

Navigating the Archipelago City: everyday experiences and socio-political imaginaries of urban floods in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

Naviguer la Ville-Archipel : Expériences quotidiennes et imaginaires sociopolitiques des inondations urbaines à Carthagène des Indes, Colombie

Navegando la Ciudad-Archipiélago: Experiencias cotidianas e imaginarios sociopolíticos de las inundaciones urbanas en Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

Silke Oldenburg and Laura Neville



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/cal/13420>

ISSN: 2268-4247

Publisher

Institut des hautes études de l'Amérique latine

Printed version

Date of publication: 31 December 2021

Number of pages: 139-163

ISBN: 978-2-37154-152-8

ISSN: 1141-7161

Electronic reference

Silke Oldenburg and Laura Neville, "Navigating the Archipelago City: everyday experiences and socio-political imaginaries of urban floods in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia", *Cahiers des Amériques latines* [Online], 97 | 2021, Online since 01 March 2022, connection on 15 March 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cal/13420>

This text was automatically generated on 15 March 2022.



Les *Cahiers des Amériques latines* sont mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution – Pas d'utilisation commerciale – Pas de modification 4.0 International.

Navigating the Archipelago City: everyday experiences and socio- political imaginaries of urban floods in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

*Naviguer la Ville-Archipel : Expériences quotidiennes et imaginaires
sociopolitiques des inondations urbaines à Carthagène des Indes, Colombie*
*Navegando la Ciudad-Archipiélago: Experiencias cotidianas e imaginarios
sociopolíticos de las inundaciones urbanas en Cartagena de Indias, Colombia*

Silke Oldenburg and Laura Neville

EDITOR'S NOTE

Article reçu le 29 juillet 2020, accepté le 5 mai 2021

Acknowledgements

We are especially grateful to all our interlocutors in Cartagena who shared their stories, knowledge and time during our respective fieldworks and without whom this paper would not have been possible. Silke Oldenburg would like to thank Florencio Ferrer and Maria Alejandra Buelvas for their support. Laura Neville would particularly like to thank Jose Gonzalez for his invaluable support and insights during fieldwork. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Waterworlding online conference 2021, and we are grateful to the organizers and participants of the panel for their useful feedback. We are also very grateful to René Véron who provided critical insights on an earlier draft of this article. Finally, essential feedback was received from two anonymous reviewers. The research carried out by Silke Oldenburg was funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and by the University of Lausanne for Laura Neville.

- 1 *Aguacero e' mayo dejalo caer*. This *bullerengue* musical style chorus which was made famous by world-known Colombian singer Totó la Momposina, an icon of Caribbean music, can be heard as one passes by loudspeakers on a street corner or a door left ajar in the city of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.¹ The song portrays an inhabitant's daily life in the region as a heavy downpour of May rain, an *aguacero de mayo*, falls outside. As the song suggests that it is best to "let the rain fall" (*dejalo caer*), it invites us to explore the everyday lives of residents and the socio-political imaginaries related to rain and flooding in the city. What can rain tell us about the relationship between nature and urbanity? Is rain welcomed as a joyful event (*dejalo caer*) or rather anticipated with fear? How is rain interpreted and environmental futures imagined by coastal residents, particularly in face of flood threats? And who is actually humming along to this song on Cartagena's street corners? A city like Cartagena has no clear place in the stories told so far about environmental politics, competing urban futures and socio-economic transformation. Far less is known about the ways its residents deal with climate uncertainties in a rapidly changing social setting, where entanglements of race, ecology, citizenship and socio-spatial inequalities shape and are shaped by the urban context on a daily basis.

Map 1. Map of the location of Cartagena



Sources: www.d-maps.com, modified by the authors, 2020

- 2 To overcome dualistic nature-in-the-city accounts, we introduce Cartagena as an Archipelago City to emphasize first that water is an integral part of the city and second that through the lens of urban waterscapes [Swyngedouw, 1999] the city's urban context appears as socially fractured and divided, but nevertheless interconnected.
- 3 Topologically, Cartagena is built on water. Since its foundation on the archipelago where Pedro Heredia established a Carib village in 1533, Cartagena has been imagined

as an island that traces barriers between its inhabitants [Camacho, 2003 in Aguilera Diaz & Meisel Roca, 2015]. Today, there is water surrounding the city, dividing and connecting its different parts, falling from the sky and flooding the streets, but also rising from underground due to a dysfunctional sewage system. In this paper, we focus in particular on the everyday experiences of urban floods caused by seasonal flooding and dysfunctional infrastructure. We examine Cartagena's inhabitants' everyday experiences of living alongside and coping with urban floods and their entanglements with the patterns of socio-spatial inequality in the Archipelago City.

- 4 The analytics of the Archipelago City describes both the topological form of “parcels of land scattered in a sea” as well as the water surrounding them as “archipelagic space” [Hayward, 2001], and the historically and socio-politically fragmented character of the city. Besides its importance in the realm of the academic study of islands [Stratford, 2013; Pugh, 2013], the archipelago gained particular popularity as a metaphor employed by famous poststructuralist authors, such as Foucault, to describe confinement (“carceral archipelago”) [Foucault, 2010 (1975)], or by Deleuze who, in contrast, praised the archipelago as a model of a “world in process” that offers “freedom” [Deleuze, 1997, p. 86]. Furthermore, postcolonial thinkers, such as the Caribbean poet Glissant [1997], pointed clearly to the links between poetics and the relationality of the archipelago, turning the representation of the isolated island upside down and approaching it as “paradoxical spaces simultaneously bounded and dynamically relational” [Pugh, 2018].
- 5 Artists and architects like Ungers and Koolhaas imagined Berlin as “a Green Archipelago” designing decay while pointing to the metropolis' central dichotomy: the historic city centre masking the “un-city” identifying “urban islands-in-the-city” [Walker, 2015]. The idea of “cities within cities” [Ungers, Koolhaas *et al.*, 2013], together with Robinson's call to study cities in a world of cities [Robinson, 2011], encourages a comparative examination of the uneven and fractured everyday experiences of residents and the imaginaries of urban floods and rain that are developed in this paper. By bringing two very different neighbourhoods into perspective, it allows us to de-centre, situate and diversify current concepts of the city [Dibazar *et al.*, 2013; Lawhon & Truelove, 2020]. Framing Cartagena as an Archipelago City and tracing the flows of water through urban space highlights both the disconnection and the interconnectivity of those “urban islands-in-the-city” [Walker, 2015] and “cities within cities” [Ungers & Koolhaas, 2013] in order to understand the city as a socially produced terrain of social relations with specific historic contexts and manifold imaginations towards the future [Lefebvre, 1974].
- 6 From an actor-centred perspective, the analytical lens of navigation is useful to explore the Archipelago City, where strong winds, heavy rains and rising sea levels provide the environmental context as well as the shifting socio-political background that people engage with and co-produce. This interplay of agency and structure has been framed by Vigh [2009] as navigation,² hence as a seafaring-metaphor for praxis that serves to illuminate how people move in volatile environments. Often, social actors and their everyday experiences are neglected in urban environmental studies employing a techno-bureaucratic vantage point, as Zeiderman has shown for Bogota's environmental futures [Zeiderman, 2016a]. Other studies show how governments intend to turn uncertainty into a governable and predictable risk and residents' responses are understood as mere resilience [Nygren, 2016]. Without seeking to

overemphasize the potential for agency in the Archipelago City, we argue that looking at urban floods through urban residents' experiences and imaginaries helps to understand the ways those concerned make sense of their cities. Indeed, discussing urban futures and how to deal with prospective environmental scenarios in Cartagena encourages architects, urban planners and other experts to devote considerable attention to the built urban form, and more generally to the city's colonial period material infrastructure. However, ordinary citizens deal with increasing urban complexities in their everyday lives and try to navigate through uncertain times and spaces towards what is envisioned as a positive future. We take inspiration from Gandy's claim that environmental uncertainty opens a space that invites us to "reinvent relations between society and nature" [Gandy, 2014, p. 211].

- 7 This reconfiguration of urban society and nature can be analysed with an Urban Political Ecology (UPE) approach which pays growing attention to the complexity of urban environments on the one hand, and to the deterioration of urban socio-ecological conditions on the other. The early UPE literature was rooted in Marxist urban geography tradition as well as Science and Technology Studies [Zimmer *et al.*, 2018], yet more recent research, known as *situated* UPE, argues the necessity of considering "everyday practices and diffuse forms of power" [Lawhon *et al.*, 2014, p. 512], thus further addressing the need to develop an understanding of micro level dynamics based on ethnographic research in UPE [Rademacher, 2015; Jaffe, 2016]. In Latin America, an emerging body of literature questions everyday experiences of urbanity in relation to environmental issues, focusing on social representations [Aliste & Blondel, 2012], socio-environmental conflicts [Merlinsky, 2017; Aliste & Stamm, 2016] and the implementation of urban environmental policies [Zeiderman, 2016a].
- 8 Water occupies a central place within UPE discussions, which look into its uneven socio-natural production [Heynen, 2014], notably since the emblematic work by Swyngedouw [1997] on water in Guayaquil; or Gandy's [2014] insights on water and modernity. This body of work has been reinforced by research on wastewater [Loftus & McDonald, 2001; Truelove, 2011], ponds [Zimmer *et al.*, 2020] and water infrastructure [Jaglin, 2012; Anand, 2017]. Natural and man-made urban floods have mainly been researched from an urban governance perspective, focusing on the uneven production of flood risk and infrastructure [Collins, 2010; Ranganathan, 2015]. In Latin American cities, authors emphasize the relation between the urban environmental governance of floods and the production of vulnerability [Clichevsky, 2006; Nygren, 2016; Coates & Nygren, 2020], overlooking residents' everyday experiences. Much of the recent research regarding water, the urban condition and the city has developed in an attempt to deconstruct a predominantly western tradition of urban thought in line with Robinson's famous claim on the "ordinary city".³ Latin American cities have been no exception to this. The megacities of Bogotá [Zeiderman, 2016a], São Paulo [Caldeira, 2002] and Buenos Aires [Auyero & Swistun, 2007] have been studied in depth and the results serve to counterbalance the evidence of studies of New York and London. In attempt to compensate for the traditionally strong focus on megacities, increased attention has been paid recently to secondary cities occupying a middle ground position between megacities and rural areas [Rodgers *et al.*, 2011, p. 554]. Conceptualising the secondary city of Cartagena as an Archipelago City challenges temporal and spatial coordinates, both enriching and complicating recent debates about nature and city.

- 9 By applying an actor-oriented relational approach through the conceptual perspective of Cartagena as an Archipelago City and of navigation as a social praxis, this paper examines the manifold experiences of Cartagena's urban residents during the rainy season. First, we recount Cartagena's socio-environmental history to show the entanglements between city and nature. We explore the urban coordinates that will shape the future of urbanites and which, vice-versa, will be shaped by urbanites through navigation. Second, our ethnographic core contrasts two seemingly opposite neighbourhoods in Cartagena which are shaped both differently and similarly, by the heavy downpours, dysfunctional sewer systems and landslides: the historic city centre, El Centro (with a particular focus on the residential neighbourhood of Getsemani), and the peripheral neighbourhood of Olaya Herrera in the South-East of the city (with a particular focus on a self-built settlement within the area). Through everyday vignettes from Olaya and El Centro we devote particular attention to the ways in which the everyday is disrupted, slowed down or sped up during periods of urban flooding, and we explore how the local residents navigate this seasonal flooding in the different neighbourhoods of the Archipelago City. Here, navigation stands as an analytical lens to describe how people experience, interpret and anticipate unstable urban terrains [Vigh, 2009].
- 10 Methodologically, we draw on empirical data from ethnographic fieldwork⁴ in Cartagena, linking our detailed ethnographic insights to critical urban theory. The analysis we develop in this article includes both a cross section of ethnographic materials from interviews, oral history and conversations as well as participatory experiences gathered whilst sharing the everyday lives of the urban residents alongside an analysis of local and social media.⁵

Cartagena de Indias: entanglements of nature and city in the *longue durée*

- 11 Surrounded by the Caribbean Sea on the northern coast of Colombia, Cartagena became one of the major colonial locations of the Spanish Empire in Latin America [Cunin & Rinaudo, 2006]. From the 16th century on, Cartagena was turned into a hub of migration and trade for the Spanish Crown on the West Indies route, due to its strategic geographical position in a protected bay [Cunin & Rinaudo, 2006]. For several centuries, the historic seaport city became the setting for confrontation among the principal European powers yearning after control of the "New World", shipping slaves in and gold out [AbelloVives & Florez Bolivar, 2015]. The fortification walls that surround today's city centre, *la ciudad amurallada*, were gradually built by the Spanish since the 16th century [Diaz de Paniagua & Paniagua Bedoya, 1993], taking advantage of the natural defences provided by the numerous bayside channels and passages. In response to the inclement weather and to protect the city from sea hazards, the Spaniards reinforced the city walls.
- 12 Cartagena's global position in the colonial era was particularly favoured by its archipelago form. However, over the centuries, the importance of the port-city was gradually supplanted by that of the Andean interior [Helg, 2004]. In 1811, Cartagena became the first Colombian city to declare independence from the Spanish Empire. However, successive civil wars devastated parts of the built environment and affected many lives, amidst the resistance of its people that earned the city its nickname, "La

Heroica”. By the 20th century the city had lost its economic importance. By way of addressing this economic crisis, the tourism industry was developed during the 1920s as a new resource for the national economy [Cunin & Rinaudo, 2006, p. 2]. This policy evidently bore fruit, as Cartagena was declared the first tourist destination of Colombia in 1943 [Deavila Pertuz, 2015, p. 127; Gomez, 2004; Posso Jimenez, 2015, p. 73]. However, by the late 1960s, almost half of Cartagena’s population lived in difficult socio-economic circumstances, as urbanization did not extend to the new neighbourhoods that have been developed more recently [Deavila Pertuz, 2019, p. 114].

- 13 With the focus on tourism and the declaration of the city as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1984, urban transformation processes were initiated, displacing the functional significance of the centre’s waterways to the outskirts of the city. Previously, much fluvial traffic had indeed been concentrated in the city centre, until Cartagena’s main market was moved. Today, large international cruise ships use the new port in Manga. With its colonial-style buildings, Cartagena not only attracts national and international tourists, but was also chosen as the venue for the ceremony at which the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)⁶ were signed in September 2016. After being a peace agreement city, Cartagena is now endeavouring to become a climate pioneer, having already drawn up a long-term plan for adaptation to climate change in 2014, namely *Plan 4C – Competitive and Climate Compatible Cartagena*, in order to “take into account the vulnerability of the city today and its predictable future scenarios” [*Plan 4C*, 2014, p. 4].
- 14 Today, Cartagena is a secondary city of about one million inhabitants [Dane,⁷ 2016] and is characterised by marked inequalities and striking contrasts. Glittering towers and opulent hotels in the Bocagrande neighbourhood mingle with colourful colonial buildings and cobbled streets in the walled city, connecting via bridges with other parts of the Archipelago City. Yet, these beautiful facades don’t show the *barríos populares* located in the north and south-east of the city where the majority of the population live confronted with poverty, racial segregation, high unemployment and crime rates, low educational levels and unequal access to urban infrastructure and public services. In these *barríos*, environmental inequality is striking and seasonal flooding regularly leaves extensive areas submerged.
- 15 While one part of the Archipelago City is presented to the public as a gem, the other part, “la otra Cartagena”, is made invisible, as was notably the case on the occasion of Pope Francis’ visit in 2017, when several kilometers of zinc barriers were erected along the main roads to hide the poor neighbourhoods from view.⁸ This much decried operation shows how the intersection of race, poverty and culture [Abello Vives & Florez Bolivar, 2015] is played out as a continuity of the past in Cartagena, thus shaping the uneven “cities within cities” [Ungers & Koolhaas, 2013] that form the Archipelago City.

Two tales of the Archipelago City

- 16 Two seemingly different neighbourhoods within the Archipelago City are presented: Getsemaní in the former colonial heart (El Centro or la Ciudad amurallada), and Olaya Herrera, whose development began around the 1960s. These two neighbourhoods epitomize first how Cartagena urbanized along its waterways, and second how socio-economic disparities are produced and reproduced in the urban space. This is

particularly visible in the early morning hours, when buses crammed full of daily workers come into the city centre, while buses going out towards the periphery are nearly empty.

- 17 Olaya Herrera is a neighbourhood of approximately 19,000 inhabitants [Dane, 2005], with high presence of Afro-descendant population [Ayala García & Meisel Roca, 2017], located in the south-east of the city. Olaya, like many other *barrios* located in the city's urban periphery, was built on empty land or by filling in water bodies such as *caños* or *ciénagas* [Lamus Canavate, 2010]. The neighbourhood grew by receiving the internally displaced inhabitants fleeing the violence of the armed conflict in the hinterland [Puello *et al.*, 2015], as well as the population displaced from the city centre [Lora Diaz, 2017]. The material and infrastructural deprivation which characterises the *barrio* is juxtaposed with race and class-based injustice [Ayala García & Meisel Roca, 2017]. El Centro comprises different neighbourhoods with approximately 17,000 inhabitants, including 6,750 permanent residents in Getsemaní,⁹ most of them from a working-class background. Due to processes of urban transformation over the last two decades, different parts of El Centro have been emptied of their original population. Getsemaní's social composition has altered substantially since the 1980s due to the so-called process of gentrification. For families that have lived there for several generations, remaining in their homes has become an unaffordable luxury as many local residents earn the minimum wage or are unemployed [Oldenburg, 2018].

Map 2. Map of Cartagena de Indias and its waterbodies



Sources: image from Google Earth, modified by the authors, 2020.

“The city collapses at the slightest rain”: living with urban floods

- 18 In the Caribbean region the annual monthly average rain increase is double than observed in other cities: unprecedented levels of precipitation cause severe floods,¹⁰ while the sea level has risen by 22 centimetres in the past 50 years [Stein & Moser, 2014, p. 171]. In response, the local city government developed an environmental policy in 2014 that specifically addressed the issue of climate-change vulnerability. The long-term plan for climate change adaptation, Plan 4C,¹¹ elaborates technocratic and engineering-led responses. Here, Cartagena is presented as a model and leader in Latin America aiming to achieve climate-compatible urban development by 2040. Based on INVEMAR¹² estimations, the city could see a 20cm sea level rise by 2040, together with a 30% increase in rainfall [Plan 4C, 2014, p. 38]. If this were to happen, flooding would affect 26 % of residential buildings, 28 % of industrial premises, 35 % of roads and 86 % of the historic heritage area by 2040 [Plan 4C, 2014, p. 42]. However, due to the city’s institutional crisis and the frequent changes of mayors that this has provoked, the ambitious plan had still not been implemented in 2020.¹³ Besides these long-term forecasts for the future, the city is already confronted today with the problem of recurring heavy seasonal rainfall, during the *época de lluvia*. Turning Totó la Momposina’s words into conventional wisdom, the rains start in May and continue to fall more or less regularly until November.¹⁴ They affect the whole Caribbean region, and are intensifying due to frequent strong winds, with devastating consequences both for the makeshift houses at the urban margins, and the heritage architecture in the centre. The constant flooding and the rise of the sea level rise are even threatening to deprive the city of its UNESCO World Heritage status.¹⁵
- 19 While some residents joke about the possible submerging of Cartagena, referring to the city as “Cartagena Submarina”, a more general attitude of climate-related uncertainty pinpoints the inability to predict the scale, intensity and impact of climate change on human, urban and natural environments. The following sections give insights into how residents of the two neighbourhoods navigate within these uncertain waters.

“Nos tienen como abandonados”: fearing, anticipating and living with floods in Olaya Herrera

- 20 One afternoon in June 2019, I¹⁶ visit Maria¹⁷ who lives in one of the last houses on a small narrow street which ends in the Ciénaga de la Virgen, the city’s largest waterbody. She is a woman of African descent in her late thirties, and like many residents of the neighbourhood, she is a *desplazada*. She was born in the remote rural areas surrounding Cartagena and fled the violence of Colombia’s armed conflict. As I can see through the back and front door of Maria’s *ranchito*, water, mainly from the Ciénaga but also waste water, surrounds her dwelling, making it difficult to distinguish where the Ciénaga begins and ends. Her house is located in the new and still expanding areas of the neighbourhood’s self-built settlements, the so-called *invasiones*, built directly on water and lacking access to urban services such as drinking water or sewage systems. Her dwelling is no exception and stands on a piece of land which is the result of a land reclamation process that consists of depositing multiple layers of waste

materials on the Ciénaga. Through Maria's window, I can see the street parallel to us where the light wooden houses seem to be floating on a raft of garbage materials. Maria welcomes me inside her home but our conversation is interrupted as the sky suddenly goes black and a thunder-storm erupts overhead. A neighbour joins us to take shelter from the storm under the house and tells me, "Don't worry, the rain won't last for long. You can see the clouds are black so it'll be heavy, but it'll soon be over. When the clouds are white, it lasts longer".¹⁸ Maria puts a plastic pot in the centre of the room to collect the rainwater that has begun to run through a leak in the corrugated iron roof, the naturalness of her gesture contrasting with the seemingly supernatural violence of the storm being unleashed outside. The dark grey sky is criss-crossed by flashes of lightning and in a matter of a few minutes the whole street is flooded. Water gushes down the street, which now resembles a river, bringing with it on its surface all kinds of waste materials, in addition to rats, cockroaches and mosquitoes. We sit and wait for the rain to pass.

- 21 This short vignette attempts to portray the entanglement of present and future everyday experiences of floods undergone by residents of the self-built settlements in Olaya. The ethnographic insights presented in this section suggest that residents *navigate* [Radicati, 2020] environmental uncertainty by fearing, anticipating and living with urban floods. The analytic of navigation emphasizes the way residents' intimate relationships with environmental uncertainties are inextricably linked with the city's historic legacy of profound inequality, as they "actively move through, practice, cope with, seek to dominate and learn how to live the city" [Anjaria & McFarlane, 2011, p. 7]. In this manner, the case points to the way residents "experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces" [Vigh, 2009, p. 420], amidst the limitations grounded in the city's unequal spatial order. As illustrated in the vignette, experiences of floods have the effect of slowing down, disrupting and at the same time accelerating residents' daily lives, as their urban built environment is temporarily submerged.
- 22 Residents' urban memories are marked by the traumatic events of past floods, which shape the way they predict and anticipate, prepare for future floods and live with them. Residents recall the former presence of water in their homes, which had dramatic consequences, destroying their dwellings, belongings, and in the worst cases resulted in loss of life. The past presence of water is indelibly imprinted on the present through residents' bodies, which are turned into markers of the height reached by the water in their dwellings, as shown by Gloria who puts a hand on her hip and says, "The water came up to here." These embodied experiences of floods further illustrate the importance of embodiment as a terrain of environmental politics where intimacy plays a crucial role in the development of embodied political ecology [Doshi, 2017].
- 23 The anticipation of urban floods is also apparent from the self-built settlement's evolving landscape, which changes at increasing speed in the months before the rainy season begins. To anticipate the floods, residents develop building practices responding to a seasonal time frame. For example, as the *época de lluvia* approaches, residents use increasing amounts of rubble (*relleno*), or clean soil (*zahorra*), which is considered to be less muddy, to elevate the level of the land and of their houses, creating long-lasting consequences on the built environment and the surrounding waterbody. For instance, whilst she is visiting Maria, another neighbour and community leader, Camila, tells me she has been up since 4 am in order to raise the level of her house with *relleno* after the

heavy rain that fell during the night and flooded her house. She adds, “There was an *aguacero* (downpour) last night, and the rain came up to here!” (showing a point on her extended leg). These building practices play a crucial role for the production of urban space in the area, constantly redrawing the neighbourhood’s built environment, sustained by rhythm of anticipation of the floods still to come.

- 24 It is clear that the habit of anticipation sustains residents’ urban political imaginaries of exclusion, as they fear being submerged both literally and metaphorically. As was shown in the introductory vignette, urban land disappears momentarily with floods in these *baja mar* (low tide) sectors, leaving water to temporarily reclaim space and stressing the struggle that residents must put up in order to continue to live in the city. As argued by Zeiderman [2016b] in the port city of Buenaventura, Colombia, the political significance of “submergence draws our attention to the sociomaterial relationship between land and sea as well as to the political condition of being resigned or forced to descend below the surface, to cover oneself or be covered over, to remain obscure and invisible” [Zeiderman, 2016b, p. 825]. The contrast between stability and fluidity mirrors the different treatment of territories in the Archipelago City, which is striking in the *barrios* surrounding the Ciénaga. *Nos tienen como abandonados* is repeatedly heard in the neighbourhood, illustrating the feeling of abandonment that prevails amongst the residents. Alfredo, a resident, explains how a recent increase in police controls to prevent the waterbody being filled in has made access to materials in the sector very difficult, hampering the residents’ practice of depositing material and their capacity to anticipate flooding. This can be read as an indirect form of the “politics of submergence” [Zeiderman, 2016b] endured by the residents. Alfredo argues:

“I don’t know if it’s just Cartagena or all Colombia, but here poverty gets no help. They help people who have more to begin with. Look what the mayor did to ban the *relleno* so that the poor would drown (*para que el pobre se ahoga*). I realise we mustn’t fill (*rellenen*) the mangrove, but we have a problem: we get flooded out! [...] We won’t use the mangrove anymore but they should let us use the *volqueta* (truck transporting the rubble), so that the water doesn’t rise any higher”.¹⁹

- 25 Similar complaints are heard regarding the clogged canals and the lack of intervention. The problem is that the overflowing canals, which are obstructed by waste, originating partly from the self-built settlement that has no waste disposal infrastructure, but also flowing in from other sectors of the city, are also at the heart of flooding risks in Olaya. Thus residents and community leaders constantly pressure the municipality, demanding that the canals be cleaned, especially before the rainy season, protests that sometimes take the form, for instance, of blocking the nearby main road, the Avenida Pedro Romero.²⁰ Andrea, another community leader, expresses her discontent regarding the absence of public intervention:

“We do clean-up days with the Fundación.²¹ Neither the State nor anyone else cleans the canal [...] The JAC’s²² priority is to clean the canals. I’ve just been talking about this problem in an interview for the newspaper [...] I don’t know who does the cleaning now because they keep changing the contractors (*la contratación*) every time there’s a new mayor”.²³

- 26 Yet these claims often remain unanswered. Camila continues to explain how the cleaning of the canals is caught up in the complex subcontracting apparatus, making it difficult for the residents to point an accusing finger at a precise entity.

“The cleaning of the canal is sometimes done by Aguas de Cartagena, or subcontracted by the district office. It is like a chain: they supply and then subcontract (*suministran y subcontratan*)”.²⁴

27 The everyday practices of residents in response to the fear and anticipation of floods are in a constant state of evolution due to their everyday experience of the phenomenon. As the *época de lluvia* unfolds and water temporarily submerges parts of the streets, it disrupts residents' daily routines by shaping the way they practice the neighbourhood and the city. As streets get flooded, sectors of the neighbourhood get disconnected, just like the small islands of an archipelago, and residents' mobility is consequently interrupted. In response, as soon as the water starts rising, residents start leaving their housing and find refuge a few streets higher up, waiting for the street to surface again. Others decide to stay to avoid leaving their empty homes open to robbery and are trapped for up to several days waiting for the water to recede. Residents spatial practices are also limited and slowed down by urban insecurity, as it is on rainy days that the local gangs, *las pandillas*, like to fight, taking advantage of deserted streets and disrupted mobility. The constantly changing landscape during the rainy season is also evident from the way residents envision their future urban trajectories. In a high flood risk sector, two community leaders show me the site of a football pitch they wish to build for *la invasión*: "This will be our football pitch", says Andrés, to which Gustavo responds jokingly, "Until it rains and it turns into a water polo field" (laughter).

Worse than Venice? Navigating through Urban Heritage Infrastructures in El Centro

- 28 Relaxing in a gently-moving rocking chair on my first evening in Cartagena at the end of June 2015, I²⁵ felt like I was in paradise. So, I was pretty flabbergasted when my host suddenly drew my attention to the neighbourhood's olfactory experience, telling me that this city "smells like shit." What a clash of perceptions—just after arriving in one of the twelve "coolest" neighbourhoods worldwide²⁶—, I had certainly envisioned the social struggle behind the beautiful facades, but being hinted at the start of how evil-smelling it was came as a big surprise.
- 29 This casual comment is perfectly in tune with the discursive repertoire of embodied and sensory experiences of flooding, and therefore with the imagination of nature in the city. Detritus left by rain water, plastic bags and waste of all sorts form insalubrious spaces next to the bay. When the sun hits this standing water, often called "laguna" by the local residents, the emerging mix of smells attracts small animals and insects that can carry diseases such as zika, dengue and chikungunya.
- 30 Socio-political imaginations about the force of nature are omnipresent in El Centro and present manifold facets for the residents' everyday life and evoke astonishment among foreign visitors. During the rainy season, social media are flooded with photos and memes of inundated streets and sights in El Centro which often depict not only the scale of rain and flooding but also creative navigational practices as we will see below. The urban residents will face those regular challenges sometimes with annoyance, sometimes with amusement, and will make comments like "it seems like the city was never prepared for rain", alluding to the city's authorities' unpreparedness, corruptness or ineffective policies to deal with the rainy season, thereby clearly connecting nature to the realm of the political.

- 31 The force of water becomes particularly evident on coastline Avenida Santander, the main street leading into Cartagena. While taking my morning walk around the *ciudad amurallada* and passing the Avenida Santander, big waves crash heavily onto the main road, bringing all the traffic to a sudden halt. The incoming masses of salt water affect the street's concrete-built material infrastructure and at the same time modify urban-dwellers' mobility patterns. When the big waves approach this main road, motorcycle taxis, cars and buses are forced to slow down or even to stop in order to avoid accidents. Discussing this natural spectacle later that day with a friend, she recounts one of her experiences: "Once, we were in the car near the Kalamari Theatre, on the Camellón de los Mártires just going into Media Luna street. We got stranded and so much water poured into the car that we had to bale it out with a little pot (*tarrito*), as if we were in a *chalupa*".²⁷
- 32 Converting a car into a boat, Luisa and her family had to resort to elementary survival techniques (*sacando con un tarrito*) in order to navigate their way through the city, turning this experience into an audacious river adventure. Here, navigational skills seem to be necessary in the literal sense of "moving in a moving environment" according to Vigh [2009, p. 420].
- 33 Main roads and little streets are transformed into rivers and water networks in times of heavy rains. Even though the massive and unique fortification walls protect the city centre against big waves and strong winds, the very old sewage and drainage system means that the city is inundated in periods of heavy rain. In this respect, the fast-developing tourist industry and with it the general urban transformation that shaped El Centro so visibly, also play a major role in the evolution of the situation. Public services in the former residential neighbourhoods are stretched beyond their limits. The Getsemaní community leader Davinson announces, "The drainage system has also collapsed because the pipes are over forty years old and were not designed to cope with so many people".²⁸
- 34 Recurring problems with power and sewage systems cause much distress in the supposedly modern and touristic-friendly heritage area at the heart of the city, thereby provoking the astonishment and laughter of visitors, while local residents have to find ways to deal with these challenges. The perceived repercussions are not only palpable in daily life, but also during highly politicized events. In October 2016, when the Colombian peace agreement referendum was taking place, Cartagena was hit by heavy rains which (among other reasons) caused a lot of people to stay at home and abstain from voting. These examples demonstrate the entanglements of the social-environmental context with urban citizenship and belonging.
- 35 While the last example illustrates the disruptive power of rain and flooding, many people seem to look forward to the rain as it promises some break from the Caribbean heat. In Getsemaní, rain is often equated with the joy of living, and youngsters in particular go out and wash in the rain—as rainwater is considered particularly pure—while others jump off the Puente Roman, a test of courage. It is a time of conviviality spent with friends, far away from the social control of the small neighbourhood alleys.
- 36 The decrescendo of life during the rainy season provides people with an excuse to exercise day-to-day obligations in a more relaxed fashion, hanging out with friends and spending more time wandering round the shops. However, the difference between feeling slowed down and feeling stuck is not enormous. As we have seen for the main

Avenida Santander road, the nexus of traffic, flooding and mobility particularly shapes how residents experience and perceive the city, as Señora Alma remarks,

“If you go out, first you get wet, or second, you get wet because taxis and cars don’t take any notice of pedestrians. When you are in the centre you feel like a prisoner, because you have to wait for the water to clear up and evacuate before you can get out, or if it is something very urgent, you go out anyway, otherwise you wait for the rain to pass”.²⁹

- 37 Relations that show a lack of solidarity and situations that highlight the feeling of being trapped illustrate the unstable social terrain which people have to navigate during urban flooding. Therefore residents like Señora Alma prefer to stay home when it rains, emphasizing practices of waiting and killing time until the rain calms down. For this reason, when the forecast, or a look at the sky, tells them heavy rain is in the offing, people prepare to return to their homes, among them the many commuters who fear being stuck for hours far from home. This can sometimes lead to speeding things up, as I experienced with a domestic worker at a friend’s place. The lady was in a hurry to get away in time to catch a bus back to one of the outlying neighbourhoods.
- 38 Navigating the Archipelago City requires interpreting signs of change. When I was sitting with Martin on the fortification walls watching the sea and observing the Avenida Santander, he suddenly remarked out of the blue, “I’ve heard fortune tellers who have seen in their visions that the sea is coming to the city. I hope we’re all prepared for that”.³⁰ In a similar way, people may say, “the sea tends to reclaim its territory”, or “water has a memory and takes back what once belonged to it”. Here, nature is considered by Cartagena’s residents as a living force to which you owe respect and which you need to navigate carefully.
- 39 Preparing oneself for a biblical deluge, believing in seers or referring to climate change and global warming as an explanation of why it has become hotter than usual are modes of navigation that give meaning to accelerated change under the pressures of globalization. Uncertainty can be defined as something that is immanent to everyday life but also deprives people of that which is known and trusted. One of the main navigational skills here is to make sense of unusual phenomena like the lack or absence of rain when it should—according to Totó la Momposina—actually be pouring. When I was buying an ice-cream from a street vendor aged about sixty standing next to his colourful bike, I complained about the heat. Surprisingly (as far as I was concerned) he joined in (although I thought he would be used to the heat), reminding me of the seven plagues of Egypt, and predicting that drought and floods would come over the city and destroy it.³¹
- 40 There are not always apocalyptic visions to accompany people’s navigation. Social life is always composed of times and spaces of stability, when and where navigation is no longer necessary to orient and position oneself for the future. However, when “the rain threatens to come down” people apply their knowledge of the city in order to navigate the streets of Cartagena according to pre-planned routines. Furthermore, navigating the Archipelago City means, in El Centro, to be prepared and flexible, a condition that becomes visible through emerging economic niches. Street vendors who normally sell diverse merchandise will offer umbrellas and plastic covers against the rain, fruit and vegetable sellers who carry their goods in wooden carts store their food away and convert their business into transporting people over the puddles from street to street. At the same time, people make a business out of connecting planks from one sidewalk to the other, and pedestrians have to pay in order to pass over the makeshift bridges.

Finally, Getsemani's residents compare El Centro to another tourist destination, Venice, where people also need to navigate the urban terrain on foot during the exceptionally high tides (*acqua alta*). Connecting their everyday experiences of urban floods to socio-political imaginaries of corrupt elites unwilling to invest in better sewage infrastructure, many residents remark with grim humour that their city is "just like Venice but worse".

Conclusion

- 41 Kaika and Swyngedouw [2012] have forcefully hinted to the vast number of experts, policy makers, architects, planners and NGOs who are trying to get a grip on urban environmental challenges, that "the urban ecological conundrum has become more intractable than ever" [2012, p. 24]. As Zeiderman puts it, "all around us are signs of an urban imagination that envision cities as spaces of menacing uncertainty, imminent threat, and potential crisis" [Zeiderman, 2016a, p. 205]. These signs appear clearly when we look at the way Cartagena's urban future in the Anthropocene is to be governed through the Plan4C anticipating climate change and driven by rising sea levels and flooding risks. Inspired by Zeiderman's call to "challenge apocalyptic projections and enable new forms of urbanity to emerge" [Zeiderman, 2016a, p. 207], the objective of this article is to offer a window into the complex constituents of everyday social worlds that prevail in many Latin American coastal cities. To be more precise, we examine the everyday experiences of residents at the present time, and socio-political imaginaries of urban floods and rain during mundane, unspectacular urban flood events in Cartagena. In so doing, through a situated UPE approach, the paper brings to the fore social actors who are both important and overlooked, namely the ordinary urbanites and the reality they experience as they hum Totó la Momposina's chorus on Cartagena street corners.
- 42 By presenting Cartagena as an Archipelago City, we aim to show the entanglements of environmental and socio-political urban configurations in the *longue durée*. Cartagena was initially a colonial port city, and its urbanization process unfolded over several centuries, further sustaining and shaping the city's deeply unequal spatial order. When talking about Cartagena today, the material built environment and its urban heritage are still the focus of attention, while the urban population—be it in the historic city centre or the urban periphery—serves mainly as mere extra and an element of local colour (*folclor*). The analytics of the Archipelago City highlights the residents' everyday experiences of urban floods and shows that the ways they have been living alongside and coping with rain and floods are inseparable from patterns of socio-spatial inequality. In the Archipelago City, during episodes of seasonal rain and floods, water is thus both part of the city and also traces physical and social barriers amongst the population.
- 43 In the bullerengue song presented in the introduction, *Aguacero e' mayo*, a drum ensemble accompanies the chorus. One of the drums, *el tambor alegre*, assumes a complex improvised musical language, always specific to the performer. As rain and floods increase and uncertain environmental futures become the norm in Cartagena, residents' everyday practices evolve, progressively taking up the *tambor alegre*'s role of musical improvisation, by navigating through the Archipelago City to deal with

increasing urban complexities amidst an uneven, fractured and uncertain urban context.

- 44 Through the paper's ethnographic core, we show how rain and floods slow down, disrupt and speed up residents' everyday experiences of urbanity in the city, beyond the specific time frame of the rain season. We show that improvising with urban floods doesn't necessarily lead to successful outcomes as the environmental and socio-political context of the Archipelago City defines the residents' room for manoeuvre, as stressed through the ethnographic insights from two neighbourhoods with distinct socio-historical trajectories. As such, we seek to avoid a romanticized account of navigation interpreted as "the never-ending resourcefulness of subaltern imagination" [Simone, 2019, p. 19], and rather argue that the spatial regimes of the Archipelago City shape how urbanites envision, experience and respond to rain and floods.
- 45 In line with recent scholarship in urban political ecology and urban anthropology, and to explore Gandy's assumption that climate uncertainty serves as a lens for "reinventing relations between society and nature" [Gandy, 2014, p. 211], we argue in the case of Cartagena that these relations have historically been deeply uneven. Hence, in addition to the natural forces that reign in the Archipelago City, the entanglement of race, ecology, citizenship and socio-spatial inequalities needs to be further investigated in order to obtain a holistic picture of nature-city relations. While Gandy argues that flooding scenarios suggest "an optimism almost entirely lacking in much of the contemporary environmental discourses" regarding the "human capacity to create a better future" [Gandy, 2014, p. 213], with the metaphor of navigation we nevertheless try not to romanticize the human leeway for action. This is not to deny that floods also have as existential consequences such as racism, both of which are constitutive of Cartagena's "shaky (archipelagic) terrain" [Vigh, 2009]. Urban environmental futures are as unpredictable for urban citizens as they are for "experts", however, their navigational praxis allows ordinary people to develop daily practices so as to make sense and try to muddle through their changing environment.
- 46 In conclusion, the praxis of navigation helps people move through their—at times very liquid—city, shedding light on both the changing socio-material and ecological trajectories within the Archipelago City. Navigation is based both on urbanites' present experiences and also on their imaginations of the future. The future entanglements of nature and city, whilst looking beyond expert knowledge, must account for the socio-political imaginaries of ordinary citizens, enabling new forms of social interaction with urban water to surface, such as emerging grassroots projects for urban river transportation, to name just one. New forms of urbanity in the Archipelago City may emerge, when water is no longer envisioned as tracing barriers between its inhabitants, but rather as connecting "urban islands-in-the-city" [Walker, 2015].

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABELLO VIVES Alberto & FLÓREZ BOLIVAR Francisco Javier, 2015, “Del arte de prohibir, desterrar y discriminar: Cartagena y sus disímiles narrativas de desarrollo y pobreza”, in Alberto ABELLO VIVES & Francisco Javier FLÓREZ BOLÍVAR (eds.), *Los desterrados del Paraíso. Raza, pobreza y cultura en Cartagena de Indias*, Bogotá, Marémagnum, p. 21-54.
- AGUILERA DIAZ María & MEISEL ROCA Adolfo, 2015, “¿La Isla que se repite? Cartagena en el censo de población del 2005”, in Alberto ABELLO VIVES & Francisco Javier FLÓREZ BOLÍVAR (eds.), *Los desterrados del Paraíso. Raza, pobreza y cultura en Cartagena de Indias*, Bogotá, Marémagnum, p. 186-219.
- ALISTE Enrique & BLONDEL Violeta R., 2012, “Concebir lo socio-ambiental. Representación y representatividad en los discursos sobre el desarrollo”, *Polis. Revista Latinoamericana*, 32 [on line], accessed the 6th december 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/polis/6590>
- ALISTE Enrique & STAMM Caroline, 2016, “Hacia una geografía de los conflictos socioambientales en Santiago de Chile: Lecturas para una ecología política del territorio”, *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, vol. 55, p. 45-62.
- ANAND Nikhil, 2017, *Hydraulic city. Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- ANJARIA Jonathan Shapiro & MCFARLANE Colin, 2011, *Urban Navigations: Politics, Space and the City in South Asia*, New Delhi, Routledge.
- AUYERO Javier & SWISTUN Débora, 2007, “Confused because exposed. Towards an ethnography of environmental suffering”, *Ethnography*, vol. 8, n. 2, p. 123-144.
- AYALA GARCÍA Jhorland & MEISEL ROCA Adolfo, 2017, “La exclusión en los tiempos del auge: El caso de Cartagena”, available at: <http://www.foronacionalambiental.org.co/publicaciones/detalle/libro-ciudades-sostenibles-en-el-posconflicto-en-colombia/>.
- CALDEIRA Teresa, 2002, *City of walls. Crime, segregation, and citizenship in São Paulo*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- CAMACHO Miguel, 2003, *Karmairi, crónica de Cartagena de Indias*, Bogotá, Pluma de Mompox.
- CLICHEVSKY Nora, 2006, “Estado, mercado de tierra urbana e inundaciones en ciudades argentinas”, *Cuadernos de Geografía: Revista Colombiana de Geografía*, vol. 0, n. 15, p. 31-52.
- COATES Robert & NYGREN Anja, 2020, “Urban Floods, Clientelism, and the Political Ecology of the State in Latin America”, *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, vol. 110, n. 5, p. 1301-1317.
- COLLINS Timothy W., 2010, “Marginalization, Facilitation, and the Production of Unequal Risk: The 2006 Paso del Norte Floods”, *Antipode*, vol. 42, n. 2, p. 258-288.
- CUNIN Élisabeth & RINAUDO Christian, 2006, “Entre patrimoine mondial et ségrégation locale : Cartagena et ses murailles”, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, vol. 73, p. 151-171.
- DEAVILA PERTUZ Orlando, 2015, “Los desterrados del paraíso: Turismo, desarrollo y patrimonialización en Cartagena a mediados del siglo XX”, in Alberto ABELLO VIVES & Francisco Javier FLÓREZ BOLÍVAR (eds.), *Los desterrados del Paraíso. Raza, pobreza y cultura en Cartagena de Indias*, Bogotá, Marémagnum, p. 123-146.

- DEAVILA PERTUZ Orlando, 2019, "Community action, the informal city and popular politics in Cartagena (Colombia) during the National Front, 1958-1974", in Niall GERAGHTY & Adriana Laura MASSIDDA (eds.), *Creative Spaces: Urban Culture and Marginality in Latin America*, London, Institute of Latin American Studies, p. 107-132.
- DELEUZE Gilles, 1997, *Bartleby; or, the Formula' in Essays Critical and Clinical*, Minneapolis MN, University of Minnesota Press.
- DIAZ DE PANIAGUA Rosa & PANIAGUA BEDOYA Raúl, 1993, *Getsemaní. Historia, patrimonio y bienestar social en Cartagena*, Cartagena de Indias, Coreducuar.
- DIBAZAR Pedram, LINDNER Christoph, MEISSNER Miriam & NAEFF Judith, 2013, "Questioning urban modernity", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, n. 6, p. 643-658.
- DOSHI Sapana, 2017, "Embodied urban political ecology: five propositions", *Area*, vol. 49, n. 1, p. 125-128.
- FOUCAULT Michel, 2010 [1975], *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*, Paris, Gallimard.
- GANDY Matthew, 2014, *The Fabric of Space. Water, Modernity, and the Urban Imagination*, Cambridge, MIT Press.
- GLISSANT Édouard, 1997, *Poetics of Relation*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press.
- GOMEZ Maruja Redondo, 2004, *Cartagena de Indias. Cinco siglos de evolución urbanística*, Bogotá, Fundación Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano.
- HAYWARD Philip, 2001, *Tide Lines: Music, Tourism and Cultural Transition in the Whitsunday Islands (and adjacent coast)*, Lismore, Music Archive for the Pacific Press.
- HELG Aline, 2004, *Liberty and Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835*, Chapel Hill and London, The University of North Carolina Press.
- HEYNEN Nik, 2014, "Urban Political Ecology I: The Urban Century", *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 38, n. 4, p. 598-604.
- JAFFE Rivke, 2016, *Concrete Jungles: Urban Pollution and the Politics of Difference in the Caribbean*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- JAGLIN Sylvie, 2012, "Services en réseaux et villes africaines. L'universalité par d'autres voies ?", *L'espace géographique*, tome 41, n. 1, p. 51-67.
- KAIKA Maria & SWYNGEDOUW Erik, 2012, "Cities, Natures and the Political Imaginary", *Architectural Design*, vol. 82, n. 4, p. 22-27.
- LAMUS CANAVATE Doris, 2010, "Negras, palenqueras y afrocartageneras. Construyendo un lugar contra la exclusión y la discriminación", *Reflexión Política*, vol. 23, p. 152-166.
- LAWHON Mary, ERNSTSON Henrik & SILVER Jonathan, 2014, "Provincializing urban political ecology: Towards a situated UPE through African urbanism", *Antipode*, vol. 46, n. 2, p. 497-516.
- LAWHON Mary & TRUELOVE Yaffa, 2020, "Disambiguating the southern urban critique: Propositions, pathways and possibilities for a more global urban studies", *Urban Studies*, vol. 57, n. 1, p. 3-20.
- LEFEBVRE Henri, 1974, *La Production de l'espace*, Paris, Éditions Anthropos.
- LOFTUS Alexander & MCDONALD David, 2001, "Of liquid dreams: a political ecology of water privatization in Buenos Aires", *Environment and Urbanization*, vol. 13, n. 2, p. 179-199.

- LORA DÍAZ Marcela, 2017, “Chambacú: entre atavismos y rizomas. Rastros de identidad en el corral de negros”, *Visitas al Patio*, vol. 2, p. 117-127.
- MERLINSKY María Gabriela, 2017, “Ecología política del agua y territorialización de las luchas sociales: La experiencia del foro hídrico de Lomas de Zamora”, *Anthropologica*, vol. 35, n. 38, p. 119-143.
- NYGREN Anja, 2016, “Socially differentiated urban flood governance in Mexico: Ambiguous negotiations and fragmented contestations”, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 48, n. 2, p. 335-365.
- OFFICE OF THE MAYOR OF CARTAGENA DE INDIAS, mads, 2014, Invemar, CDKN and Cartagena Chamber of Commerce. *Plan 4C: A Competitive and Climate Compatible Cartagena*.
- OLDENBURG Silke, 2018, “Street Corner Society. Conviviality and contestation in Getsemaní”, in Silke OLDENBURG et al. (eds.), *Making the City in Cartagena de Indias, Basel Papers on Political Transformations*, n. 16/7, p. 39-43.
- POSSO JIMENEZ Ladys, 2015, *Getsemaní. Casa tomada*, Cartagena de Indias, Afán Gráfico.
- PUELLO Amaranto Daniels, ROMERO Raúl Román & GARCIA Jennifer Jiménez, 2015, “La población desplazada en Cartagena de Indias: Alcances y limitaciones de la política pública”, *Revista Palobra, “palabra que obra”*, vol. 11, n. 11, p. 40-56.
- PUGH Jonathan, 2013, “Island Movements: Thinking with the Archipelago”, *Island Studies Journal*, vol. 8, n. 1, p. 9-24.
- PUGH Jonathan, 2018, “Think like an archipelago: paradox in the work of Édouard Glissant”, *Island Studies Journal*, vol. 13, n. 2, p. 211-213.
- RADEMACHER Anne, 2015, “Urban political ecology”, *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.*, vol. 44, p. 137-152.
- RADICATI Alessandra, 2020, “The Unstable Coastline: Navigating Dispossession and Belonging in Colombo”, *Antipode*, vol. 52, n. 2, p. 542-561.
- RANGANATHAN Malini, 2015, “Storm drains as assemblages: the political ecology of flood risk in post-colonial Bangalore”, *Antipode*, vol. 47, n. 5, p. 1300-1320.
- ROBINSON Jennifer, 2006, *Ordinary Cities. Between modernity and development*, London & New York, Routledge.
- ROBINSON Jennifer, 2011, “Cities in a world of cities: The comparative gesture”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 35, n. 1, p. 1-23.
- RODGERS Dennis, BEALL Jo & KANBUR Ravi, 2011, “Latin American urban development into the twenty-first century: Towards a Renewed Perspective on the City”, *European Journal of Development Research*, vol. 23, n. 4, p. 550-568.
- SIMONE AbdouMaliq, 2019, *Improvised Lives. Rhythms of Endurance in an Urban South*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- STEIN Alfredo & MOSER Caroline, 2014, “Asset planning for climate change adaptation: lessons from Cartagena, Colombia”, *Environment and Urbanization*, vol. 26, n. 1, p. 166-183.
- STRATFORD Elaine, 2013, “The idea of the archipelago: Contemplating island relations”, *Island Studies Journal*, vol. 8, n. 1, p. 3-8.

- SWYNGEDOUW Erik, 1997, "Power, nature, and the city. The conquest of water and the political ecology of urbanization in Guayaquil, Ecuador: 1880-1990", *Environment & Planning A*, vol. 29, n. 2, p. 311-332.
- SWYNGEDOUW Erik, 1999, "Modernity and hybridity: Nature, tegeneracionismo, and the production of the Spanish waterscape, 1890-1930", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 89, n. 3, p. 443-465.
- TRUELOVE Yaffa, 2011, "(Re-)Conceptualizing water inequality in Delhi, India through a feminist political ecology framework", *Geoforum*, vol. 42, n. 2, p. 143-152.
- UNGERS Oswald Mathias *et al.*, 2013, *The City in the City. Berlin: A Green Archipelago*, Zürich, Lars Müller Publishers.
- VIGH Henrik, 2009, "Motion squared. A second look at the concept of social navigation", *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 9, n. 4, p. 419-438.
- WALKER Julia, 2015, "Islands-in-the-City: Berlin's urban fragments", *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 20, n. 4, p. 699-717.
- ZEIDERMAN Austin, 2016a, *Endangered City. The Politics of Security and Risk in Bogota*, Durham, Duke University Press.
- ZEIDERMAN Austin, 2016b, "Submergence: precarious politics in Colombia's future port-city", *Antipode*, vol. 48, n. 3, p. 809-831.
- ZIMMER Anna *et al.*, 2018, "Urban Political Ecology: Landscapes of Power", in *Defining the Urban: Interdisciplinary and Professional Perspectives*, London and New York, Routledge, p. 212-222.
- ZIMMER Anna *et al.*, 2020, "Urban ponds, environmental imaginaries and (un)commoning: An urban political ecology of the pondscape in a small city in Gujarat, India", *Water Alternatives*, vol. 13, n. 2, p. 225-247.

NOTES

1. Cartagena de Indias will be abbreviated as Cartagena.
2. This concept has found popularity particularly in contexts of political instability in order to show how people need to deal with and muddle through highly volatile socio-political circumstances. The concept has been criticized for neglecting times of stability and people's need to routinize in unstable times.
3. As Robinson [2006, p. 531-533] has shown, moving away from a developmentalist perspective that compares cities of the Global South in terms of what they lack, all cities should be considered as "ordinary", thus calling for the "decolonisation" of urban studies.
4. Silke Oldenburg carried out 13 months of fieldwork and Laura Neville carried out 10 months of fieldwork in Cartagena.
5. Our ethnographic insights are based on two independent research projects by Silke Oldenburg (University of Basel) and Laura Neville (University of Lausanne) which are mutually complementary.
6. Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).
7. National Administrative Department of Statistics.
8. *El Espectador*, 08.09.17, available at: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/nacional/en-cartagena-habian-cercado-un-barrío-por-la-visita-del-papa-francisco/>.
9. Phone interview with local leader, June 2020.

10. E.g. the 2004 and 2010 flooding with more than 50,000 residents affected; or the 2020 floods caused by hurricane Iota.
 11. *Cartagena de Indias Competitiva y Compatible con el Clima*. Supporters of the plan hope that the city can become a model of urban and coastal planning by 2040, basing its development on environmental standards that take climate change into account.
 12. Institute of Marine and Coastal Research [Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras: José Benito Vives de Andrés]. Homepage, last accessed 10.06.2020.
 13. Cartagena has had eleven mayors in the past seven years, of which seven were appointed by the Presidency of the Republic, and in 2018 alone, Cartagena had four different mayors [*El Universal*, 2019], last online access on the 7.12.21, available at: <https://www.eluniversal.com.co/cartagena/dau-el-alcalde-numero-12-en-8-anos-que-llega-a-la-aduana-DH2191353>.
 14. Due to climate change, seasons are no longer predictable in this way.
 15. Interview, Instituto de Patrimonio y Cultura de Cartagena de Indias [IPCC, January 2020].
 16. Refers to Laura Neville, a human geographer who has been investigating environmental inequality, urban space production, everyday politics and practices of waste management in Cartagena since 2017 (fieldwork in August-Sept. 2017, January-July 2019, and July-August 2021 as part of her PhD project).
 17. All names used in both case studies are pseudonyms.
 18. Fieldnotes, June 2019.
 19. Alfredo, interview, May 2019.
 20. Fieldnotes, March 2019.
 21. One of the main local NGOs active in the sector.
 22. Junta de Acción Communal (JAC), a local non-profit civic corporation made up of democratically elected residents.
 23. Andrea, interview, May, 2019.
 24. Camila, interview, April 2019.
 25. Refers to anthropologist Silke Oldenburg who has been investigating changing urban lifeworlds and material manifestations of power and infrastructures in Cartagena since 2015 (fieldwork June-September 2015, January-June 2016, January, February and November 2017, January-February 2020, July-August 2021 and ongoing as part of her PostDoc-project).
 26. <https://forbes.co/2020/01/03/forbes-life/getsemani-el-barrio-de-cartagena-entre-los-mas-cool-del-mundo/> (last accessed 10.06.2020).
 27. Luisa, interview, February 2017.
 28. Davinson, interview, January 2020.
 29. Señora Alma, interview, January 2020.
 30. Martin, interview, January 2017.
 31. Fieldnotes, May 2015.
-

ABSTRACTS

It is difficult to imagine the city of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, the “Pearl of the Caribbean”, without water, as sandy beaches, lush mangrove forests, swampy landscapes and a maze of canals both surround the emblematic historic city centre and shape the expanding neighbourhoods in the so-called urban periphery. Water and the city are so closely intertwined that we introduce

Cartagena as an Archipelago City to explore how urban residents navigate the city during seasonal urban rain and flooding. As climate change and rising sea level have become a pressing environmental challenge for coastal cities worldwide, we nuance mainstream discourses on governing and planning environmental futures by applying an actor-centred approach. We use navigation as an analytical lens, to provide insights into the way urbanites experience, anticipate and improvise around urban floods and imagine their city. Drawing on 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork in two distinct neighbourhoods, we dialectically explore how urban flooding slows down, disrupts and also speeds up Cartagena's everyday life while its residents navigate their way through the Archipelago City. By arguing that these everyday experiences and imaginaries reflect the historical and social legacies of profound inequalities in the city, we are offering a window into the complex constituents of everyday social worlds that prevail in many Latin American coastal cities.

Il est difficile d'imaginer la ville de Carthagène des Indes, en Colombie, la « Perle des Caraïbes », sans eau car ses plages de sable, ses forêts de mangroves luxuriantes, ses paysages marécageux et ses dédales de canaux entourent à la fois l'emblématique centre historique de la ville et façonnent les dénommés quartiers périphériques en expansion. L'eau et la ville sont si étroitement liées à Carthagène, que nous présentons la ville comme une Ville-Archipel afin d'explorer la manière dont les habitants naviguent la ville en période de pluies et d'inondations urbaines saisonnières. Le changement climatique et l'élévation du niveau de la mer étant devenus un défi environnemental pressant pour les villes côtières dans le monde, nous nuancions les discours dominants sur la gouvernance et la planification environnementale future en appliquant une approche centrée sur les acteurs. Nous utilisons la navigation comme angle d'analyse, afin de fournir des indications sur la façon dont les citoyens vivent, anticipent et improvisent autour des inondations urbaines et imaginent leur ville. En s'appuyant sur treize mois de recherche ethnographique dans deux quartiers distincts, nous explorons dialectiquement comment les inondations urbaines ralentissent, perturbent et accélèrent la vie quotidienne à Carthagène pendant que ses habitants naviguent la Ville-Archipel. En faisant valoir que ces expériences et imaginaires quotidiens reflètent les héritages historiques et sociaux des profondes inégalités de la ville, nous ouvrons une fenêtre de réflexion sur les composantes complexes des mondes sociaux quotidiens qui prévalent dans de nombreuses villes côtières d'Amérique latine.

Es difícil imaginar la ciudad de Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, la "Perla del Caribe", sin agua, ya que sus playas de arena, exuberantes bosques de manglares, paisajes pantanosos y laberintos de canales rodean el emblemático centro histórico de la ciudad y modelan los barrios en expansión de la llamada periferia urbana. El agua y la ciudad están estrechamente entrelazados, por lo tanto presentamos la ciudad de Cartagena como una Ciudad-Archipielago para explorar cómo los habitantes navegan la ciudad en tiempos de lluvias e inundaciones urbanas estacionales. Dado que el cambio climático y la elevación del nivel del mar se han convertido en un problema ambiental urgente para las ciudades costeras en el mundo, matizamos los principales discursos sobre gobernanza y planificaciones ambientales futuras aplicando un enfoque centrado en los actores. Utilizamos la navegación como un lente analítico, para proporcionar información sobre la forma en que los habitantes experimentan, anticipan e improvisan las inundaciones urbanas e imaginan su ciudad. Basado en 13 meses de trabajo etnográfico en dos barrios distintos, exploramos dialécticamente cómo las inundaciones urbanas frenan, interrumpen y también aceleran la vida cotidiana en Cartagena mientras sus habitantes navegan la Ciudad-Archipielago. Al argumentar que estas experiencias e imaginarios cotidianos reflejan el legado histórico y social de las profundas desigualdades de la ciudad, abrimos una ventana de reflexión sobre los complejos componentes del mundo social cotidiano que prevalecen en muchas ciudades costeras de América Latina.

INDEX

Keywords: urban floods, navigation, everyday practices, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

Palabras claves: inundaciones urbanas, navegación, prácticas cotidianas, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

Mots-clés: inondations urbaines, navigation, pratiques quotidiennes, Carthagène des Indes, Colombie

AUTHORS

SILKE OLDENBURG

Institute of Social Anthropology, University of Basel.

Silke OLDENBURG est maîtresse de conférences à l'Institut d'anthropologie sociale de l'université de Bâle, en Suisse. Elle est titulaire d'un doctorat de l'université de Bayreuth, en Allemagne. Ses intérêts de recherche : l'anthropologie des médias et du journalisme, l'anthropologie urbaine, ainsi que l'anthropologie politique avec un accent particulier sur les aspects de la vie quotidienne dans les contextes de conflits violents prolongés.

LAURA NEVILLE

Institut de géographie et durabilité, université de Lausanne.

Laura NEVILLE est doctorante en géographie à l'université de Lausanne, Suisse. Elle est titulaire d'un master en urbanisation et développement de la London School of Economics and Political Science et d'un master en anthropologie et sociologie de l'université libre de Bruxelles. Sa recherche doctorale actuelle porte sur les inégalités sociospatiales et environnementales dans la ville de Carthagène des Indes en Colombie.