

Cartagena de Indias, Colombia: Heritage as a mediator between spatial, historical and social transformations of the Old City

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Introduction

In 1984, Cartagena de Indias' fortresses, port and group of monuments were inscribed in the World Heritage List of Unesco (UNESCO, 2017). Government of Colombia protected the city's historic centre—the old town—by Law 163 of 1959 and Decree 1919 of 1995. In the late 1980s, a boom in international tourism attracted by Cartagena's unique heritage, fostered economic growth that produced a whole chain of added values and affected transformation of the city's urban and socio-economic structure. Despite the accumulation of capital, Cartagena became the city with the largest percentage of poverty and social inequality in Colombia. The fortresses of the old town, the most famous in the Caribbean Sea, became the lines of segregation of the city's residents according to class and race. The descendants of the European colonizers and *criollos*, sons of Spaniards born in America, who belong to the upper social class, concentrated inside the historic core of the old town. The descendants of the indigenous of *Karib* ethnic group, African slaves brought by Spaniards as a work force, and casts of *mestizos*, *mulattos* and *zambos*, (Castaño, 2002) (Gallego, 2004) (Gruzinski, 1999) (2000), (Mörner, 1969; Sánchez, 2010) who belong to the lower social classes, were forced outside the fortress walls.

This chapter discusses the ways in which has heritage mediated socio-spatial segregation of Cartagena de Indias. The chapter looks to reveal how from a historic process of social segregation, the old city of Cartagena relapsed and propelled the greatest population segregation in the history of Colombia. Using a research on historical documentary sources on the types of urban growth related to the population composition of Cartagena -and from

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planimetric contrasts- a verifying process of Cartagena's Old City spatiality is based on statistical information obtained from census data or available since 1900. Also it is needed to retrieve population information supplied by the chroniclers of the Colonial period to understand the origins of an historical problem of bias and social expulsion.

The chapter argues that the city's segregation has been conditioned by the heritage conservation and management policies that have driven the redevelopment of Cartagena's old town—fortress, port and monuments—to the advantage of tourism over the local residents. Such redevelopment was focused on the preservation and conservation of the colonial heritage, linked to the European descendants, without taking into account the diverse local heritage, linked to the descendants of the indigenous people and former slaves. This has resulted in gentrification of the old town by the upper social classes and consequently, in the increase of the land value that pushed the lower social classes to the areas outside of the old town.

Towards a Pluralist Notion of Heritage

In this chapter, we deploy a concept of heritage that shifts from the Eurocentric or North American view of heritage as monuments inherited from the past of an outstanding universal value, commonly evaluated through the lens of the Western culture (Isaza, 2014). We adopt Isaza's (2014:2) pluralist notion of heritage that embodies "natural sites, cultural landscapes and even innumerable intangible manifestations of the present culture of any people of the world, regardless of their degree of cultural, economic, political or technological development". This inclusive, diverse and participatory vision of heritage corresponds to heritage notion of in Colombia, as defined by Culture Law⁴. According to them, heritage includes a sum of goods and events that cover a vast field of social life and is made up of a complex set of social assets of a cultural nature (material and immaterial), which give a human group meaning, identity and belonging. As such, heritage is linked closely to the concept of culture that, by default, involves plural positions, values and meanings which co-exist but also often engage in a latent conflict.

As Aparicio (2014) shows, culture and heritage often involve negotiations, disputes and conflicts between different actors who struggle over the question of who has the social power over the heritage-making processes. These contestations involve not merely citizens and

⁴ Law 1185 of 2008, Republic of Colombia Congress.

http://www.secretariassenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/ley_1185_2008.html

Accessed: 1 October, 2018

civilian networks involved in democratic public consultation, but also the State, social movements, grassroots organizations, communal actions. Contrary to a general idea that cultural policy is largely a responsibility of the State, cultural heritage is also produced through non-authoritarian and democratic processes, which involve various non-state actors having the right to the self-determination through heritage projects.

García-Canclini (2004, p. 50) argues that heritage is not only cultural but also intercultural as it embodies difference. Inequality in Latin America contains a cultural dimension. Rather than in essentialised genetic or cultural traits (language, inherited and immovable manners), the constitution of differences lies in historical processes of social configuration. Some of these elements become from their precolonial cultures and show partial similarities because they elaborate in analogous symbolic ways how to cultivate the land, relate to nature and organize as families and peoples with these ends. Other beliefs, dances and festivals coincide because they were imposed during the colonisation by the Europeans. They also differed by the reinterpretation operations with which they updated these inheritances throughout the 20th century. They also share the mix of traditional and modern resources to meet health needs, local, national and global communication, even for the more traditional tasks of cultivating the land, or adapt to cities. In addition, they share the habit of giving importance to relations of reciprocity and trust, even in societies intensely articulated with the capitalist economy.

Precisely, the concept of heritage coined in Cartagena is the opposite of the manifested one in this chapter. The old city of Cartagena de Indias reflected its isolation as a museum of urban-architectural exhibition of heritage pieces as treasured buildings out of context and in the midst of disintegration with the natural, social and economic environment, leading to social deterioration and the progressive segregation of its inhabitants descendants from 16th-20th centuries generations. The “museumisation” of old city raised the prices of housing, becoming an elite neighborhood of European or American tourist homes, hotels, fashion boutiques or restaurants. But this is not new. The real issue is at the end of the 90s Cartagena held the most representative slums belt in Colombia. Labor informality and attraction for jobs in the international tourism industry way created another greater city around the old one, far from any heritage beauty.

Cartagena as a Place in Permanent Transformation

Since its foundation as a fortified settlement in 1533 Cartagena de Indias has been the economic and political centre for the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean. Due to its location, it became the main seaport node for goods exchange of the Caribbean network with Europe. The old town of Cartagena de Indias is located in an area of islands and peninsulas between

bays and swamps, directly accessible from coastal edge of the Caribbean Sea and Karmairi Island.

Cartagena has grown during three major historic periods. The first is the Colonial period (1600 to 1800), in which the defensive strategy drove the city's urban development (Figure1). The first settlement stretched inside the fortress walls and bastions provided protection from pirates and tides. Apart from the military infrastructure, religious and public administration buildings—designated later as cultural heritage in the 20th century—were constructed in this period. The initial spatial patterns of social segregation in the Colonial period were expressed through residential architecture—stone masonry was used to distinguish houses of rich families from poor neighborhoods that were largely built in wood and bahareque (braided reeds).

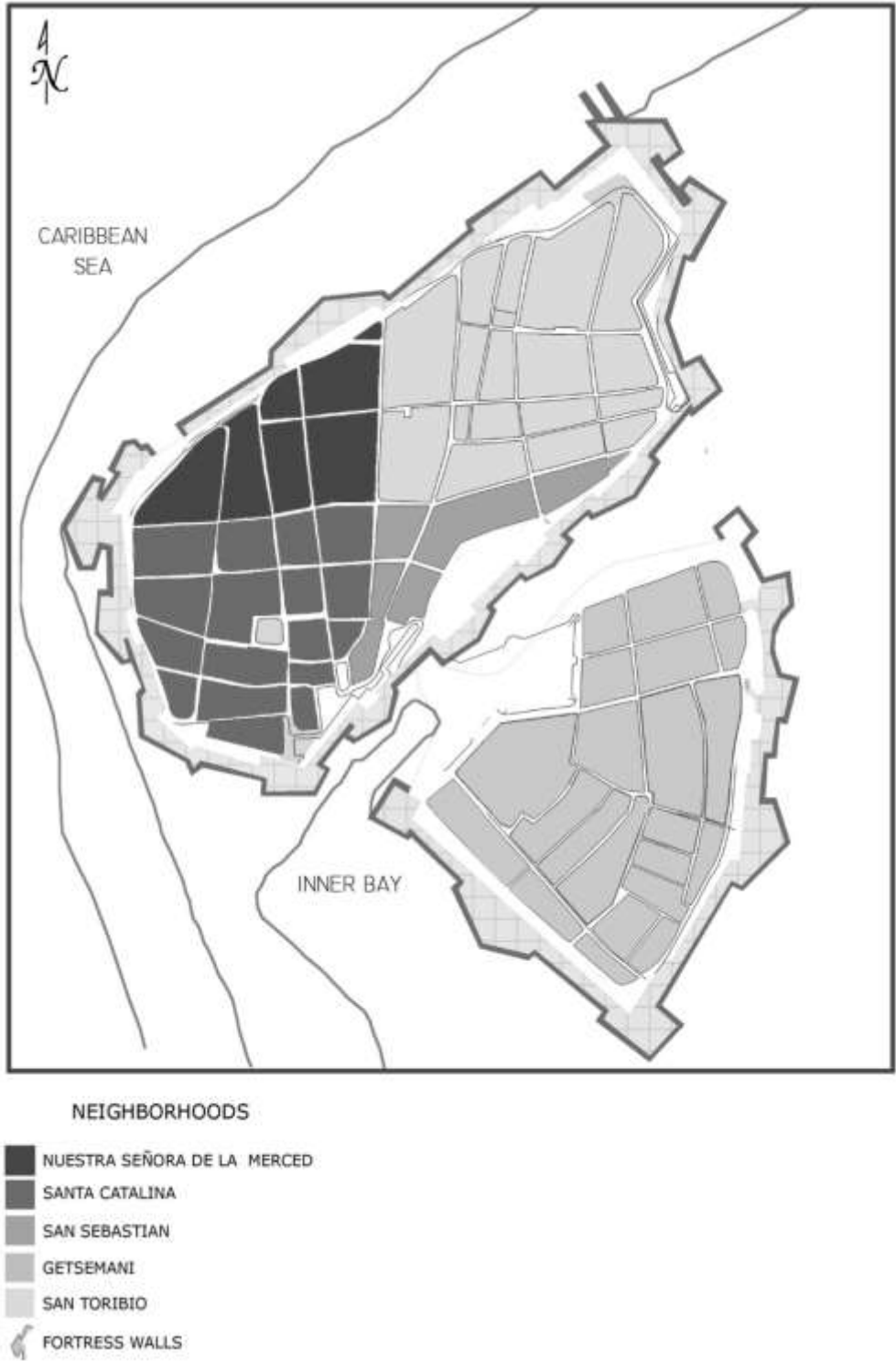


Figure 1. Neighborhoods in the ancient city of Cartagena de Indias. Source: Authors from De Pombo, (1999).

The second period (1800 to 1900) was a transition to Independence, marked by decline and disorder. This period is characterized by improvements in public space through the construction of the city’s two main squares. Although built public spaces, which involved the

preservation of heritage, it made a significant contribution to citizens' daily life. Segregation of Cartagena's neighborhoods began to solidify in this period: "one was the invasions that settled north and other hamlets that were beginning to transform as a result of the expansion of the historic center" (Redondo, 2004, p. 70).

The third period from beginning of the 20th century, approximately 1900 to 1989 was marked by progression of foreign trade and an accelerated growth of population. The Bay of Cartagena was consolidated as a seaport and a vast network of roads accelerating urban growth. The resurgence of the economy in Colombia as one of the main exporters of coffee (Forero, 2016) contributed to the recovery of Cartagena's strategic role as commercial and tourist port of the Caribbean Sea (Arenas, 2009).

Consequently, various urban reforms affected heritage, as some parts of the fortress walls were destroyed to extend the city limits. In 1911, on commemoration of the first Centennial of Independence, a massive cleaning of monuments was carried out. This resulted in the creation of parks, erecting of statues and installation of electric street lighting network and aqueduct. Beautification of the old town also took place in this period.

Economic growth of Cartagena started to decline due to Great Depression effects and later by post 2nd World War global crisis especially after 1955 (Cunin & Rinaudo, 2005). In order to solve this, Central Board of Historic Monuments and Tourism was created in 1932 to promote heritage of Cartagena and take advantage of its value to boost tourism and make profit from it. The Society of Public Improvements established policies for preservation of its monumental buildings (Cunin & Rinaudo, 2005). In 1943, National government declared Cartagena as a tourist center of Colombia and initiated the first projects in fortified old town. These measures would have an effect on the urban development of the city and regional tourism years after, particularly in 1984, when Old City and a group of monuments were inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List. From this national and international tourist visits increased. An uncontrolled change of land uses and interventions on heritage in the historic centre generated an accelerated process of gentrification and eventually city's socio-spatial segregation.

Historic Roots of Cartagena's Segregation

Social segregation of Cartagena has characterized the city since 1533 on the island where Pedro de Heredia and his army established its foundation over a Karib Indians village called Karmairi. In the Colonial period, first settlements grew into the fortified ring, which interposed barriers between its residents. Karmairi Island became the core of the city, populated by Europeans and *criollos*. The adjacent island renamed Getsemaní was the suburb populated by the indigenous population and later by slaves, mulattos, *zambos* and mixed races (*mestizos*).

During the 17th century, displacement of indigenous population to urban centers intensified due to increase in demand for labor. By then massive use of African slaves became necessary to intensify exploitation of mines and sustain the emergence and acceleration of *haciendas*⁵ economy. The slave trade caused an important commercial dynamism. Also a crossbreeding process between populations of different races developed. The concubinage of new mixed couples of Spaniards with African or Indigenous led to forming a large number of settlements outside the city, most of them built on pre-existing indigenous settlements which State and the Church were not able to control (Conde, 1999, pp. 33-37). Cities like Magangué, Lorica and later Barranquilla have their origins in those social linkages. Expulsion also caused population of free slaves' settlements like San Basilio de Palenque⁶ among others *palenques*.

By 1620 “Most of the agricultural production came from slave *haciendas*” (Gallego, 2004, p. 60). Leading to situation in which slaves' population outnumbered indigenous population by the end of the 17th century. Consequently, mixed races (*mestizos*) artisans and African slaves workers who brought food to the fortified city lived in Getsemaní, San Toribio and San Sebastián as settlements formed at periphery of Cartagena. The city became the most important port in the Caribbean for commerce and slaves trafficking.

From 18th century Cartagena besieged by Britain and pirates, must strengthen its men for defense. *Mestizos* and mulattos acquired their freedom to belong to defending armies and lived in Getsemaní. Likewise, smuggling is increasing with landings of goods and slaves in the swamps and mangroves outside the city. Settlements are expanded to meet this demand.

In the 19th century from 1811 to 1815 feats of Independence from Spain occurred. *Mestizos* and mulattos received freedom by the Junta of Cartagena in 1810 lived outside fortress and fought against Pablo Morillo. The prolonged warlike processes evidenced during this period prevented to make economic investments and urban transformations until the end of century.

The exporting economic consolidation of Cartagena at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century and the works of the port generated a working class. First industries drag workers to peripheries and neighborhoods settle next to the new industrial sectors. Since 1895, the Cartagena-Calamar railway departed from Getsemaní providing a greater commercial dynamism to near fortress city and attracting Syrian-Lebanese immigrants who interacted with the mulatto and *mestizo* population.

⁵ Large state of agricultural or livestock farms.

⁶ Cultural space of San Basilio de Palenque was inscribed in 2008 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/cultural-space-of-palenque-de-san-basilio-00102?RL=00102> Accessed: 3 of October, 2018.

The 20th century brought a vertiginous urban growth and establishment of tourist and industrial project of Mamonal. Model was built on the basis of displacement and exclusion of *Afro*⁷ people. They were removed from sectors such as Bocagrande, Crespo and Chambacú to others such as Caño del Oro, Bocachica, Basurto, Olaya, insular and peripheral sectors without any infrastructure or public services. “Racialisation” of space ended up becoming public, that is, it progressively left private spaces such as haciendas and houses traditionally *Afro*’s spaces, and divided the city into three spaces: the neighborhoods of the white elite that now settled in the old *Afro* neighborhoods; those of the incipient middle class located around the great avenues and the suburbs and peripheral areas of the *Afro* population.

The first official movements to expel population took place. During 1930s Mayor Daniel Lemaitre Tono forced to move *Afro* population to Canapote sector. Dozens of people died from malaria by the unhealthy conditions of the lot. Also Pekín, Pueblo Nuevo, Punta Icacos and Boquetillo neighbors moved to La Popa hill slopes and La Boquilla (Figure 2). This happened when some wealthy merchants massively bought the old ruined buildings of Old City, raised rent prices and forced *Afro* families to move outside the walled city.

Later in 1970s the same happened with *Afro* residents of the most traditional ghetto of African heritage in Cartagena: the district of Chambacú. Moreover, it was demolished because town planners considered their presence and their overcrowded houses in precarious condition, disfigured Colonial centre surroundings. Due to the eviction, inhabitants of Chambacú moved to neighborhoods of San Francisco, Nuevo Porvenir, Republic of Venezuela, Chile and Los Cerros.

Displacement of many *Afro* populations in early periods of urban expansion of Cartagena was imbricated with eugenic ideologies that helped legitimize processes of domination, discrimination and exclusion that fundamentally characterized the 500-year history in America. Hygiensm movement also came from Europe supporting justification for the population displacement in 20th century. Later it would become intertwined with tourism and modernization of the city. Tourism industry and the real estate market (moved by speculation of capitalistic forces) have similar consequences: pressures for space and displacement of *Afro* populations, especially in Cartagena coastal zone for resorts and golf courses.

⁷ It is worth to clarify that Constitution of 1991, determined the recognition of diversity of all communities of Colombia, its multiculturalism and its cultural manifestations, as a fundamental part of national heritage, denominating “Afro” to the descendant communities of slaves brought from Africa. “Rom” for gypsy communities; “Raizal” for Colombian Caribbean Islands inhabitants.

Heritage Tourism as a Social Segregator of Cartagena in the 20th Century

Cartagena de Indias is one of the most attractive tourist destinations in Latin America for visitors from all over the world. Since 1968, the city has experienced transformation of its historic centre, which has largely been driven by tourist policies issued by the National Tourism Corporation⁸. It was in charge of tourism development programs having a high level of influence on conservation and transformation of heritage as a part of the National Monuments Council.

The General Law of Tourism⁹, was based on premise that tourism is an essential industry for country development and its territorial entities, regions, provinces and cities. The law established sectoral plans for tourist development at national, regional and local levels. It defined clusters and resource areas¹⁰. It also prescribed that resources reactivated by entries payments to heritage properties should be directed exclusively for the maintenance and conservation of heritage sites. A significant issue with Law 300 was that it gave priority to the Corporation and hence focused on realizing tourist demands and needs rather than those of the local residents. This is evident in Article 18, which states “the tourist use will take precedence over any other use that is later decreed on such areas and that is not compatible with the tourist activity” (República, 1996, p. 10). As defined by Article 23, the Ministry of Economic Development pursued “patrimonialisation” of public properties that represented potential tourist resources, which effectively included “all urban or rural areas, squares, monuments, subject to special plans, acquired by the State, or preserved, restored or rebuild” (República, 1996, p. 11). As evident in Article 24: “the property object of the declaration will be specially affected to its exploitation as a regional or national tourist attraction, with priority to its use for other purposes different and contrary to the tourist activity.” (República, 1996, p. 11). The consequence of these acts was the consolidation of Cartagena’s old town into a large tourist cluster by the beginning of the 21st century.

As argued by Espinosa et al (2012), development of tourism provides benefits and disadvantages for heritage. In theory, tourism contributes to the preservation and conservation of heritage and it can also contribute to cultural and socio-economic development of local population. According to Hernández (2004: 310) heritage “acquires its value according to the use that community makes of it. Social use can be understood as appropriation of heritage as an instrument of education, collective identification, social, economic and cultural development”.

⁸ Decree 2700 of 1968. Official Diary of Nation N° 32646. 15, November, 1968 p. 4. Congreso de la República de Colombia. <http://www.suin-juriscol.gov.co/viewDocument.asp?id=1774178>

⁹ Law 300 of 1996.

¹⁰ Republic of Colombia Congress. <https://www.anato.org/sites/default/files/Ley300de1996-Actualizada2006.pdf>

In case of Cartagena, public policies evolved around cultural tourism focused since 2007¹¹ on to maintenance of cultural heritage in order to ensure its sustainability as a tourist resource. While main goal was to make Colombian heritage competitive on the global level in order to attract international visitors, these policies also aimed to create benefits for local communities. The development of tourism has led to physical and infrastructural improvements of the city. To mention some, the lighting design of the San Felipe de Barajas castle and the monuments and squares of Old City were developed. Recently, a BRT transportation system came into operation.

The historic centre and its fortifications of the colonial period have been maintained in good condition. Although it has remained in good condition, has not been possible to approve its Special Plan for Management and Protection, while the Land Use Management Plan¹² struggles against corruption and real estate pressure to build at high altitude near the historic centre and fortified monuments

Nevertheless, as Borg (1991) argues, while development of tourism brings advantages to a city, it also creates multiple disadvantages, such as gentrification and inequality. Heritage tourism has turned Cartagena into one of the Colombian cities with the greatest economic and demographic growth in the last three decades. Unfortunately, distribution of prosperity has been very unequal, as the process of transforming the old town into a tourist area has produced an unequal competition on the market. Economic interests of a minority controlling development of heritage tourism eventually outweighed public interests. Wealth accumulated in the historic centre, where it was held by only 1.5% of the urban population (Melero, 2014).

The investments focused on commercialization of properties in the historic centre, particularly on heritage sites could be converted in tourist infrastructure and attractions. This in turn raised land values, which has consequently disadvantaged the local residents and its economies. As a result, some parts of the old town lost their residential function (Melero, 2014), as a part of the population were pushed outside its walls, due to the high costs of real estate and taxes which they could not afford. These disadvantaged social groups included mostly *Afro*-descendants (Redondo, 2004). They settled in informal settlements around the old town (Diz, 2016), or high risk areas, as it is still the case around La Popa hill (see figure 1). A high concentration of informal settlements can also be seen in the area of Virgin's Swamp populated by fifty-one poor housing districts developed by private builders. These settlements formed a large poverty belt, the biggest in Cartagena in the last 50 years.

¹¹ Published in 2011 in:

http://www.mincit.gov.co/minturismo/publicaciones/199/politica_de_turismo_cultural
(accessed 16 July, 2018)

¹² The first required by the Law of Culture and the second by the Law of Territorial Order, 388 of 1997.

In addition to the poor's displacement, upper classes remained and/or settled in Cartagena's old town in their attempt to isolate themselves from popular classes. A modern tourist zone has been developed in the neighborhoods. During the first decade of the 21st century, luxury private towers were constructed near the old town along the coast including Castillogrande, Bocagrande, El Centro, El Cabrero, Marbella, and Crespo and Cielomar in La Boquilla sector.

Streicker (1997, pp. 109-122) concludes that heritage tourism is an extraordinary obstacle for a construction of an equalitarian society. Vargas (2012, p. 208) argues: "On one hand the patrimonial city was built with majesty, and on the other, misery, unhealthiness and poverty of Cartagena people, put down the tourist discourse". This trend leads to the conclusion that development of heritage tourism in Cartagena sets in motion a spatial segregation and reinforced social and cultural differences existing in the urban community. Touristic exploitation of heritage in the old town took place at the expense of segregating Cartagena's residents according to wealth.

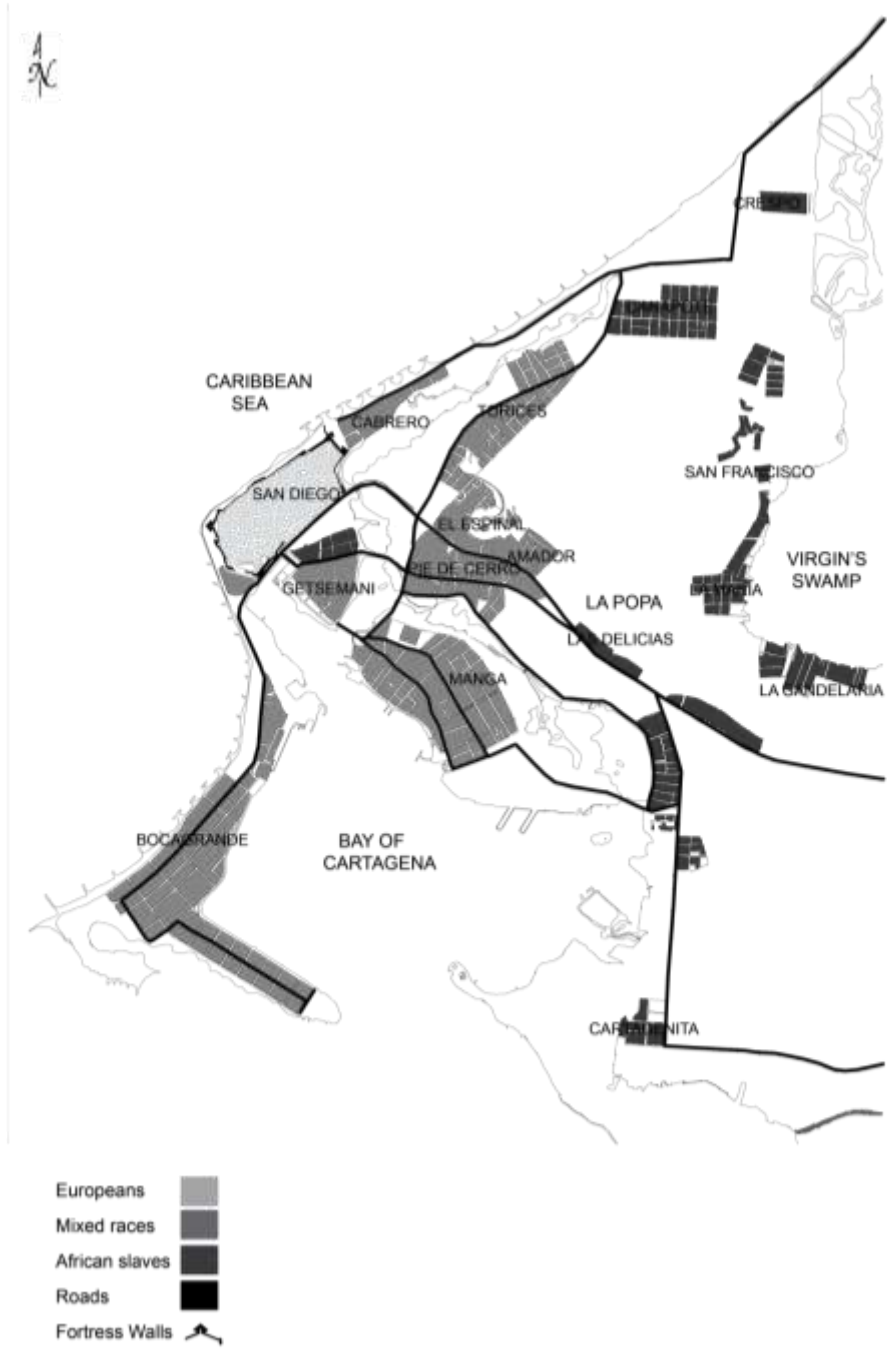


Figure 2. Types of population related to expansion through 1960. Source: Authors from (De Pombo, 1999) and (Alcaldía Mayor de Cartagena de Indias, 2001).

Conclusion

Cartagena de Indias is marked by a significant polarisation according to its population income levels and social opportunities. This has a very clear manifestation in physical space: the poor are located outside the core in historically segregated sites, while those with the highest incomes are located in more expensive areas where heritage is concentrated, such as the historic centre. From 15th century until today, urban heritage and its transformation through time has mediated this polarisation with a strong ethnic component.

Heritage has been used as a tool for appropriation of space by the upper social classes. Across time, evolution of tourism activity around heritage influenced the displacement of low-income population of mostly *Afro*-descendants from historic centre neighborhoods such as San Diego and Getsemaní. The same pattern of displacement is repeated in Bocagrande peninsula, islands of Getsemaní and Manga, and through north in El Cabrero, Marbella, Crespo and La Boquilla.

Today, the walled city performs like a filter and reflects morphologically the social structure of the Latin American colonial community. All social relations, interchanges, mobility connections, meeting points, popular celebrations, occur near Clock Tower, the principal fortress gate. This point is the passageway between Old City and Getsemaní. Foreigners from all over the world pass by and cross paths with *Afro* culture daily life that works in tourism, or that comes to downtown to offices of all government levels.

Outside, Getsemaní once populated with artisans workshops and slaves homes, is now an area with upper-class hotels, restaurants and housing. Contrary to the evenly distributed social structure of urban population in 18th century, social structure of contemporary Cartagena has been completely out of balance. On the one hand, this is a result of the exponential growth of poor population outside of old town in comparison to the rich population in it. On the other hand, this was affected by the persistence of differences between social and cultural classes of urban communities, which also have relation with ethnic characteristics (Streicker, 1997).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Cartagena population was composed of a tenth of a white community of European immigrants and Creole families, a majority of *Afro*-Colombians and a minority of indigenous. The white community composed the political and business elite while the bulk of *Afro*-descendant inhabitants worked in the less qualified trades, representing popular class (Flórez, 2015). Still heritage of Old City struggles to reflect this complexity of social crossing and mixing.

For a long time after Colombia's Independence there was a certain denial of the existence of the *Afro*-descendant culture, despite the fact that Constitution of 1991 and its policies for construction of the nation focused on the reinforcement of the Colombian multicultural identity. According to Streicker (1997), ethnic composition of Cartagena population is characterized by a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. Although it was supposed to be a symbiosis of races that manifests itself in a predominantly *mestizo* and mulatto population, a structural integration between different population groups is still considered, which also has a spatial expression due to heritage mediation.

This is shown in the difference between the first civilised and planned part of the city, the heritage one, inscribed in the World Heritage List, which follows the European urban models that followed cultural preferences of the Cartagena white elite (Pizarro, 2015), and with the second part, located in the periphery where poor-class population stagnation seems to develop organically, characterised by a variety of forms of traditional self-construction and *bahareque* use.

Aguilera y Meisel (2009) explain how during the last 30 years Cartagena has become one of the cities in Colombia with the highest uneven economic and demographic growth. Analyzing 2005 census, they highlight poverty and characteristics of its population, location, ethnicity and schooling. They conclude that the poorest people live in places of lower quality and their *Afro* racial component is directly related. Aguilera y Meisel (2009 , p. 138) believe that "polarisation in income and social opportunities in Cartagena has a very clear manifestation in the physical space in which the ethnic component stands out: the poor, who are mostly *Afro*-descendants, are located in the least attractive places since point of view of the landscape and transport and those with the highest income are located in the most beautiful places." Throughout the 20th century, a political consciousness emerged and there were global social trends that led to the recognition of the Caribbean identity and the reinforcement of African ethnicity, which was manifested in Colombia's heritage (García & Coral, 2004).

Up to now, despite development plans and heritage management plan initiatives, there is no recognition of ethnic and spatial dimension of the city's social imbalances. In addition, the goal of developing the city's heritage tourism should no longer serve as a support for the deepening of the urban segmentation patterns in terms of accessibility, appropriation and conservation of historic centre and its heritage by communities, also the beach line, the bay and the abandonment of the rest of the city. The challenge of the role of Cartagena de Indias' heritage is how to revert both sides that have built the city image and its relation to its inhabitants. It is how to reinforce a process of education and reconquest of heritage spaces by *Afro*-Colombian people. It is how heritage is used to balance people's hopes and necessities.

Recently heritage appropriation processes are helping to mediate with people in an inclusive and democratic way. Perhaps the Gold Museum of Cartagena endowed with a narrative about the history of the city and its tangible and intangible heritage is a sign of the transition from the concept of traditional white, Catholic, elitist heritage to a heritage of difference of Afro, indigenous, pagan, communal and participatory.

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