesses into an urban fabric long constructed on whiteness (and *mestizaje*; see: Torino, 2024) and on anti-blackness (Alves, 2018).

This consideration opens new perspectives to study and understand collective life and space-making in Latin American cities. In this sense, the inscription of black consciousness into the history of city-making in Bogotá can be seen as a decolonial act of 'disenclosure' (Mbembe, 2021, pp. 42–89), insofar as it embodies 'the permanent possibility of emergence of the non-yet' from the enclosure of racial thinking (*ibidem*). Liberating society and space from such an entrapment also entails to create a place in, against, and thanks to the city; to make territory away from one's roots in the wake of forced displacement; to recreate community against all odds; to sustain freedom by repeatedly causing 'runoffs [. . .] as when you drill a hole in a pipe' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 239), whereby the pipe represents the racialized edifice of Latin American cities.

Notes

1. All names used in this article are acronyms. None of this impacts the analysis.
2. Bogotá, interview, September 2018.
3. A fruit that is typical of Central and South America's tropical forests, and a key element of culinary recipes in the Colombian Pacific region.
4. Bogotá, interview, August 2018.
5. Due to the racialized making of socio-economic inequality in Bogotá and Colombia (see: Duarte Mayorga et al., 2013; Urrea & Viáfara, 2016).
6. Original poem in Spanish. The English text, to the side, is this author's unofficial translation.
7. Bogotá, interview, May 2019.
8. Bogotá/Soacha, multiple interviews, August 2018-June 2019.
9. Bogotá/Soacha, interview, September 2018.
10. The common makeshift practice of a large part of Colombian society is to re-invent anew their daily livelihoods. They can include, for example, on-the-move businesses on wheels, to sell *cocadas* (coconut-based sweets), *empanadas* (fried pies), sodas, nuts, and fruit; or working as *recicladores*, collecting and selling materials to recycle.
11. The biggest popular festival of the Chocó region and an iconic celebration of Afro-Colombian culture. It is dedicated to Saint Pacho, religious patron of the city of Quibdó.

12. Theological organizations that, in Colombia, work extensively with Afro-descendant communities in the most marginalized areas of the country.
13. Bogotá/Soacha, fieldnotes, September 2018.
14. Bogotá/Soacha, personal communication, September 2018.
15. Bogotá/Soacha, personal communication, September 2018.
16. Collective informal transport (mini-buses).
17. Bogotá/Soacha, personal communication, September 2018.
18. Bogotá/Soacha, personal communication, September 2018.
19. Bogotá/Soacha, personal communication, September 2018. As a reference, at the time this research took place a single, furnished, and ensuite room in the most affluent parts of the city could range approximately between 800.000 and 1.200.000 *pesos* (i.e. ten times more).
20. A title that evocates the beaches (*playas*) and lush forests of Colombia's Pacific region, the *home* of the displaced protagonists of the film, which nostalgically emerge over and over in their memories, while they navigate the marginalized, grey, and insecure spaces of the capital city, Bogotá D.C.
21. Bogotá, interview, August 2018.
22. Such as those of the Afro-descendant *trenzado* (braids) of women hairstyles: a direct legacy of, and tool for, marooning.
23. Bogotá, interview, August 2018.
24. The Law 70 of 1993, better known as Law of Black Communities, recognized for the first time the ethnic rights of Afro-Colombian communities to the collective ownership of some 'ancestral' riparian lands on the Pacific coast of Colombia (for a critical overview see: Ngweno, 2007).
25. Bogotá, interview, August 2018.
26. Bogotá, interview, August 2018.
27. Bogotá, interview and fieldnotes, August 2018.
28. Bogotá, fieldnotes, August 2018.
29. Bogotá, fieldnotes, August 2018.
30. Chants often used as storytelling and tools for political denunciation.
31. Ancestral Afro-Colombian practices of healing.
32. Bogotá, fieldnotes, August 2018.
33. Bogotá, fieldnotes, August 2018. Original song in Spanish. The English text, to the side, is this author's unofficial translation.
34. Bogotá, fieldnotes, August 2018.
35. Bogotá, interview, June 2019.
36. Bogotá, fieldnotes, September 2022.
37. Bogotá, interview, July 2019.
38. Bogotá, interview, June 2019.
39. Bogotá, interview, June 2019.

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