Racial urbanities: towards a global cartography

Racial Urbanities: Introduction to the Special Issue

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> Race and city. Both terms share an anchor at the heart of commonsense discussions
> about the ways in which we live our lives. Both terms are the invisible centre of
> subdisciplinary studies in both social sciences and humanities. Both terms mean
> something, and yet when scrutinised more carefully they appear to expand to include
> everything or else melt into air as conceptually flawed caricatures of reality (Keith, 2005:
> 26)

How does race play out in urban life? And how does it play out in urban structures;
networks; markets; spaces; cultures; professions; institutions; households, politics?
Symmetrically, how does the urban play out in explicit and subtle processes of racial
hierarchizations and racist exclusions globally? Although these questions go back at least to
W.E.B. Dubois' (1899) pioneering work, they have only remained bounded to specific urban
contexts. While race has been theorized and scrutinized as a global organizing principle of
social life within and across national and supranational configurations, very few studies have
made a similar attempt in and across multiple urban contexts. Relatedly, while several works
have uncovered logics of social organization and structures within and across different cities
globally, very few of them have included a systematic focus on race. The few telling exceptions
come from such different fields as the historical sociology of social change in India
(Patel/Masselos 2005), the study of nationalism from a world-systems perspective (Samman
2015), and, more recently, critical race and decolonial interventions in debates on European
cities (Picker 2017, Zwischenraum Kollektiv 2017). Viewed from a global perspective, the racial

and the urban seem to remain largely disconnected. We think it is time to analytically start (re-)connecting them. This special issue is meant as a step in that direction.

It is with these questions and issues in mind that we convened the session "Racial Urbanities: A Global Cartography" at the 2016 World Forum of the International Sociological Association in Vienna. The provocative and stimulating discussions that took place during and after the session resonate across the three articles that were presented in Vienna, and the other three which joined the project at a later stage. The aim of gathering six outstanding pieces of empirically rigorous research is to open up global reflections and debates that centre raciality and race-making in the study of urbanism and city-making, and -reversely- urbanism and urban dynamics in global reflections of race, racial thinking and racialization. In this introduction we set out some of these multiple intersections and cross-fertilizations, and will subsequently locate the six articles in this context.

The reason for this is not only our goal of advocating for a more global social theory, but also relates to the need for a concrete and empirically grounded understanding of 21st-century global contexts and of the possibilities to shape them. While avoiding apocalyptic narrations of urban growth and sprawling worldwide (see Angotti 2006), our starting point is to acknowledge the general incapacity of urban development policies to respond to an increased demand for urban services, from mobility infrastructures to health services (Davis 2006). As a consequence of this incapacity, multiple forms of displacement and exclusion such as forced evictions get normalized, especially in large metropolitan areas. These tendencies became particularly evident after the 2008 financial crisis (UN-HABITAT 2011), but are not unprecedented. They give shape to already familiar as well as to new dynamics of boundary-making, reconfiguring and decentering territorial belonging, networks and material opportunities for urban dwellers across the world.

Within the shifting and accelerated increase of complex instruments for regulating

national and supranational markets, moreover, financial corporations and offshore business

gain increased prominence (Sassen 2014), supranational agencies such as the World Bank

often facilitate unequal urban growth, and challenges and resistances proliferate within a

generalized loss of control by institutional politics. In this scenario, cities become key sites of

emerging asymmetries, mobilization and exclusion, reappropriation and detachments (Simone

2004). Race, a politicized organizing principle of social cleavages and inequalities, borne out of

the different projects of colonial domination, should therefore be part of analyses of global urban

transformations.

Open City

It is a normal afternoon in early-21st-century New York City. Julius, a young doctor, is

thinking about a concert he attended the evening before, at the Carnegie Hall:

Again, the oboist played an A, and this time the woodwinds turned, and they

were joined by a flurry of strings. At last a signal came from the stage and a hush fell on

the hall. Almost everyone, as almost always at such concerts, was white. It is something

I can't help noticing: I notice it each time, and try to see past. Part of that is a quick,

complex series of negotiations: chiding myself for even remains, being annoyed that

these thoughts can be counted on to pass through my mind at some point in the

evening. Most of the people around me yesterday were middle-aged or old. I am used to

it, but it never ceases to surprise me how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city and

enter into all-white spaces, the homogeneity of which, as far as I can tell, causes no

discomfort to the whites in them. The only thing odd, to some of them, is seeing me,

young and black, in my seat or at the concession stand. At times, standing in lines for

the bathroom during intermission. I get looks that make me feel like Ota Benga, the

Mbuti man who was put on display in the Monkey House at the Bronx Zoo in 1906.

Teju Cole, *Open City*, 2011, p. 252.

Much of *Open City* is about Julius' flaneurial walks in New York City and Brussels.

People, connections, feelings and events inhabit the protagonist's stream of consciousness

which bringing together personal and urban histories. It is a walk in both the city and Julius'

biography, to the point that the two become at times fused in each other, oozing out deep

melancholia and once-longing expectations. The book resonates with Walter Benjamin's studies

such as *Paris Capital of the XIX Century* (1973) and *One Way Street* (1978), in that it shows the

volatility and unpredictability of what we may call "the city". In Cole's story, the city, or *citiness*,

appears as a set of different and dis/connected individual and collective imaginaries,

representations and experiences, constrains, fatigues and hopes. And yet, *Open City*'s fresco is

not only fragmented and partial, but so quintessentially raced, gendered, sexed and classed, so

that Julius' deep sense of embeddedness, as a lonely middle-class black man, into the urban

fabric, also resonates -from a different class position- with Gordon Parks' poetics and portraits

of urban life in 1960s United States: "What I want, what I am, what you force me to be, is what

you are. For I am you, staring back from a mirror of poverty and despair, of revolt and freedom"

(Parks 1968: 48). In turn, Parks' work seems a visual embodiment of DuBois' (1935) historical

study of the African American contribution to reconstruction.

So many questions and themes can be unpacked from *Open City* - so many arise from

looking at how race and cities clash and enmesh: Benjamin's study of capitalism and the role of

imaginaries of progress in building all-too fragile Western democracies and their subjectivities;

Parks' empathic optic behind his use of the camera as "a tool of social consciousness" (1966);

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yet also the absolute primacy, in the English-speaking world and beyond, of "Western" perspectives and cities, like New York City, in imagining and thinking through the urban and the racial as paired processes; and finally the question, never outdated, of the gendered and classed compositions of different kinds of racial structures and configurations assembling and disassembling urban life from the margins to the centre and how these processes become known and forgotten.

One extension of these themes is that attempts to view racial urbanities from a global perspective require the simultaneous consideration of different dimensions in relation to both a) the topic under scrutiny, and b) the position from which the enquiry is carried out. We decided to deal with the former by proposing a symmetrically twofold reasoning - we first will discuss the absence of a systematic focus on the urban in global studies of race and then the absence of a systematic focus on race in global studies of cities. The third and final move will outline how the six articles ground a possible perspective on our topic. The position from which we propose our analysis (i.e., point b) relates primarily to the "Western" side of the planet from which we speak. There is a sense of gloomy irony, sometimes, in studies embracing global perspectives that only consider works in English. It is true that the British colonial expansion has created many "Englishes" in its former colonies and throughout the world. Conversely, other European languages such as Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, and Italian, although much less (re)presented in academic research and publishing, remain imperial languages whose global spread was triggered by colonialism and in itself triggered the extinction of many languages worldwide (Mignolo 2000). We nevertheless strive to break through the globally hegemonic academic language in which we write, and consider recent scholarship in other Englishes as well as languages other than English.

Race and Cities from Global Perspectives

Global perspectives on race and racism have proliferated since Wallerstein's seminal interventions on the topic (Wallerstein 1974; Balibar/Wallerstein 1991, Wallerstein 2000). His analyses of global capitalism's unavoidable necessity to intersect with race, class and gender via the global organization of labour remain pivotal. However, subsequent works on race and racism, while considering the centrality of capitalist accumulation regimes, have somewhat distanced themselves from World System Analysis' focus on political economy and specifically the global division of labour. They have instead prioritized different political and social dynamics of race-making and racial domination.

Bowser's (1995) *Racism and Anti-Racism in World Perspective* is one of the first examples of this kind. The book explores theoretical and historical issues concerning race and racism, including antagonist social movements in Britain and Western Europe, Brazil, the Caribbean and South Africa. Another example is Marx's (1997) comparative work on South Africa, the US and Brazil. Marx stressed the need to consider race, racial domination and racism as differentiated and not homogenous, and this is also a key part of Keith's (2005) argument about contemporary urban formations. Thus both provide a corrective to Wallerstein's (and others' before him) rather vague account of how race plays out in cross-national variations of legal systems and legacies of colonialism. Winant's (2001) historical sociology of race since World War II is inscribed in this stream; in adding Europe (i.e., Britain, France and Germany) to Marx's case studies, Winant argues that the post-WWII rise of anti-racist struggles represent a rupture in the history of racial domination. Relatedly, Goldberg's (2009) analysis of a series of racial projects in different global regions make up a context-sensitive theorization of different processes of racial rule. Along the lines of Goldberg's regional analysis, the Palgrave Book Series *Mapping Global Racisms* hosts a number of cutting-edge studies of such diverse contexts as, among others, the Caribbean (Tate and Law 2015), Russia (Zacharov 2016), and

the Mediterranean (Law 2014). Two of the most insightful contributions to the relationships

between race and cities come from Goldberg's seminal reflections on the transition from

colonized to post-colonial and European cities (Goldberg 1993) and Wacquant's (2002) socio-

historical explorations from the plantations to the ghetto.

This overview shows that global studies of race are limited to national and supranational

polities and contexts, largely leaving cities at the periphery of their focus. This is noteworthy, we

contend, because, if we understand cities as both material and symbolic hubs of hegemonic and

counter-hegemonic economic, political and cultural materialities, forms of knowledge and

experiences, their centrality in the history of capitalism emerges as pivotal (e.g. Mumford 1938;

King 1989; 1990; Tilly 1990).

Reversely, while race is the pivotal focus in studies of specific cities - take, for instance,

Chicago (Park; Wilson; Wacquant 2006: Patillo 2008; Shedd 2015, etc); Johannesburg (Murray

2011; Mbembe and Nuttal 2008; Beavon 2004) and Paris (Keaton 2006; Fassin 2013; Fassin et

al 2014) - global perspectives on cities have largely excluded a focus on race. They have

instead emphasized several phenomena, some of which include economic and financial

processes (Sassen 1991; 2002); social margins and in/exclusion (Mayaram 2009), culture and

imaginaries (Amina and Thrift 2002; Bender and Cinar 2007); the culture-political economy

nexus (Eade and Mele 2002); transnational flows of governmental knowledge and experiences

(Saunier and Ewen 2008; McFarlaine 2011), and modernity and development (Robinson 2006).

All these studies have "the city" as their key focus but none of them squarely centres race.

Against the background of this twofold gap - i.e. the relative absence of cities in global

studies of race, and the relative absence of race in global studies of cities - we posit the

necessity to engage with and start conversations about the various and variable configurations of urban-racial intersections globally. This special issue, therefore, contributes to fill an important gap in the global literatures of both Racial and Ethnic Studies and Urban Studies. As such, we see this special issue as a contribution across two somewhat uneasily positioned and deep-rooted streams of scholarship. In this we share common ground with the works of Michael Keith and others across more than two decades (Keith and Cross 1993, Keith 2005), as well as recent works by Simone on "urbanity and generic blackness" (2016) and "the black city" (2017). In doing so, the key claim of this issue is not for any universalizing and totalizing view, but rather, to start and add to conversations on the ways in which the racial and the urban connect, enmesh and fuse in one another across cities, nation-states and supranational regions, without analytically prioritizing either of the two, in ways that would mirror the long-standing debates about the relationship between race and class (Hall 1980; Virdee 2014; Guimarães, this special issue).

With this outlook in mind, we think it is important to acknowledge the innovative character of recent works on both racist exclusions in certain cities, beyond the "usual suspects" in the US, Europe and South Africa, and works on specific urban phenomena that foreground racial and racist processes across cities and continents. The first stream of studies include Geler's (2016) work of racial categories in Buenos Aires, that shows both subjective experiences of blackness and whiteness, as well as the objective obstacles that these conceptions build in accessing urban resources for black people. Oehmichen's (2006) study of racism between "indios" and "mestizos" in Mexico city is another example of the ways in which interethnic everyday, political and symbolic violence is deeply embedded in the urban fabric, similarly to what Simone (2014) does on Jakarta. Rocha Espinoza's (2017) work on migration and racism in a barrio of Guayaquil, Ecuador, demonstrates the role of racism in shaping living conditions of Afro-Ecuadorians living in the barrio. Finally, Velayutham's (2006) work on

everyday racism in Singapore aptly reconsiders the issue of everyday multiculturalism in a critical light which emphasizes the making of racial lines and dynamics in the city-state.

The second stream of studies - i.e. on specific urban phenomena - include three outstanding examples: Nightingale's (2012) global history of racial segregation, Graaf and Ha's (2015) edited volume on street vending and neoliberalism and Clarno's (2017) study of apartheid in Johannesburg and Jerusalem. Nightingale's (2012) historical pathway across nine centuries of technologies of urban segregation sharply explains why racial segregation is a global phenomenon, and not only limited to certain national or urban contexts. In showing how forms of knowledge, practices, ideas and powers have been circulating across colony-metropole routes since the early eighteenth century, the historian offers a rarely clear and in-depth understanding of the fact that racial segregation is the result of hegemonic conceptions of urban forms and planning. Graaf and Ha's (2015) edited series of in-depth ethnographic and historical analyses of various cities, from Calcutta to New York and Mexico City, shows how street vending is globally a racialized and gendered practice; not only does race serve as a vector for keeping class inequalities rigidly in place, but it also functions as a platform for anti-racist struggles that re-centres family solidarities against neoliberal and revanchist urban policies. Most recently, Clarno's (2017) work reveals diverging but especially common logics and practices of spatial partitioning in Israel/Palestine and South Africa, and argues that their respective geographies of oppression are to be understood within a global trend of neoliberal reorganization of society.

Toward a Global Cartography of Racial Urbanities

The context we have outlined above points to the need for more work on the intersections as well as the nature of the diverse yet inter-related ways in which the

contemporary racial urban is taking shape. Like the examples mentioned above, the papers collected here are a further step towards building the global cartography of racial urbanities. This issue covers not only cities in Europe (Gressgård) and North America (Mele; Trujillo-Pagan; Byfield), but also Africa (Marr; Trujillo-Pagan), Latin America (Guimarães) as well as the Middle East (Trujillo-Pagan). These studies provide a rich range of examples and analyses that we hope will generate further debate and research on racial urbanities. In light of the dynamic and differentiated processes that shape the natures of race and the urban – and their manifold and complex intersections – this collection is, of course, a step and a contribution, not a claim to any definitive statement. Before providing a brief overview of the contents, we touch on two such processes that are evident across the papers and which will undoubtedly continue to play key roles in this area – planning and policing.

The role of planning in framing somewhat grandiose visions of both colonial and metropolitan cities has been undergirded by a logic of racial exclusion, as Picker (2017) has recently shown. The segregation of Roma in Europe, along with migration (see Trujillo-Pagán in this special issue) provides one of the key lenses through which this logic can be seen historically as well as in the present. Currently, racism is far from a 'hidden secret' but a central component of populist mobilisations and some electoral success of political parties across the West who rarely shy away from virulently articulating it (Farris 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2017; Narayan 2017). While much of these mobilisation are discursively linked to the idea of the nation, cities display a different but also an interrelated dynamic in this. In particular, gentrification of previously 'run down' inner cities and competition over housing has become a mechanism through which subtle logics of racism are played out through the market as well as the trope of urban regeneration, as Mele shows in his essay; in addition, both Marr and Gressgård point to the ways in which urban planning in both conventional and securitised forms contributes to this. As with analyses of the rise of the black middle class (Pattillo 2008) and of

multicultural cities (Keith 2005), these are more than matters of a White vs. Black dualism, even while a 'white racial framing' (Elias and Feagin 2016) undergirds it. In similar ways, racially motivated hate crimes in the US in the past three years that have led to the rise of Black Lives Matter (Camp and Heatherton 2016) also highlight the key role of policing in framing the nature of racialised subjugation in cities. As Byfield shows in her article, this is more than a matter of individual racist police or even 'cop culture', but deeply embedded in systems of racial profiling that draw on the 'technical' expertise of statistical analysis; this is also evident in Gressgård's work on Malmo on a securitisation nexus.

Gressgård's article revisits Mbembe's (2003) notion of "necropolitics" by showing the peculiar death-political implications of emerging "resilience" governance. This kind of governance ultimately produces a constant situation in which citizens are encouraged to co-exist with, and resist, dangers and threats. This essentially violent order of things in disguise ends up becoming part of everyday life, a condition which suggests that - if applied to deemed dangerous racialized youth - death politics does not necessarily occur in emergency and exceptional situations, as Mbembe (2003) instead suggests. Drawing on an analysis of the redevelopment of Regent Park in Toronto, Canada, Mele shows the ways in which white elites such as planners and real estate CEOs ignore race as a structuring force of social injustice while referring to the polite discourse of social-class mixing, in order to make the urban poor "learn" from middle-class habits. The related processes of individualization and moralization of poverty function through what the author calls "racial exemplar", i.e. the new presence of white and middle-class property owners and tenants. Marr's in-depth socio-historical study of Gaborone, Botswana's capital, continues the focus on planning. By dialoguing with the literature on colonial urbanism and the racial socio-spatial organization of colonized cities, the author argues that pre-colonial forms of knowledge and practice are to be taken into account for

understanding how colonial planning, architecture and politics have been converging in the making of racial segregation.

The subsequent three essays explore additional dimensions and processes of racial urbanities. Trujillo-Pagán looks at local media discourses on Ethiopian migrants in Washington, Tel Aviv, Rome and Melbourne, and contributes to squarely bring race into the debates on the urban dimension of migrant incorporation. She argues that the transnational and relational constitution of racial identity, blackness in particular, allows race and racialization in the city to take a peculiar "glocal" dimension. Guimarães also focuses on blackness and the city, but within a renewed theoretical framework which re-articulates the concepts of racialization and "racial formation" (Omi and Winant 1986) as political and classed phenomena that can clearly be analyzed by looking at the urban space. In Brazilian cities, the author shows, racial segregation is elicited by racialization which produces -as a response- instances of racial formations. Finally, Byfield contributes to the critical race scholarship on the state by phenomenologically showing how techniques and technologies of surveillance, especially Predictive Policing, make the very functioning of "the racial state" (Goldberg 2002) possible in the United States.

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