

*stratification system*

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# Spatializing Stratification: Bogotá

Juan David Guevara S. (1), Rob Shields (2)

## *Abstract*

This article presents the socio-economic stratification in Bogotá, Colombia, and discusses the socio-spatial elements of its constitution and development. The spatial classification of blocks and neighbourhoods based on services, amenities and building qualities in Bogotá, produces a surrogate spatialization of economic divisions. It maps, classifies and excludes but is also appropriated and contested as a hierarchical, sociocultural spatialization of residents. Taken up in the civic culture, strata has become a pattern of identification, stereotypes and discrimination that normatively striates the citizenship of Bogotanos identifying who should and should not go where.

## Affiliation

(1) (2) University of Alberta, Department of Sociology

## Contacts:

jguevara [at] ualberta [dot] ca  
rshields [at] ualberta [dot] ca

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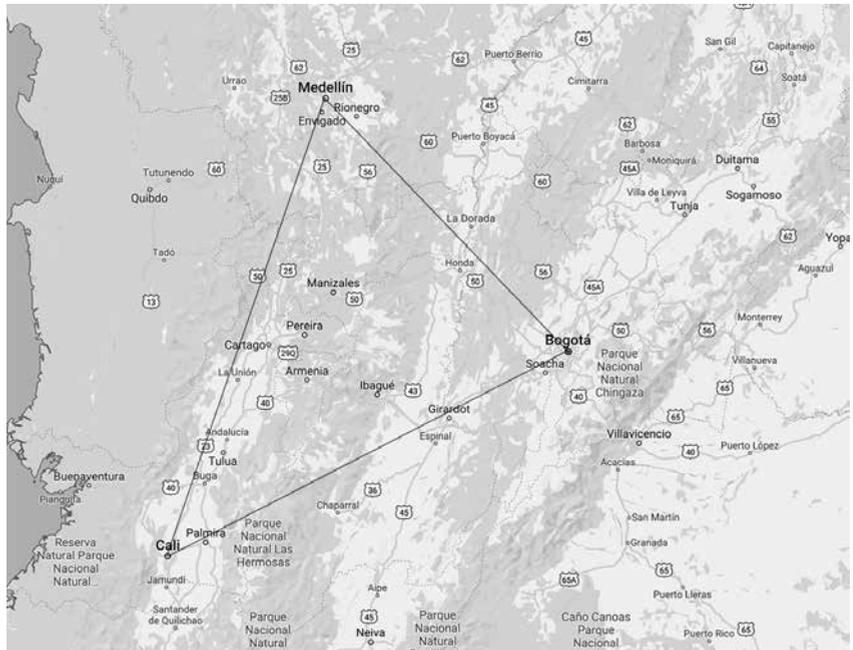
## 1. Introduction: Urbanization in Colombia

Bogotá, the capital and largest city of Colombia (8.1 million with over 10.2 million in the metropolitan area) is a financial and trade gateway to South America (placing it in the many of the same categories as Manila, Barcelona, Vienna or Dublin, see GaWC, 2017). Bogotá has a history of planning and governmental interventions in the city as a biopolitical space (Zeiderman, 2013). These map and structure the city as a knowable, rationalized, governmental space with an eye on European urban models that authorities attempt to secure against the stresses of rapid urbanization, for example, the informal economy on the streets, population invasions, and rural-urban migration. This has created a long history of division and stratification based on Eurocentric notions of the ‘civilized’ in the national culture:

While universal ideals accompanied both North Atlantic political transformations of the late 18th century and Latin American national independence movements in the early 19th, liberal democracy had limited reach and success in the latter case. In Colombia, for example, the ‘will to civilization’ rather than the pursuit of equality or freedom animated republican efforts to lead a divided society away from its colonial past (Rojas, 2002). Ultimately, colonial divisions between cities and their hinterlands, between whites and nonwhites, and between elites and the popular classes – all shaped by the durable opposition between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism’ (Sarmiento, 1961) – proved stronger than the ideal of a national citizenry endowed with universal rights. (Zeiderman, 2013: 77-78).

Colonial and Republican spatializations (cf. Shields, 2013) were more than just a division between whites and nonwhites. For instance, the

Fig. 1 – ‘Golden triangle’ of major cities in Colombia: Bogotá, Medellín and Cali (Credits: After googlemaps, 2019).



Republican elite was composed of whites and 'criollos' (a miscegenation of Spaniards, Aborigines and sometimes Blacks). Historically, there has been a trend in Colombia's national spatialization to divide populations in political and economic terms. This paper presents the actual stratification in Bogota and provides some elements for discussion regarding what this spatial classification system does.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the industrialization process and the rural violence produced the urbanization of Colombian society. Since 1918, a network of intermediate cities was established in what is called the 'golden triangle' between Cali, Medellin and Bogotá. The coffee industry was developed in this area, providing industrial, agricultural and urbanistic transformations of the cities placed in this zone (Zambrano, 1993).

Fig. 1 provides a graphical presentation of the 'golden triangle'. The cities placed in the interior of the triangle formed by Bogotá, Medellin and Cali were of high importance for the first decades of the Republic and the process of industrialization and urbanization of the centre of the country.

Besides the importance and spatial relations of small, intermediate and big cities of the 'golden triangle', the industrialization process was captured by the big cities, which in turn produced a certain degree of dependence among the intermediate and small cities in a 'functional relationship' (Zambrano, 1993: 90). Some intermediate cities created an agro-industrial identity; for instance, Ibagué as the city of rice and cotton producers; and Manizales, Armenia and Pereira as the coffee zone. At the same time, socio-political armed conflict occurred in rural areas of the country; this generated in small and intermediate cities that were fields of confrontation and socio-political divisions between liberals and conservatives (Guzmán, Fals Borda, Umaña, 1980; Roll, 2002).

Since the second half of the 19th century, Colombian society has been divided in two political parties: the liberal party that promoted industrialization, commercial exchange and the recognition of rights of private property and labour. The conservative party was aligned with the Catholic church, promoting centralized power, Catholicism in the education system and a protectionist economy. Across these differences, the political elites possessed extensive rural farms from which their socio-political power derived. Part of the violence generated in Colombia was due to the need to maintain colonial economical institutions with a Republican and modern face (Guillen, 1979). Farm workers, their domestic animals, their families and everything that was part of the farm was owned by the landowner. In the best cases, workers received a salary but others worked merely for the chance of continuing to live on the landowners' farms (Molano, 2016). Confrontations between the landowners and farm workers led to the creation of private self-defence militias that Molano (2016) locates as the origins of the Farc guerrillas. Those who were not able to defend themselves or their families migrated to the cities, leaving behind their possessions and in some cases family members and friends. The three big cities of the 'golden triangle' received a high number of people in a 47 year period. Bogota, Cali and Medellin, raise from 6.9% of the total population in 1938 to 25.6% in 1985.<sup>1</sup>

**1 - All data used was taken from official census reports made by the National Department of Statistics of Colombia - DANE (in Spanish).**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relative balance between intermediate and big cities was transformed by the increasing status of big cities as destinations receiving displaced families from rural areas and small and intermediate cities. Most of these populations came to self-constructed neighborhoods where they live today – what can be called informal settlements or informal barrios (Zambrano, 1993).

## *2. Urban Space and Social Hierarchy in Colombia*

In recent decades, the Colombian State has developed different tools for managing its territory. From politico-administrative divisions such as departments and municipalities to more technical economic segmentations such as social ‘strata’. One of these schemes is the actual model of spatial socioeconomic stratification implemented with the law 142 of 1994. Socio-economic stratification has its origins in the spatial inequality that shape Colombian cities, in the socio-historical dynamics of the country, and in the State’s lack of politico-economic resources to control and administer its territory. Socio-spatial differentiations are easily observed when comparing formal and informal settlements in these cities (Yunda, 2009).

Why is this significant? Housing and commercial real estate markets are major factors in socio-spatial segregation. Do these patterns causally increase inequality? Isolating specific local causes is challenging. Wealthier groups may be more free to choose where and in what sort of areas they live in because they can afford to mitigate negative aspects of a neighbourhood. For example, they may be able to send their children to private or selected schools whereas poorer families more dependent on the locally provided education options or have less work-life flexibility to take children to more distant schools. ‘The poor are more dependent on local services than are the rich. And homogeneously poor neighborhoods are more likely to have low-quality services and lack external contacts and information than are socially heterogeneous neighborhoods’ (Roberts and Wilson 2009: 213).

Education is only one area where ‘neighbourhood effects’ can be found. Socioeconomic research broadly concludes that ‘spatial segregation may affect the employment opportunities of residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods in the city’ (Villarreal and Hamilton 2009:73). While it tends to be underestimated, the actual meaning and impact of residential segregation in terms of status depends on the local urban culture and the extent to which there are advantages to be gained by living alongside better off neighbours:

Spatial segregation in Latin American cities is one strategy for increasing real estate value in the long run, a strategy that families from all socio-economic groups try to copy. Inflationary and poor economies that yield uncertainty enhance opportunities for investment in what traditionally has been considered one of the few sure assets: urban properties in cities that grow at accelerated demographic and geographic rates.... In the

context of an economy that dramatically increases uncertainty, especially among the poor... spatial segregation appears as another factor that deepens social exclusion. The geography of opportunities is now more relevant than in former times. In the past, the potential for more organic and stable labor or political insertion made spatial segregation less negative than in the current context (Sabatini *et al.*, 2009: 131).

It is rare to find empirical systems that explicitly differentiate and stratify neighbourhoods. The first stratification system was promoted by the Colombian government in 1968 due to the need to establish a differential system for charging the cost of public services, such as sewer system, power, and water supply. However, there was no statistical information or administrative tools for developing such system (Yunda, 2019).

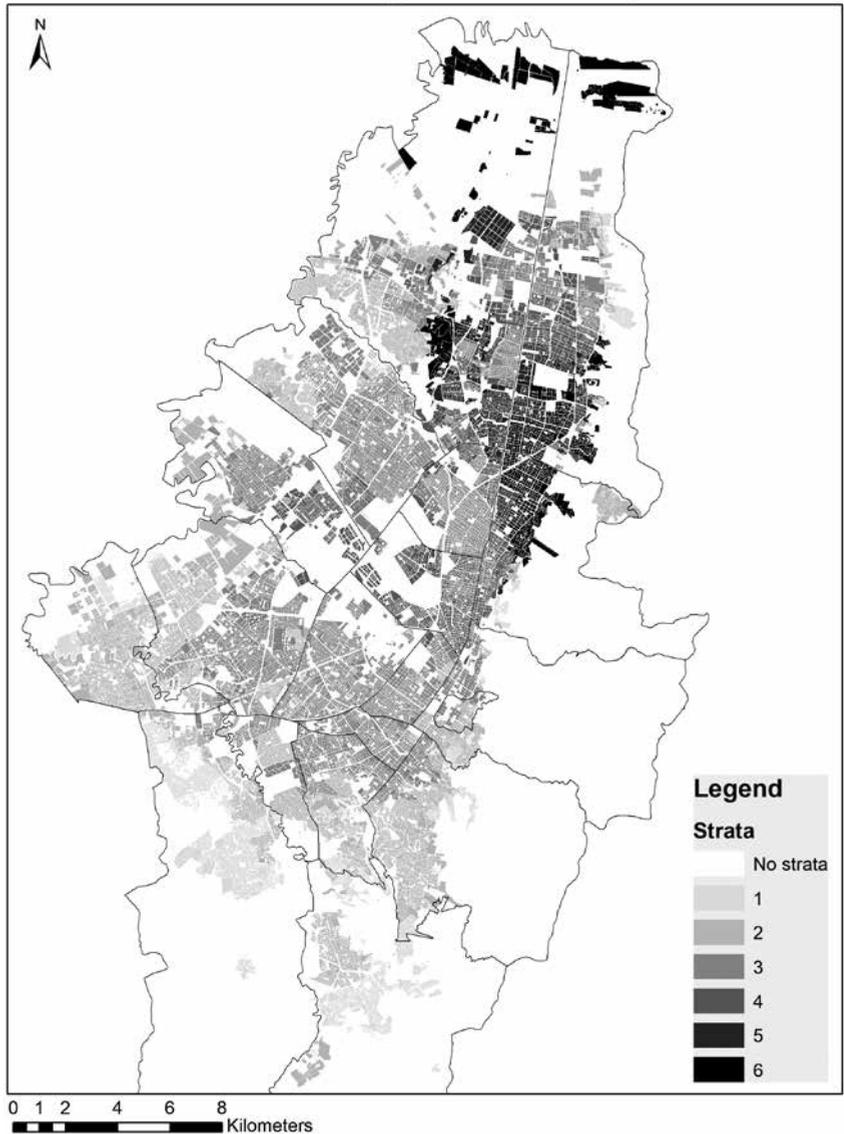
One of the main justifications for promoting this kind of system lies in the high levels of informality in rural and urban spaces. Some informal urban settlements lacked access to basic services creating unnumbered demands on the State. Other settlements generated informal practices to access to these goods, such as communitarian appropriation of natural resources or illegally hooking-in to the electrical grids. Oversaturation of the system and the eventual collapse of public services became the rationale for a system to assure the quality of the service and to oblige formal settlements (high class and rising middle class) to contribute by subsidizing lower classes and less formally established neighbourhoods.

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, local municipalities and public service companies designed and implemented different socio-economic stratifications which produced a great proliferation of arbitrary and incompatible systems (Yunda, 2019). Law 142 of 1994 standardized socio-economic stratification in Colombia. Under this law each municipality is in charge of producing the stratification system for its territory, following methods defined by the national government. Not only were the diverse approaches amalgamated but population governance was homogenized (DANE, 2013). The law established a system that is dynamic and constantly revised to keeping pace with the socio-spatial elements of urban and also rural spaces. Every two years stratification systems throughout the country have to be updated by the Permanent Committee of Socio-economic Stratification established in every municipality (Congreso de la República de Colombia, 1994).

The original objective was to map the amenities and condition of each area to identify those areas requiring improved services and those with superior levels of provision. The main tool of the stratification system created under this law is to enforce the taxing of high-income families to subsidize the public services of low-income families. In this manner, high strata will pay more for the service provided and what they have consumed in the public services bills while low strata will have a subsidized cost paying lower from what they consumed. The effect have been to raise the real estate value of the best provisioned and therefore highest ranked strata neighbourhoods. Blanco (2012) argues that planning

discourses are reducible to one discourse and practice, 'land entrepreneurialism'. This is observed in the normative, historical approach in Bogotá that prioritizes private profit on land property over any technical or social criteria promoted by the public sector: 'a land owner seeks to construct, legally or illegally, the greatest portion of land/space possible, vertically and horizontally, to generate profit out of it' (Yunda, 2019: n.p.). This discourse or practice generates a market with high costs and low quality and is captured by formal and informal private actors. The socio-economic stratification classifies dwellings of urban and rural areas in 6 categories:

**Fig. 2 – Strata in Bogotá:** The numbers on the map refer to Bogotá's localities. Each locality has a Minor Mayor and administrative staff. Strata 5 and 6 are found in only 3 localities (Usaquen-1, Suba-11 and Chapinero-2-The North of the city). And Strata 1 is concentrated in the localities of 4-San Cristobal , 5-Usmé 19-Ciudad Bolívar, and 7-Bosa (Credit: Secretaría Distrital de Planeación, 2015). Stratification of Bogotá, Colombia, by block.



Stratum 1: Low-low  
Stratum 2: Low  
Stratum 3: Medium-low  
Stratum 4: Medium  
Stratum 5: Medium-high  
Stratum 6: High

### *3. Tangible and Intangible Stratifications in Bogotá*

In Bogotá, the first unified socio-economic stratification was implemented in 1999. Since then, there have been six iterations of this system. This system was established by grouping the particular characteristics of dwellings of the same block and assigning a stratum to the block. Neighbourhoods started to be characterized on the basis of one stratum by adding the blocks with similar characteristics together (Yunda, 2019). According to the Secretary of Planning of Bogotá strata 4, 5, and 6 make up 15% of the total population of the city; while strata 1 and 2 make up 50%. The other 35% live in stratum 3 (Sdp, 2011b in Yunda, 2019). There are some stratum 1 neighborhoods in the localities of 3-Santafe, 2-Chapinero and 1-Usaquen. What can be generally observed in Map 2 is how the city is divided between low and high strata, between the North (*gomelos*) and the South (*ñeros*). This division and naming has become one of the most common stereotypes othering the relations between strata.

Any person who lives in or moves to Bogotá wants to know beforehand the Strata in which a prospective dwelling is placed. The reason why strata are important is because they allow an conceptual shortcut to understand the cost of public services, land taxes, cost of living and an image of the kind of neighbours (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008).

The materiality of the strata consists in both dwellings and services as well as in social amenities: parks, schools, the quality of residents' clothes, shopping centres, places to dance or drink (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008). Even though this classification is not intended to be a socio-economic classification but a socio-spatial identification of the physical characteristics of dwellings and their immediate environments, the production of spaces transcend the physical involving the social, the cultural and the political. (Shields, 1991; 2013). The stratum assigned depends on the physical characteristics of dwellings, their materials and the conditions of existence of the environments in which those dwellings are settled. The high importance placed on the physical characteristics of dwellings and their environment is founded on the belief that dwellings and environments are depictions of particular ways of life.

Stratification focuses on differences between, for example, informally erected dwellings and their immediate environment in comparison to secured apartment complexes bordered by municipal bicycle lanes. As a tool for producing, reproducing and in some cases contesting social spatializations (Shields, 1991; 2013), the National Department of Statistics (DANE in Spanish) recognizes the socio-cultural significance of dwelling by signalling that.

Dwellings are not and have never just been a simple way of shelter; it is a way of inhabiting which demands a series of possibilities for adapting to personal preferences and interests according to the distinct ways of life, cultures and histories of the inhabitants/occupiers. The dwelling is a physical model that goes beyond a physiological significance; it has a psychological and socio-historical sense that refers to an aesthetic and constituted by economic reasons and social position (DANE, 2013: 1). However, this recognition is limited to the appearance of the economic value of dwellings and only by extension, the economic status of their inhabitants by locating the categories of socio-economic stratification in terms of functionality, the quality of materials, and the aesthetic aspect of dwellings and their environments (DANE, 2013).

Land value is directly related to strata. High strata add more land value than low strata, and promote the development of the city since middle strata tend to develop close to higher strata (Borrero Ochoa, 2000 in Yunda, 2019, n.p.). It is important to signal that the recognition that socio-economic strata relates to household income is widespread in Colombian society. However, in the way stratification is measured and defined there are no questions related to income. This is the reason why there is a great heterogeneity within each stratum regarding income, but the majority infer income and wealth on the basis of strata.

There are wealthy who live in low strata areas, but the poor do not live in high strata areas. In some cases, people have gained wealth but wished to either remain where they were in a low strata area for convenience or for the security gained through informal systems of protection from trusted neighbours and in low strata areas more easily dominated by those whose wealth flowed from illegal activities. According to Yunda (2019), the local policy for regulating land use considers stratification as one of many components that define the Zonal Planning Unities (UPZ in Spanish). For example, in Bogotá, there is a total of 117 UPZ but the majority of them are made up of neighbourhoods with the same stratum. However, Yunda exposes how the income heterogeneity in strata is due to methodological problem of focusing on the built environment (a kind of spatial fetishism) and is also due to the resistance of certain communities to updated appraisals of their neighbourhoods, fearing they would lose the subsidies they receive. Similarly, Uribe-Mallarino (2008) emphasizes how stratification reduce the will to move from one stratum to the other due to the possible increase of public services costs in the new location.

#### *4. Socio-political Consequences of Strata in Bogotá*

##### *Classification, Identity and Exclusion*

The effect of the land strata system is to create a spatial order overlaid on the less tangible affordances of neighbourhoods, such as their social and cultural life or accessibility to transport and employment centres, given

the long commuting times in Bogotá. The strata ranking of a neighbourhood becomes part of its identity. It continues and extends identity as a form of social representation that has a life beyond the statistical depiction presented in the municipality's surveys (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008). There has been a constant evolution in the way in which individuals define their identities in relation to the others (Uribe-Mallarino 2008:148). In contrast to the opportunity to receive subsidies in lower ranked UPZs, the system becomes perverted into its opposite conclusion: for the status conscious, higher is better.

Since the system was implemented, people started to identify with the strata that attracts public service charges. Uribe-Mallarino (2008) considers that this identification has produced a sense of both familiarity and discomfort regarding the socio-spatial landscape of neighbourhoods; going out of one's own neighbourhood to other places in the city raises questions of security, access to goods, services and urban familiarity. With high levels of informality and concerns over security, strata become one consideration in citizens' expectations of access to neighbourhoods and their sense of comfort. The strata system thus extends into a spatial psychology that relates class, ethnic, educational and other competencies of individuals to spaces. These are not only spaces-for-this and spaces-for-that as might be specified in a land-use planning document, but a psychological architecture of the city. This takes the form of places-for-people-like-me and places-for-others who have different kinds of status, not just economic class.

### *Socialization of Exclusion*

Stratification has become part of the symbolic system of Bogotá's urbanity. It enforces and perpetuates differences between local populations and creates obstacles for social mobility. In Bourdieu's sense of 'habitus', strata are 'structured structures that function as structuring structures' (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008: 147). As such they also create a form of symbolic violence by legitimating cultural productions by the agents that are in a dominant position according to their spatial location in the strata system (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008: 148).

'Palabras más, palabras menos, para ellos fue como si tuviéramos un sistema de castas, con la aquiescencia colectiva y patrocinado por el Estado.' [In one set of terms or another, it was as if we had a caste system, with collective acquiescence and with the patronage of the State] (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008: 156).

Stratification has the property to define with whom you relate in the public spaces of the neighborhood or even in public transportation, for instance there are specific routes that goes to universities or to the financial centre of the city. It also maintains the inequality of the education system by keeping public schools to the lower strata while higher strata will pay for their education in the private system<sup>2</sup>.

**2 - In Colombia, schools are a way to determine 'who you are', from what strata you come. It is very usual that people inquiry about the name of your school, as a way to locate your social status. The public system aims to provide education to low strata, which does not mean that there are no private schools in these neighborhoods. For higher strata, private school is a matter of quality but essentially of status and strata. It would be really rare to see high strata studying in a public school.**

**3 – Due to space limit we will present some historical elements of the biggest and historical neighborhoods of El Codito: El Codito, Horizontes and Buenavista. These are the first neighborhoods of the sector with interesting elements to analyze.**

**4 – The neighborhoods of El Codito are: Nuevo Horizonte, Horizontes, Estrellita del Norte, Buenavista sector I y II, Las Mercedes, La Franja, Llanurita I y II, Balcones de Vista Hermosa, Mirador del Norte parte alta, Mirador del Norte, Lomitas, La Capilla, El Codito, Chaparral y Altos de Serrezuela).**

**5 – It is important to highlight that Tolima was the historical territory of the Farc's guerrilla. Probably that is the reason why the Buenavista inhabitants were labelled in that manner.**

### *Cultural Distinction not Economic (Identity Stratified)*

Not only are strata a shorthand for judging place, but the character of inhabitants. Styles, gestures, ways of being and talk all feature as an extended set of 'markers by strata: a series of expressions and modes of pronouncing words that characterize the inhabitants of different strata' (Uribe-Mallarino, 2008: 158). For example, Bogotá's rich idioms refer to the upper strata established-insiders as *Cachaco/a* or *Gomelo/a*, while a *Cachifo/a* is a upwardly mobile but economically struggling student from a low strata who has gained a position in a prestigious public university. A *Ñero/a*: similar to a *gamín/a*, a youth living mostly on the streets, but is used in a less specific way. A *Ñero* is anybody from a poor or low strata area. Not only are *gamín* out of place, a *Chanda* is a 'bad' person (thief, criminal) from the very low strata slums but usually they are conducting their 'business' in upper and middle-class neighborhoods. An *Atarbán*: is usually a poor, rustic or unrefined person, a rural-urban migrant perhaps, that drives an informal bus or commuter van. These are not only distinctions of urbane sophistication but are gendered, age-ist ethic and anti-immigrant. This spatialization categorizes and places residents as 'proper' to certain contexts where they 'belong' and not to others, where they should not be.

#### *5. Example: El Codito: Strata 1 & 2<sup>3</sup>*

El Codito sector is a group of 17 strata 1 and 2 areas, located in the locality of Usaquen (1)<sup>4</sup>. It extends from the plain of Bogotá uphill to less accessible and thus less desirable terrain. It has the second highest percentage of neighborhoods classified as strata 6 and 5. El Codito sector was originated by people that came to Bogotá looking for better employment and opportunities in the 1960s. The first inhabitants of El Codito worked in a quarry that produced stone for the different construction projects in the north part of city. The landowners of the El Codito and Horizontes farms started to subdivide the farms to provide shelter and as an opportunity for profiting from newcomers (Guevara, Mendoza y Hernández, 2013). At the end of 1960s a land invasion took place on neighbouring Buenavista farm. Families from mainly Tolima started to occupy the farm. The process of taking the land ended in 1983. Meanwhile, the 'invaders' were attacked by the police due to the illegal occupation of the land and by the inhabitants of El Codito and Horizontes who saw them as dangerous, thieves and 'guerrilleros' (Guevara, Mendoza y Hernández, 2013)<sup>5</sup>.

The constitution of El Codito sector has thus been marked by the lateral violence and confrontations between its inhabitants. The recognition of neighborhoods and their struggles to access public utilities permits one to observe the unequal access and the changing tactics utilised to overcome the negligence and corruption of the State (Guevara, Mendoza y Hernández, 2013). While the original Horizontes and El Codito farm settlers received the help of private actors to construct a water supply aqueduct and to access other provisions and communitarian spaces, Buenavista's inhabitants tactically appropriated such scarce resources

(such as making illegal electricity connections). It is thus very common to see hoses in the ground of El Codito's neighborhoods to transport water (Guevara, Mendoza y Hernández, 2013).

The importance of El Codito for the city and specifically for Usaquen is its proximity: El Codito houses the labour for the services demanded by strata 5 and 6 residents of Usaquen. For instance: construction, domestics, retail workers at shopping centres, hairdressers, and doormen are



**Fig. 3 - Looking West** above Usaquen from El Codito. The lower rooftops at the bottom of the photo are Strata 3, the central half of the image is Strata 4 neighbourhoods. A Strata 5 area backs on the hill in the distance (Credit: Shields 2018).



**Fig. 4 - El Codito** looking uphill from the oldest, lower areas, now Strata 2. Uphill are Strata 1 self-built houses encroaching into an ecological reserve seen at the top of the hill (Credit: Shields 2018).

**6 – Request for documentation and the possibility for doing inspections to pedestrian. The army specially intimidate youth and certain social groups such as rappers due to the stigma they carry by being labelled as drug addicts and thieves.**

in high demand by the upper strata. Data from 2010 shows that 61% of employees of El Codito were working in construction, while 12% were freelancers in several informal and formal jobs (Guevara and Mendoza, 2012).

### *6. Topology of Opportunity and the Reach of the State*

In Bogotá, the stratification system has permitted to the State to construct a map to identify settlements and populations. In this mapping, a topological approach is deployed that breaks up the city into a patchwork of differences represented as strata. Different social interactions and governance relationalities unfold between stratum (Allen and Cochrane, 2010). For instance, El Codito's 1 and 2 strata are a dependent labour force tolerated by Usaquen's strata 5 and 6 residents.

The State relates to low strata through regular tensions over territorial demarcation, since strata 1 and 2 are informal settlements whose public, private and communitarian spaces are in constant negotiation. The 'reach' of the State into low strata also occurs through intimidation in the name of control. For example, it is very common to observe the presence of heavily armed police forces or even the army making 'requisas'<sup>6</sup> and raids that look for youth that are not doing military service. These scenes are not common in nearby upper strata; in fact, the logic there is a client-centred approach in which citizens call the police when a problem arises. Practices of surveillance are common but one does not see harassment of one's neighbors.

As part of an urban topology of opportunity, dependence and exclusion, the strata system adds another layer to the street grid and the cadastral division of property and land-uses. It is an insider's imagined geography of the city. It equates widely separated areas according to the municipality's spatial audit of environmental qualities and amenities. This does not produce a continuous geography or smooth Euclidean space but a textured urban social architecture. It is a fractured, splintered urbanism that breaks up the natural geography of the city as well as the street layout.

The proud *Cachaco* or *Gomelo* not only tends to avoid low strata areas that are held to be insecure, but they are understood to virtually have different bodies from low strata Ñeros (Blacks, aboriginals and mestizos), if only in terms of the extent to which people are tanned or not from manual labour in the sun. Taken up in the civic culture, strata has become a pattern of discrimination that is much more detailed than cardinal divisions, such as the division of southern and northern sides of the city. It precedes the person in the form of spatial caricatures and suggests who is at home, and where, in the city. In effect, this normatively striates the citizenship of Bogotanos identifying who should go where and whom should not. In short, the strata become part of a social spatialization that is not only a matter of understanding but also reflected in government and police practice and in citizens' embodiment (Shields 1991). It has a

causative power as a conceptual shorthand of stereotypes, it intervenes in social interactions, it is an element in the social logics of everyday social interaction.

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