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Western modernity, cities, and race: Challenges to decolonial praxis in the African diaspora in the Americas

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Abstract

How do we decolonize cities? By demanding control over their land and organizing their communities according to ethnic traditions and ancestral ontologies, Afro-descendant movements in the Americas create territories of life—self-determined collectives in which people can experience new forms of life. Decolonial authors who have studied these communities define them as a path to decoloniality—a rupture with modern/colonial logics. However, most of the studies focus on communities in rural areas. Why are urban spaces not vital to the debates about decoloniality? Do cities pose specific challenges to the creation of territories of life? This paper explores these questions. Analyzing the urban experience of the African diaspora in the Americas, I argue that urban spaces challenge decoloniality because cities are often represented as the spatial and racial image of Western modernity, as white places of progress and development. I also argue this representation is based on Black people's evisceration. Finally, this paper seeks to contribute to decolonial urban struggles. Thus, I propose an urban decolonial praxis—an analytical lens and a praxis of research committed to decoloniality to explore cities' decolonization through the redefinition of territories of life, the redefinition of what 'being urban' means, and the wide range of urban resistances.

In 2018, I had the opportunity to hear Francia Márquez, an Afro-Colombian activist and current vice-president of Colombia, talking about her community's struggle against mining companies. She lives in La Toma, a rural Afro-descendant community that preserves its ancestral worldviews and resists displacement. La Toma's residents create a territory of life—a self-determined community where people break with modern/colonial logics and live according to other ontologies, politics, and economies.[1] For them, the individual cannot be dissociated from the community, the ancestors, and the territory. Therefore, their cultural, political, and economic organization is firmly based on communitarian relations and respect for the environment.

As an Afro-Brazilian woman who has fought against the displacement of Black and poor people in cities, I immediately thought about using that knowledge to strengthen my communities. However, I suspected that "being urban" posed different challenges to territories of life. To begin with, the urban settlements I have worked with were not ancestral lands—we mapped vacant lots in the city, gathered people who could not afford rent, and occupied the area. So, I asked Francia Márquez to talk about creating territories of life in cities. Her answer confirmed my suspicion. She told me urban spaces had their specificities and demanded different strategies.

Why do urban spaces demand different strategies? Do cities pose specific challenges to the creation of territories of life? This paper explores these questions. By analyzing the African diaspora experience in the Americas, I argue that urban spaces challenge territories of life because there is a racialized association between Western modernity and cities. Through this association, urban areas are pictured as the spatial and racial image of Western modernity—white places of progress and development. Black spatialities are defined as things that contaminate urban progress and must be eliminated. Moreover, I argue that this elimination can refer to displacement, but not only. Capital accumulation in cities depends on Black people's hyper-exploitation, in a way that elimination refers to the evisceration of Black lives.

This paper is also connected to decolonial theory. Decolonial authors have advocated for decoloniality—the rupture with Western modernity by forging new forms of being and living (Bernardino-Costa & Grosfoguel, 2016; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Mpofu, 2017; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). To do that, inspired by Afro-descendant and Indigenous struggles, decolonial authors have proposed creating self-determined communities that can be described as territories of life (Escobar, 2008; Hooker et al., 2020; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Zibechi, 2012).[2] However, many studies have prioritized rural struggles. Even though most of the world's population lives in cities, decolonial projects for urban areas are understudied.[3]

Considering this, I propose the creation of an *urban decolonial praxis*. This is an analytical lens and a praxis of research committed to decoloniality to explore cities' decolonization through the redefinition of territories of life, the redefinition of what 'being urban' means, and the wide range of urban resistances. More specifically, I suggest that understanding territories of life as *the possibility of spatial existence* leads us to define the decolonization of urban spaces as the rewriting of Black bodies and places in cities. Moreover, while Western modernity recognizes only one way of being urban—to be white and to embody an individualistic, secular, capitalist culture—I argue we need to acknowledge how Black folks produce different forms of urbanity. Finally, I state that even though some urban movements are not ethnic groups, their experiences surviving modern/colonial violence allowed them to create new forms of life.

Therefore, despite both Afro-descendant and Indigenous movements inspiring decolonial thought, this paper pertains specifically to the Afro-descendant experience. Approaching both movements would probably broaden the scope too much to do justice to their history. Considering this, the article proceeds with an introduction to decolonial theory and a discussion about the racialized association between urban spaces and Western modernity. Next, I argue

that cities depend on the ongoing Black people's evisceration by analyzing urban redevelopment policies. Then, I develop the idea of an urban decolonial praxis as a form to explore decoloniality in cities.

1 | DECOLONIAL THEORY AND THE URBAN CHALLENGE TO DECOLONIALITY

Decolonial theory can be defined as a critical attempt to summarize knowledge created by Indigenous groups, Black radical movements, Marxist organizations, Feminist Theory, Third-World movements, and other theoretical-political projects committed to liberation (Bernardino-Costa & Grosfoguel, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). The core of the decolonial theory is the reconceptualization of Western modernity. This form of modernity is usually associated with the advancement/progress of humanity through a series of allegedly European processes, such as (i) the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution; (ii) the emergence of nation-states and capitalist forms of production; and (iii) the individualization, secularization, and rationalization of the world (Escobar, 2008; Quijano, 2000). However, decolonial authors argue that, behind Eurocentric narratives on modernity, there is a system of death based on colonial violence (Miñoso, 2019; Quijano, 2000; Wynter, 2003). For them, Western modernity is a global phenomenon rooted in colonialism and, more specifically, in the Indigenous genocide and the African enslavement in the Americas. Thus, Western modernity has a dark side: the coloniality of power. This is a matrix of power centered on the racialization of the world that, inseparable from hierarchies based on class and gender, restricted humanity only to white, bourgeois, urban, heterosexual, cisgender, and Christian men (Maldonato-Torres, 2007; Miñoso, 2019; Quijano, 2007; Wynter, 2003).

How can we overcome the violence grounded in modern/colonial logics? Is it possible to defeat the system of death that constitutes Western modernity? Decolonial theory is also profoundly concerned with these questions, and its authors advocate for decoloniality. This is a philosophy and praxis of liberation based on the rupture with Western modernity by creating new forms of being and living (Bernardino-Costa & Grosfoguel, 2016; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Mpofu, 2017). Inspired by the praxis of Latin American and Caribbean social movements, scholars pointed to the creation of self-determined communities that can be described as territories of life as paths to decoloniality.[4] For example, Zibechi (2012) points out territory, autonomy, and the re-valorization of identity as some of their characteristics, highlighting these as critical factors in constructing another world. Besides, Escobar (2015) claims that these movements represent a form to overcome the current social and ecological crisis.[5] Territories of life emerge as the opposition to the modern/colonial system of death.

Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities have gained prominence in such discussions. By demanding control over their territories, these communities won rights to more than 200 million hectares of land in Latin America, an area slightly larger than Mexico (Bryan, 2012). Besides, while Western modernity is based on worldviews that value individualism, accumulation of profit, environmental exploration, and elimination of differences, Afro-descendant and Indigenous groups have conceived societies based on ancestral ontologies that center community, distribution of resources, connection to earth-beings (non-human life), and cultural difference (De la Cadena, 2010; Escobar, 2015). Hence, these movements have been the frontline of the creation of territories of life.

Yet, it is easier to visualize territories of life in rural spaces, alongside groups that can claim distinguished ancestral ethnicity, than in urban areas (Hale, 2014; Rahier, 2014; Restrepo, 2007; see also Hooker et al., 2020). For example, most Latin American and Caribbean countries ensure collective rights over land to ethnic groups (Dulitzky, 2010; Hooker, 2005). Due to that, many rural Afro-Descendant and Indigenous communities have been granted the title of their lands. However, several urban communities cannot prove to hold an ethnic identity distinct from other urban residents (Dulitzky, 2010; Greene, 2007; Walsh et al., 2005). After all, "being urban" is often synonymous with "being modern" and Western urbanity—a way of life associated with a capitalist, individualistic, and secular culture (Rama, 1998; Robinson, 2006). Therefore, urban communities are less likely to access collective rights over the land and to be conceived as territories of life.

Afro-descendant communities, who are the focus of this research, are the most affected by this issue since most of them live in cities.[6] Considering this, what is behind our difficulty in visualizing cities as decolonial spaces, especially from an Afro-descendent perspective? Western modernity was spatially and materially followed by an increase in urbanization. Capitalism and colonialism, for example, are deeply associated with urban areas' contemporary growth. Cities are spaces of concentration of capital, and this concentration facilitates capitalist development. At the same time, capitalism creates urbanization and concentration of capital (Brenner & Schmid, 2015; Harvey, 1996). Besides, even though Europeans were responsible for the destruction of cities where they colonized (such as Inca's and Maya's cities), they promoted urbanization by creating administrative cities to control the colonies, to the point that some authors argue that colonization "was largely a labor of 'urbanization'" (Morse, 1984, p. 78, see also Abouhamad, 2015).

These spatial and material changes were followed by discourses that associated urban spaces and Western modernity. The seminal work of Robinson (2006) demonstrates that modern/colonial logics are at the core of urban studies. For urban theory's founders such as George Simmel and Louis Wirth, city life would erase 'tribal' traditions by stimulating capitalist competition and individualism. Therefore, at the heart of their theory, there was a rural/primitive space modernized by urbanization. Robinson also shows that these ideas were incorporated into politics. Multilateral agencies (such as the World Bank) defined urbanization as a path to development, picturing cities as examples of high culture, civilization, and technological advancement—spatial symbols of Western modernity.

Besides, race and space are related. Analyzing the construction of race during slavery, McKittrick (2006) explains that Black enslaved people were placeless—bodies that should not exist in the landscape. If one Black body was in sight, this body was authorized to occupy space solely as an object-thing. In other words, denying spatial dimensions to Black people is part of the dehumanization that constitutes the world's racialization. This denial has influenced the way we think about rural and urban areas. Ansfield (2015) explains that urban areas were considered tainted before the twentieth century. According to the author, there was a juxtaposition between Blackness and cities, both pictured as the embodiment of impurity. At that time, rural areas were portrayed as pure and habitable—the white natural realm of pastoral landscapes. Ansfield explains this only changed at the beginning of the twentieth century, when cities started to be considered the Human (European) domination over nature and, consequently, the fulfillment of modern ideas of progress. Therefore, cities are associated with modernity when they are white spaces. When cities (or neighborhoods) are primarily Black, they are defined as centers of violence and moral degradation.[7]

Therefore, there is a racialized association between Western modernity and urban spaces. Due to this association, our imaginaries about urban areas swing toward forms of life embedded in modern/colonial logics rather than decolonial praxis, which challenges attempts to promote decoloniality. In other words, creating territories of life in urban spaces means disrupting Western modernity's spatial and racial representation.

2 | URBAN REDEVELOPMENT, WESTERN MODERNITY, AND BLACKNESS IN CITIES

Cities' governments seek to bring cities to their colonial apex—the level of rationalization and capitalist development proposed by their association with Western modernity—by eliminating Black spatialities (Alves, 2018; Cazenave, 2011; Corrêa, 2017; Gregory, 1999; Oliveira, 2017). Urban redevelopment policies, for example, deny Black spatial existence from the body (the basic spatial unit) to the territory.[8] Perry (2013) illustrates this in her study about urban struggles in Salvador, Brazil—the largest Black city in the Americas. Urban politics have transformed Salvador into two cities—the visible and the invisible. Salvador is known for being a visible spectacle composed of natural and cultural beauty that attracts tourists from all over the world. However, behind this visible city are invisible and unwanted Black and poor communities deprived of infrastructure and public services.

Urban redevelopment policies are central to the creation of this division. According to Perry, Brazilian elites seek to eliminate the colonial heritage expressed both in Salvador's landscape and in its population's demographics—they aim to eradicate colonial architecture and the Black population. To do that, urban redevelopment projects relied on

activities to segregate neighborhoods, such as constructing highways to separate communities. The city's government also mobilized discourses on hygiene and beautification to displace the Black population. The decayed buildings inhabited by Black people started to be considered prejudicial to the health and the city's esthetic. Then, these residents were displaced, and standardized housing buildings unaffordable to Black people were built.

The idea of cleaning the city by removing allegedly "problematic areas" has informed urban redevelopment projects in other regions of the African diaspora, such as Ecuador (Valdivia, 2018), Colombia (Alves & Ravidran, 2020; Castro, 2013), and the United States (Ansfield, 2015; Gregory, 1999). Yet, this removal cannot be understood solely as displacement. Urban policies depend on these areas to generate capital accumulation, creating the 'problematic areas' they aim to eradicate.

Harvey (2012) helps us to understand this. He argues that urban policies are connected to accumulation by dispossession—a form to acquire surplus value through the dispossession of people's land, homes, and wealth. Landlords, banks, and city authorities, among others, do not need to produce commodities to generate profit. They dispossess the urban population through rent, utility bills, mortgage fees, etc. This type of debt accumulates so that urban capitalists eventually take people's property or other forms of material wealth for debt redemption. Thus, through accumulation by dispossession, they can displace vulnerable communities, opening space for urban redevelopment projects.[9] Therefore, urban capitalists profit both by impoverishing some cities' neighborhoods and, later, by promoting redevelopment projects allegedly to fix these 'problematic areas.'

However, although Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession sheds light on the economic logic behind urban policies, it overlooks how racialized and gendered representations of humanity impact this process. To highlight this impact, I propose a conceptual replacement. Instead of talking about accumulation by dispossession, I suggest accumulation by evisceration. This term was created by Williams (1993) to refer to the increasing precarization of Black workers that led, at the same time, to economic growth and the increase in poverty rates in the United States during the 1980s. Later, this term was developed by Alves and Ravidran (2020) in their analysis of Buenaventura, a port city in Colombia. This city is connected to hundreds of ports worldwide, having significant importance to global capital flow. Its position in global capitalism depends on the exploitation and violence against the Black population. Although the city has less than 400,000 inhabitants, Alves and Ravidran write that "between 1990 and 2012, there were 4799 homicides, 475 disappeared persons, and 22 massacres in the city" (Alves & Ravidran, 2020, p. 192). In this context, they apply the term accumulation by evisceration to explain the relationship between the urban economic processes and the racial terror that impacts Buenaventura's population.

According to Alves and Ravidran, the state abandons Buenaventura's population by refusing to invest in infrastructure and essential services. Yet, the city is often a place of urban redevelopment policies that privilege capital. For example, when building a highway to connect the ports to Cali, a nearby metropolis, the state intentionally skipped Buenaventura, isolating the local population from any benefit the highway could bring. According to the authors, this state negligence is intentional. It ensures that Black people be easily exploited by drug-trafficking militias, paramilitaries groups, and legal capitalist enterprises that dispossess people from their homes and profit from the increasing labor precarization. Black death alone generates profit. The authors explain that Buenaventura is an international route for the drug trade, and Black youth are usually those who transport cocaine to Central America. If murdered in this process, they are easily replaced in a way that drug cartels profit from having almost no cost with drug transportation. The authors name these processes of accumulation by evisceration. "In all these aspects, what is seen is not a failure of the economy to incorporate the Black population in its expanding dynamics but rather an eviscerating process of accumulation and expansion of capital enabled by the infrahuman status of Black lives" (Alves & Ravidran, 2020, p. 197).

Therefore, urban redevelopment policies seek Black spatialities' elimination not solely through displacement. After all, urban capitalists depend on Black people's presence in cities to eviscerate their bodies and territories. Hence, Black people are needed in urban spaces but are authorized to occupy them solely as an object-thing used for capital accumulation. Black spatialities' elimination means the ongoing affirmation of Black people as non-humans.

Moreover, this process is also profoundly gendered. Historically, Black women have been pillars of the Black community. In this context, to destroy Black women is a strategy to destroy communities' organizations, as Lozano (2019) demonstrates. She also researches Buenaventura and, according to her, paramilitaries attack women to erase the networks of mutual help developed by the Black community. Lozano highlights, for example, that paramilitaries claim to "clean" the streets from sluts by subjecting Black women to rape, kidnapping, sexual slavery, forced abortion, genital mutilation, and so on. Feminicide cases and the cruelty embedded in them are used to submit Black women to a life of fear and demobilize their resistance. Thus, the violence against Black women is a rationalized "(…) strategy of deterritorialization of the Black population by global capitalism, that needs their territories to execute its mega-investment projects" (Lozano, 2019, p. 55, own translation).

The gendered characteristics of Black people's evisceration are also evident in discussions about criminality. Cities are privileged sites for the emergence of the racist stereotype "Black = criminals" (Muhammad, 2011; Rotker, 2002), and this contributes to accumulation by evisceration by promoting police terror and incarceration. In the United States, for example, Derickson (2017) demonstrates that, before Michael Brown's murder, the police department in Ferguson requested city officials to increase municipal resources by collecting money through traffic violations and nuisance laws. Since Black neighborhoods are represented as criminal spaces, they are the ones who face police terror and pay the bills that increase municipal resources. Also, Gilmore (2007) argues that the carceral system has targeted mainly Black and Brown urban residents in the United States. According to her, prisons have been built in bankrupted rural areas and small towns to create jobs in the region and, allegedly, save them economically. In this context, the surplus population from the Black and Brown poor urban communities is incarcerated to fill these prisons. Places such as Brazil (Alves, 2018), Mexico (Santos, 2016), Central America (focusing on El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, see Umaña, 2019), Argentina (Loango, 2019; Rodríguez, 2012), Colombia (Moncada, 2010; Moreno & Mornan, 2017), Ecuador (Rahier, 1998) and Venezuela (focusing on prisons, see Fischer-Hoffman, 2020 and Salas, 2003) share a similar reality.

The stereotype "Black = criminals" is gendered. Most police terror and incarceration victims are men (Alves, 2018). In modern/colonial logics, Black heterosexual masculinity is a threat: Black men are stereotyped as violent beasts, sexual animals, thugs, and rapists (Davis, 1983). Black women are on the frontline of the fight against this, which is exemplified by the increasing number of Black mothers across the Americas fighting against the murder and incarceration of their sons (Alves, 2018; Moreno & Mornan, 2017; Perry, 2013). Black women and queer people have also denounced how police terror and incarceration directly impact them. Their movements inveigh against sexual violence perpetrated by police officers and denounce the many forms of violence Black women and queer people face in prisons, such as the requirement to give birth in handcuffs and the denial of hormone treatment for Black trans incarcerated people. To bring visibility to this violence, many campaigns focusing on the intersection between race and gender have emerged in the Americas, such as "Say Her Name," "Black Trans Lives Matter," and "Solta Minha Mãe" (Free My Mother, in Brazil).

Hence, to fulfill the expectation of cities being the spatial and racial representation of Western modernity, urban policies eliminate racialized and gendered residents to whiten the space. Yet, Black spatialities are central to capital accumulation in cities. Black lives are required in urban areas: they are the object-things hyper-exploited. Consequently, elimination is not reduced to displacement but represents the complete evisceration of Black lives.

3 | FOR AN URBAN DECOLONIAL PRAXIS

To promote decoloniality in urban spaces, we must consider cities' specificities. Therefore, based on the Afro-diasporic experience in the Americas, I propose an *urban decolonial praxis*. This is an analytical lens to explore possibilities for decoloniality in cities through (i) the redefinition of territories of life, (ii) the redefinition of what 'being urban' means, and (iii) the wide range of urban resistances. Besides, it is praxis as it constitutes a form of analysis committed to decoloniality.

Concerning the first point, territories of life are usually associated with Afro-descendant (and Indigenous) autonomous communities that control a demarcated geographic space. However, I suggest understanding territories of life *as a possibility of spatial existence*. This suggestion aims to recognize that self-organized groups that do not control the land but fight against Western modernity are also decolonial spaces. Besides, it allows us to emphasize race and gender in urban forms of resistance by interpreting the decolonization of urban areas as rewriting Black bodies and places in cities.

Restricting territories of life to demarcated geographic spaces eliminates many possibilities for decoloniality in cities. Although urban peripheries can be sites of new forms of life, their population does not always control the land. Porto-Gonçalves (2006) and Zibechi (2017) recognize this. They understand territories as material entities inseparable from society, culture, and power. Based on that, the authors define the control over territory as the control of the means of production and reproduction, in its economic and cultural dimensions. This definition allows the authors to shed light on a wide range of actions that promote decoloniality in cities, such as the recovery of factories, neighborhood associations, communitarian kitchens, etc. According to the authors, these actions are territorialized resistances that allow oppressed people to create new ontologies, politics, and economies.

Therefore, drawing on Porto-Gonçalves and Zibechi, I propose recognizing self-organized groups that do not control the land as territories of life. However, Porto-Gonçalves and Zibechi emphasize some sort of class-based or deracialized liberation, analyzing some identities mobilized by social movements (such as peasants and homeless) as if they could be detached from the racialization of the world. This form of emphasis often occurs inside social movements influenced by forms of Marxism that recognize race and ethnicity as important to class formation but not as structuring factors in the contemporary world.[10] Yet, a praxis of research committed to decolonizing cities cannot follow this path since the racialization of the world, inseparable from class and gender, causes the dehumanization that denies spatial existence. An urban decolonial praxis must be attentive and critical of how urban struggles mobilize class, race, and gender.

Therefore, I propose defining territories of life as the possibility of spatial existence as a form to emphasize racialized and gendered forms of resistance.[11] Alves (2020) exemplifies these forms. According to him, a blackpolis has emerged from racialized struggles for emancipation, such as the occupation of vacant lots and buildings and clandestine transportation that challenges segregationist urban mobility policies (see more examples in Carril, 2005; Morris, 2016; Tyner, 2007; Valderrama, 2008; White, 2011). These actions resemble the ones studied by Porto-Gonçalves and Zibechi. Also, in many cases, they are organized by multi-racial groups. Yet, they differ by centralizing Black people's experiences. In Alves's words, blackpolis is "a radical praxis founded on the ethic of urban marron communities (insubordination zone) or alternative political communities founded on a Black ethic that re-signify what we understand as humanity, reorganize the world's production, and radically reconfigure the life of the wretched of the city" (Alves, 2020, p. 24, own translation).[12] Considering this, territories of life demand the acknowledgment that the erasure of race and gender challenges decoloniality.

Concerning the second point, decolonizing cities entails redefining what it means to be urban. The racialized association between Western modernity and urban spaces recognizes only one form of urbanity—to be white and embody an individualistic, secular, and capitalist culture. Thus, we must acknowledge that other ways of 'being urban' are possible. This acknowledgment is exemplified by Pérez-Wilke's work (2020) on Afro-urban communities in Caracas, Venezuela. According to her, many Afro-Venezuelans were displaced from rural areas and migrated to Caracas. Arriving in the city, they collectively built their neighborhoods, from the houses to the basic infrastructure. In this context, many rural and ancestral traditions were recreated, especially those related to African-based worldviews. The author states these traditions became a source of solidarity and mutual help, and these dynamics marked the self-built neighborhoods. Consequently, Afro-Venezuelans create forms of being urban distinct from modern/colonial logics. Instead of the individualistic, secular, and capitalist culture usually defined as 'urban,' they create urban places and urbanities based on community, solidarity, and ancestral ontologies.[13]

Brazilian urban quilombos (Black ethnic groups) also exemplify the need to redefine what is urban. Poets (2017) explains that the Brazilian constitution recognizes Black ethnic communities' right to territory in a way that many

quilombolas communities have received the title of their lands. Most of them were in rural areas. However, urban quilombolas communities are gaining more attention and challenging ideas about what it means to be urban. Poets writes that, in Rio de Janeiro, for example, the Quilombo Sacopã resist displacement for years. The region where the quilombo is located was a rural settlement close to the city, but the city expanded in such a way that the quilombo is now in one of its most expensive areas. "Being urban" became part of Sacopã residents' experience. However, this does not mean they lost their ancestral culture. Quite differently, José Luiz Pinto, one of the local leaders, explains that the community still holds their traditional festivities and other practices, such as using plants for healing. In addition, he explains that the festivities had become a source of income for the community. For almost half a century, the community organized rodas de samba (a traditional Afro-Brazilian music party) that included local artists and nationally recognized singers.[14] Thus, their ancestral ontologies are not in opposition to urbanity—but to Western urbanity.

However, is being ethnic enough to promote decoloniality? Besides, can the communities that do not claim a distinguished ethnicity create territories of life? These questions lead us to the third point: an urban decolonial praxis needs to consider the wide range of urban struggles. Although many Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities mobilize the idea of ethnic rights to preserve their territories, this does not mean they claim to hold a pure non-Western worldview, assert an essentialist identity, or fight for an immutable way of life. Quite differently, these groups are battling for the right to define their future, and, in the process, they are choosing to delink from modern/colonial logics and rescue ancestral cultures to create "other worlds" (see more in Mamani Ramirez, 2011). Hence, a community is considered a territory of life not because it is ethnic but because it is built as a resistance to the Western modern system of death.

Considering this, groups that do not claim a distinguished ethnicity but emerge from the struggle for another world can also represent territories of life. After all, to survive in urban spaces—between real estate speculators, police terror, drug cartels, prison, displacement, etc.—urban communities often create their sense of community, being, and living. For example, Tyner (2007) explains that the Black Power movement in the United States was an urban revolution, emerging after violent outbreaks across U.S. cities in the 1960s. In the segregated and exploited ghettos, Black radical activists understood the association of capitalism and racism, advocating for what he called communal separatism—"separate communities, such as Black towns, wherein African Americans retain political, economic and social control of their surroundings" (Tyner, 2007, p. 226). In other words, these activists understood that African American spaces were a reserve of cheap labor for white people in segregationist regimes and that integration continued this exploitative relation (through inclusion, not liberation). Based on this understanding, Tyner explains Black Power movement's radicals aimed for self-determination by producing spaces in which Black people controlled the means of production and experienced new forms of life. Therefore, they were building territories of life.

The creation of territories of life in cities also is exemplified by urban occupations (the occupation of vacant areas by people that cannot afford rent). In Brazil, for example, the occupations *Esperança*, *Rosa Leão*, and *Vitória* (the three regions are also known as *Izidora*) are the house of eight thousand families, mainly Black. In 2015, I witnessed the struggle of these families for housing. At that time, the government wanted to displace these families but offered a relocation plan in response to social movements' mobilization against displacement. It promised to build houses on the occupied land and deliver them to the occupation's residents, who would be removed from the area until the government's construction was finalized. This relocation plan was an attempt to divide the community. According to it, residents needed to be a family in financial need to be granted a house, and the governmental definition of family was restricted to heterosexual couples with kids. Many LGBTQI+ families and people without kids (especially elderlies living alone, who were a large part of the occupations) would be permanently displaced. Considering this, the occupation's residents refused the government's proposal. During the struggle for housing, they developed a strong sense of community and argued that nobody would be left behind. The occupations' residents are not an ancestral or ethnic group. Yet, their struggle for survival in cities and the social, economic, and political relations created during this struggle represent an urban decolonial praxis.

Therefore, decolonizing cities is possible. Black people demonstrate this through the creation of urban territories of life. However, we need to consider cities' specificities to visualize these territories. To do this, the redefinition of territories of life, the re-signification of what "being urban" means, and the different forms of urban resistance are key factors. Hence, I propose an urban decolonial praxis as an analytical lens based on these factors to conduct a praxis of research that allows us to investigate these territories and contribute to their struggles.

4 | CONCLUSION

Decolonial authors seek to promote decoloniality: the rupture with Western modernity through the creation of new forms of life. Based on Afro-descendant and Indigenous struggles in Latin America, these authors propose creating self-determined communities where other ontologies, politics, and economies are forged—territories of life. However, it is easier to visualize this proposal in rural areas, alongside ethnic groups, than in cities.

Analyzing the Afro-diaspora in the Americas, I argued that a racialized association between cities and Western modernity precludes us from seeing the former as decolonial spaces. Cities are associated with white areas of progress—spatial and racial representation of Western modernity. Based on this association, urban policies aim to eliminate racialized and gendered residents. Yet, Black lives are the hyper-exploited object-things required in urban areas to generate capital accumulation. Therefore, elimination is not reduced to displacement but represents the complete evisceration of Black lives.

Considering this, I proposed an *urban decolonial praxis*—an analytical lens and a praxis of research committed to decoloniality to explore cities' decolonization based on the redefinition of territories of life, the redefinition of what 'being urban' means, and the wide range of urban resistances. In more detail, I defined territories of life *as the possibility of spatial existence*. Instead of limiting ourselves to looking for demarcated ethnic communities in cities, I suggest including self-organized forms of resistance in the range of possibilities to decoloniality, problematizing the erasure of race and gender in urban struggles. Additionally, I proposed redefining what 'being urban' means to recognize forms of urbanity based on ancestral ontologies. Finally, I argued that a distinguished ethnicity is neither required nor enough for territories of life. Differently, the wide range of struggles against the modern/colonial system of death produces territories of life and decolonizes

Therefore, regardless of all the challenges that urban spaces offer to decoloniality, this decolonization is possible, and it is happening. Black people exemplify this by creating urban territories of life and disrupting the system of death that constitutes Western modernity. Thus, we must develop ways to contribute to these struggles.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The term territories of life has been used by Afro-descendant groups fighting for their ancestral lands. See in Grueso (2005).

[2] These authors do not use the term "territories of life" but refer to communities that can be described as such.

[3] Exceptions are Lao-Montes and Dávila (2001), Porto-Gonçalves (2006) and Zibechi (2012).

[4] These authors build their theoretical work based on social movements, but their work is not limited to theoretical production. Their theory emerges from the praxis and aims the praxis. For example, Raul Zibechi draws on Linda Tuhiwai's work to

argue that subaltern people's struggles are a "form of life needed to survive, that when is theorized and mobilized, can be a powerful strategy for transformation" (Tuhiwai, 2016, cited in Zibechi, 2017, p. 41, own translation), claiming for studies concerned with advancing these strategies. Escobar also has defended that the Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and peasant communities are "a good formula to transition to the pluriverse" (Escobar, 2015, p. 99, own translation) in a way that he investigates these communities thinking of practical ways to decoloniality.

[5] To see differences between decoloniality and decolonization, see Maldonado-Torres (2016).

[6] Juliet Hooker (2005) explains that Afro-descendant communities in Latin America are less likely to access ethnic-based rights than Indigenous groups. According to her, this occurs because they are not understood as ethnic by their national states. Latin American hegemonic national narratives define Indigenous people as owners of a specific culture—ancestral contributions to modern nations or backward traditions to be civilized. By contrast, Afro-descendant culture is invisibilized in discourses of mestizaje or defined as national experiences where it is acknowledged, in way claims of Black cultural specificity are denied. Indeed, Black rural communities are less likely to be described as ethnic than Indigenous rural groups. Yet, the urban dimension of the issue cannot be overlooked. After all, Indigenous people living in cities also are portrayed as less Indigenous and face challenges in reaching ethnic-based rights (see Peters & Andersen, 2013).

[7] Studies on settler-colonialism have also demonstrated that urban spaces relate to race by pointing out that colonization occupies Indigenous lands but denies Indigeneity, associated with the rural/primitive area eliminated through urbanization (Porter & Yiftachel, 2019).

[8] To a discussion about body as an spatial unit, see McKittrick (2011).

[9] Besides, Harvey explains these projects are essential to prevent capitalist economic stagnation. Capitalists are constantly increasing their production to increase their profit. Therefore, they must find new consumer markets to incorporate surplus products into the economy. However, capitalist production cannot expand forever—space, labor, consumer markets, and others limit this expansion. Then, to avoid economic stagnation, Harvey argues that urban redevelopment policies promote the circulation of capital and the absorption of surplus products by destroying older landscapes and constructing new infrastructure (such as houses and roads).

[10] For example, the Regional Articulation of Afro-Descendants of Latin America and Caribbean (RAAC) has criticized the leftist parties and organizations of the Foro of São Paulo for denying the importance of race, claiming for the end of "political blindness and the erasure of history" (RAAC, 2019, own translation).

[11] Here, I am understading that race is gendered and gender is racialized (Miñoso, 2019).

[12] For Alves, blackpolis is necessary a violent political-intellectual project. He does not refer to the patriarchal and militarist view of violence. Differently, his 'violent approach' seems to focus on the denial of inclusion and access to the white city, understanding that inclusion does not mean emancipation. Considering that decoloniality refers to a rupture with modern/colonial logics, and that this rupture is violent in a way that denies inclusion, the concept of territories of life proposed in this article affirms the violence of the blackpolis.

[13] Similar examples are found in Colombia (Moreno & Mornan, 2017) and in the United States (White, 2011).

[14] See more in Torres et al. (2018).

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