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TERRITORIAL, URBAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND LANDSCAPE PLANNING

UNDERSTANDING INTERNAL COLONIALISM THROUGH URBANIZATION

THE CASE OF LA PAZ-EL ALTO

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the enduring presence and continuous renovation of colonial structures from a spatial lens in the context of La Paz-El Alto, Bolivia. By integrating Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's decolonial thought with Latin American urban historiography and a chronological socio-spatial analysis of La Paz-El Alto, this study demonstrates how historical colonial dynamics persistently shape urbanization processes.

The research reveals that the urbanization of La Paz-El Alto is a material manifestation of internal colonialism, where mechanisms of cultural disciplining and exclusion, initially established during the formal colonial period, have been continuously repurposed throughout history. Reforms aimed at "civilizing" and "modernizing" the country triggered massive rural-urban migration and unprecedented urban growth. However, the intrinsic contradiction of the "modernizing" projects led to marginalization and "informalization" of the indigenous-*mestizo* urban population, clearly evident in the growth and socio-economic characteristics of El Alto.

Furthermore, the thesis illustrates how a social hierarchy structured by ethnicity, rooted in the polarization between Western and indigenous cultures, is reflected in the socio-spatial segregation of La Paz-El Alto. La Paz is associated with western culture and power, while El Alto has emerged as a predominantly Aymara city. This contrast has been reinforced by exclusionary urban policies and administrative separation of the two cities. Moreover, while wealthier areas are predominantly inhabited by non-Aymara population and showcase imported architectural styles, lower class areas are mostly inhabited by Aymara population, and are characterized by buildings that reflect informal economies and by neo-andean buildings that embody cultural resistance.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the socio-spatial landscape of La Paz-El Alto is a material expression of persistent colonial structures, simultaneously embodying centuries of systemic oppression and cultural resistance. It contributes to decolonial theory by offering a spatial lens through which to understand the continuous reproduction of colonial logics in contemporary urban inequalities.

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INTRODUCTION

In the past years, postcolonial theories in the Latin American context have configured a systematic critique to colonialism, eurocentrism, and imperialism, and decolonial thought has recently emerged to further this critique[1] (Curros Cámara & Ciocoletto, 2022). Latin American decolonial thinkers argue that colonial structures have a renovation capacity that has enabled them to persist until present times (Contranarrativas, 2021; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). They highlight the importance of identifying and uncovering the renovation and continuation of colonial structures – that emerged in the formal colonial period – not only to understand today's Latin American societies, but also to challenge colonial social structures and shed light to alternative social configurations (Contranarrativas, 2021). Postcolonial theories and decolonial thought have been mostly developed within disciplines such as sociology, politics and economics (Curros Cámara & Ciocoletto, 2022), and although colonialism has been central in the formation of socio-spatial structures (Yiftachel, 2009), and cities have represented the material and visible part of colonialism (Rama, 1984), there are not many works that articulate postcolonial theories and decolonial thought with disciplines such as urban historiography, urban studies and architecture in Latin America (Curros Cámara & Ciocoletto, 2022). Articulating postcolonial theories and decolonial thought with spatial disciplines can be very helpful to further the understanding of colonial historical continuity. Since colonialism has shaped spaces and societies, studying socio-spatial configuration dynamics with a post- and decolonial lens and introducing a spatial perspective to post- and decolonial theories can help to identify and uncover some of the ways in which colonial structures have been renovated and maintained until present times.

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[1] Postcolonial theory usually refers to the work elaborated by scholars from former French and English colonies such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Hommi Bhabah. However, in the Latin American context scholars such as Anibal Quijano, Peter Calvert, and Pablo Gonzales Casanova elaborated important postcolonial critiques. More recently, these critiques have been expanded by Latin American decolonial thinkers that range from scholars such as Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, and Lucia Lugones, that focus their analysis on the modern world system, to academics such as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui that focuses on understanding internal or local colonial structures.

This thesis aims to articulate postcolonial theory and decolonial thought with historical urban studies to understand, through urban space, the ways in which colonialism has been continuously renovated in the specific context of La Paz-El Alto, Bolivia.

La Paz-El Alto makes an interesting case study because contemporary socio-ethnic differences and spatial segregation suggest a continuation of socio-spatial structures established in the formal colonial period. La Paz was founded by Spanish conquerors in 1548 in the mountain valley between the Altiplano and Yungas. It served as a midway station for the colonial commercial route and as a control center of the surrounding territory (Cuadros, 2002). The colonial order generated a polarization between the Western and the native cultures that was materialized in the dual city configuration: a Spanish city and indigenous towns (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). During this period, a process of cultural assimilation took place and generated a *mestizo* identity. Therefore, the colonial society progressively came to be configured by three ethnic identities: Western, *mestizo*, and indigenous (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The western population mostly lived in the Spanish city, whereas the *mestizo* and indigenous population that performed artisanal, commercial, and agricultural activities lived in the indigenous town, and those who were dedicated to activities such as domestic work lived in the Spanish city. Colonial La Paz was a segregated city with porous spatial boundaries (Barragán Romano, 1990). In 1825, Bolivia gained independence, which meant the restructuring of a colonial social hierarchy where the white elites identified with European modernity and understood themselves as the bearers of progress. They viewed indigenous-*mestizo* people as "backward" and sought to "civilize" them by incorporating them as cheap labor into the capitalist economy (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Guevara, 2021; Loureiro, 1999). This social restructuring was not visible in La Paz's urban space until the end of the 19th century when it was assigned as the Seat of Government. During the first half of the 20th century, the factories established in La Paz attracted indigenous population, which, in addition to migrants from other cities and countries, generated significant urban growth (Cuadros, 2002). In the first decades of the 20th century, La Paz transitioned from a dual colonial city to a "modern" city with differentiated neighborhoods according to ethnicity, occupation, and class (Mesa Gisbert, 1999 in F. Cajías et al., 2007; Guevara, 2021). In the second half of the 20th century, unprecedented urban growth took place due to populist reforms after the National Revolution and neoliberal reforms that triggered rural-urban

migration (Coordinadora de Historia, 2024; Cuadros, 2002; Poupeau, 2010; Valencia, 2016). The segregated character of the city continued with the wealthier neighborhoods located towards the south and the poorer ones located in the north and north-west areas (Cuadros, 2002; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). The unprecedented urban growth of the second half of the 20th century generated extreme urban expansion in the area of El Alto (the Altiplano area located next to the mountain valley of La Paz), where a large portion of rural-urban migrants established (Cuadros, 2002). Although this area experienced the most significant expansion, it was systematically overlooked by the local government. The administrative neglect, in addition to an emerging Alteño identity – rooted in an Aymara indigenous consciousness – led the population from El Alto to demand independent administration that ultimately resulted in the recognition of El Alto as an independent city in 1988 (Cuadros, 2002). At the end of the 20th century, some Bolivian scholars argued that, instead of being configured by three ethnic identities (western, *mestizo*, and indigenous), the society of La Paz-El Alto was shaped by two cultural poles in constant tension: western and indigenous. These poles generated a social configuration based on the articulation of ethnicity, occupation, and class (Albó et al., 1983). This social structure is reflected in the segregated urban space of La Paz in the 21st century, where the wealthier neighborhoods are predominantly non-indigenous and the poorer neighborhoods present the highest concentration of Aymara indigenous population. In sum, although there have been social reconfigurations and spatial changes, foundational colonial socio-spatial structures seem to have persisted throughout time.

Research questions and objectives

This thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- How is the continuous renovation of colonial structures reflected in the urbanization process of La Paz-El Alto?
- In what ways have the socio-spatial configurations of the formal colonial period persisted until current times?

To address these questions, this work will focus on the following objectives:

- Identify connections between colonial dynamics and urbanization processes.

- Compare key characteristics of the socio-spatial configurations of the formal colonial period with those of the post-colonial period.

Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in three main parts and a conclusion. The **first** part consists of a literature review that is organized in two sections. The first section revises decolonial theory of the Bolivian scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, which provides a framework to understand the renovation of colonial structures in the context of Bolivia. The second part of the literature review explores Latin American urban historiography, which allows to identify notions that explain urbanization processes and spatial characteristics of Latin American cities. The **second** part of the thesis consists of a spatial-temporal analysis of La Paz-El Alto, which aims to show the historical continuity of social and spatial dynamics from the formal colonial period until current times. This analysis makes use of different resources: urban history literature, urban studies, sociology and history studies, and maps and pictures of the city from different historical periods. The information gathered from all of these sources is articulated in different sections that aim to explain the social structure, urbanization process, socio-spatial configuration, urban governance, and architecture of La Paz-El Alto throughout time. The **third** part of the thesis is the discussion section where the ideas explored in the literature review – that explain the renovation and continuation of colonial structures, and the processes of urbanization and spatial characteristics of Latin American cities – are articulated with the spatial-temporal analysis of La Paz-El Alto to explain, through a spatial lens, the historical continuation of colonialism in this specific context. Finally, the **conclusion** provides an overview of the three sections, highlighting the contributions explained in the discussion part, and commenting on possible directions of research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is divided in two parts. The first one evaluates Silvia R. Cusicanqui's ideas about colonialism and its mechanisms of renovation. The second part revises Latin American urban historiography and identifies key notions that explain urbanization processes and socio-spatial characteristics of cities.

Internal colonialism in Bolivia

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui is one of the best-known decolonial thinkers of Latin America (Andrade, 2013). Her decolonial critique originates from the work of various thinkers and scholars such as Franz Fanon, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Pablo Gonzales Casanova, and the Bolivian radical Indianist Fausto Reinaga (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The work of Cusicanqui elaborates a profound critique of long-standing colonial structures in the context of Bolivia and provides concepts that are crucial for understanding the complexities of contemporary Bolivian society.

Cusicanqui proposes an understanding of Bolivian society through a historiographical lens from which emerges the concept of non-contemporary contradictions. This idea suggests that multiple historical layers, horizons, or cycles simultaneously coexist in contemporary times, where the structural layer is the colonial cycle to which the more recent liberal and popular cycles have been articulated to enable its renovation and continuation. The **colonial cycle**, which started with the Spanish colonization and continues until today, constitutes a set of ideologies and social practices that organize society based on ethnicity. The formal colonial period generated a polarization and hierarchy between the native cultures and the Western culture, where the former were considered inferior and the latter superior. The Spanish colonization inaugurated a colonial cycle of cultural disciplining where "the humanity of the colonized would be denied until they "learn" to behave in the way that the dominant culture dictates it and thereby deny their own organizational and cultural specificity" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 11, translation by the author). The liberal cycle initiated after independence (1825) and established institutions and ideologies that introduced the idea of human equality and citizenship that were rooted in civilize-savage discourses. Therefore, the notion of equal citizens was associated with "cultural civilizing" actions that entailed a renovated and more

rigorous cultural disciplining and polarization, and at the same time reinforced a monocultural and exclusive political power that enabled a territorial dispossession comparable to the one that took place during the formal colonial period. Finally, the populist cycle inaugurated with the national revolution of 1952, generated a centralized state that incorporated the social majority into national life. However, this was done through a series of reforms based on ideas of modernity and development that ended up giving continuity to the dismantlement of ethnic identities and political exclusion.

Cusicanqui argues that the liberal and populist cycle have been articulated with the colonial horizon to renovate it and enable its continuation in modes of internal colonialism[2].

> "In contemporary Bolivia, operates an underlying mode of domination sustained by a long-standing colonial horizon, to which the most recent cycles of liberalism and populism have been articulated—but without completely overcoming or modifying it. These recent horizons have managed to repurpose long-standing colonial structures, transforming them into forms of internal colonialism that continue to be crucial in explaining the internal stratification of Bolivian society, its fundamental social contradictions, and the specific mechanisms of exclusion and segregation that characterize the country's political and state structure and that underlie the deepest and most latent forms of structural violence." (Rivera Cusicanqui, 1993: 30 translation by the author)

The author argues that within internal colonialism operate different forms of violence. Explicit modes of domination are combined with more subtle and undercovered modes of control. Physical violence, coercion, and dispossession are combined with paternalistic modes of

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[2] The concept of internal colonialism that Cusicanqui proposes was developed drawing from the work of the Mexican sociologist Pablo González Casanova. Casanova (1965) argued that although the direct domination of foreigners over natives disappeared after the creation of Latin American nation-states, the domination of Spaniards was substituted by that of the Creoles, and exploitation of the indigenous population continued with the same characteristics it had before independence, giving place to internal colonialism.

colonization. The combination of explicit and subtle modes of control were renovated with each historical cycle and entailed continuous assaults against indigenous modes of social, territorial, economic, and cultural organization. But Cusicanqui emphasizes that during this processes the indigenous population did not behave as passive masses; rather, they actively resisted and contested in diverse ways. The Spanish conquest was constantly challenged by indigenous revolutions that tried to either expel the colonizers or negotiate with them in order to gain self-governance and therefore preserve their territories and cultural identities. During the decades after independence, several indigenous protests took place to demand the rights that the republican law was supposed to grant. The native population constantly questioned the fictitious equality between "citizens" and contested the renovated mechanisms of cultural disciplining and territorial control that the liberal reforms introduced. Later on, after the national revolution of 1952 and the following national reforms, the party in power stated that the condition of "citizens" that the liberal reform had given to the indigenous population was reinforced by returning their land in the form of individual property. However, indigenous movements from the west of Bolivia claimed that the citizenship model had assigned the indigenous population a position of "second class citizens" and that their equal human condition was only recognized when they adopted Western manners. Therefore, during the 1970s and 1980s, they postulated the Aymara identity as the structural axis for contestation and vindication. In a nutshell, throughout the centuries, the indigenous population constantly challenged the different modes of domination and demanded the recognition of their own territorial, cultural, social, and political space.

Within her concept of internal colonialism, Cusicanqui identifies "fundamental social contradictions" that shape the long-standing colonial social structure. The stratification of the Bolivian society is the result of the tension between two cultural poles where relations of power and domination generate a society structured by "chains of colonial domination" where "each strata is established on the denial of those 'below' and on the desire to appropriate the cultural and social goods of those 'above'" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 15 translation by the author). On one hand, the western pole represents the dominant culture that seeks to modernize and acculturate, but at the same time discriminates, segregates, and tries to distance itself from the indigenous world. On the other hand, the indigenous world, contradictorily, tries to assimilate the dominant culture that allows social mobility, but at the

same time struggles to preserve its own customs and language (Albó et al., 1983 in Barragán & Soliz, 2009). These tensions or contradictions generate an ambivalent *mestizo* world, which, rather than being a harmonious combination of two heterogeneous cultures, is a conflictive space shaped by power relations and modes of cultural disciplining.

Therefore, Bolivian contemporary society is characterized by three fundamental identities: indigenous, *mestizo*, and western/white. These three identities are defined through mutual opposition within a civilizing framework, where the natives need to go through an acculturation or *mestizaje* process in order to become Western "civilized" individuals. These three identities emerged in the formal colonial period and, although they went through some changes in terms of composition and cultural characteristics, they have persisted until contemporary times following the foundational logics that originally shaped and defined them.

Cusicanqui provides an analysis of the historical process that configured the *mestizo* identity under the framework of the three historical horizons, and attempts to highlight "constitutive moments" of the *mestizaje* process. During the formal colonial period, the *mestizo* identity emerged within a context characterized by two cultural worlds, not only as a result of "racial" mixing, but most importantly as a result of cultural assimilation. The process of *mestizaje* was in part produced by the demand for new labor activities in the Spanish cities. Urban labor, such as artisanal work, rural-urban commerce, and domestic service, entailed a transition from the indigenous world towards the Western world. The engagement of an indigenous person in economic activities that were not associated with the indigenous world led them to be perceived as *mestizo*. These urban economic activities became mechanisms of social mobility and survival in the colonial regime. The "forced acculturation" generated different *mestizo* social groups that managed to escape the most oppressive forms of domination, but did not manage to access the dominant social group. For the Spanish and Creoles would generate exclusion mechanisms based on racial parameters, such as skin color and lineage. Therefore, the colonial society became progressively structured by different layers hierarchically organized based on cultural, economic, and racial criteria that defined the ethnicity of each individual. Since the hierarchy was supported by the idea of a "superior" European culture and "inferior" native cultures, the layer to which an individual would belong was determined by their proximity to one or the other cultural pole. The overlapping of

cultural, economic, and racial aspects had a "constitutive" role in the configuration of the Bolivian society and persisted throughout the liberal and populist reforms in such a way that even today they continue to shape the dynamics between the different social groups.

In the liberal horizon, the *mestizaje*, that is, the acculturation process, had to do with the citizenization processes, which entailed the engagement of economic activities that aligned with the "civilized" modernity project of the ruling elite. This project involved the articulation of the national economy to the capitalist international market of minerals. Therefore, the elites progressively "converted the country into a mining camp" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 82) and disregarded the prosperous internal market that was led by the indigenous and *mestizo* population. Moreover, as the internal commerce was in the hands of the lower social groups, the oligarchy diminished its economic potential by expanding rural land ownership and draining it through a heavy tax system. Thus, the liberal horizon transformed market and economic activity into a cultural disciplining tool, and the apparent beneficial processes of modernization and citizenship constituted new ways of cultural disciplining. The ideologies that promoted and emerged with the National Revolution of 1952 proposed the idea of a "*mestizo* nation" where there were no indigenous, oligarchs, or colonial domination. Instead, Bolivia was a nation of *mestizo* that enjoyed equal citizenship rights. But, these populist ideologies were shaped by a logic that did not have space for non-Western culture, and therefore, equality and other civil rights were not applied if the indigenous did not adopt the dominant culture. Therefore, the populist cycle, to further the citizenization processes and create a "*mestizo* nation", undertook a gigantic task of cultural disciplining through new reforms and institutions. The Agrarian Reform was one of the most aggressive civilizing instruments that, justified by the action of giving back the expropriated land, imposed the division of common lands. In many cases, the parceling had to be conducted with coercive action because it meant the dismantlement of indigenous networks and ethnic collective identities. The Agrarian Reform substituted the word "*indio*" or indigenous for the term "peasant", and it envisioned as an ideal subject a *mestizo* peasant, integrated to the market, and "submissive to the leadership of the illustrated *mestizo* groups that monopolized the political power" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 97). The ideologies of the populist cycle justified a segregation in two categories: on one hand, those who enjoy egalitarian rights provided by the state, and on the other hand, those who needed to be "civilized" for them access the

rights that the citizenship status provided. Throughout the liberal and populist cycle was configured a social system where the western minority continues to be the one that has the power to dictate the social norms, and therefore occupies the higher layer of the social hierarchy and the core of the state. On the other hand, the subordinated *mestizo* groups compete for control over the *mestizo*-indigenous sphere to be able to access positions of power and the higher layers of the social hierarchy.

The year 1985 marked an important moment of renovation of the liberal and populist reforms. It was the moment when the state of 1952 ended to give place to a neoliberal state. During that year, the so-called New Economic Policy was introduced to liberalize the economy, deregulate salaries, stop state subsidies for basic goods, and implement various tax-saving measures that included a tax reform and massive layoffs. These changes took place within a context where "adjustment policies" were being imposed in Latin American countries by neocolonial powers. The neoliberal reforms completed the long process of forced citizenization through "the expansion of a market of material and cultural goods designed to dismantle the productive dynamics of the native communities and to forcefully integrate them to the market" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 104, translated by the author). In this context, migrating to the cities meant the pursuit of the benefits of citizenship, because it was in the cities where the impoverished indigenous peasants were supposed to access material, cultural, and symbolic goods. But, indigenous economic logics were replaced by unstable salaries or "informal" activity that did not allow the precarious urban population to access the goods that the neoliberal changes claimed to offer. Thus, "the market constituted a renovated mechanism of social polarization through segregation of the different strata based on their unequal consumption capabilities" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 105, translated by the author). All in all, the neoliberal reforms gave continuity to a long-standing colonial structure where a minority Western group concentrates the power, and the majority *mestizo*-indigenous continues to be segregated, and politically, economically, and socially excluded.

In sum, Cusicanqui explains contemporary Bolivian society through the idea that historical cycles coexist in contemporary times, where the colonial cycle is the structural axis to which more recent historical layers have been articulated to renovate colonial structures into modes of internal colonialism. There are three elements throughout Cusicanqui's work that are crucial to understanding colonial structures or dynamics. First, a social configuration that is

characterized by a monocultural and exclusive power, and a social stratification shaped by cultural polarization and ethnicity. Second, mechanisms of cultural disciplining, and third, discourses that justify domination, exclusion, and segregation. These three elements articulate to generate colonial structures, where the repurpose of the overall structure and the continuity of a colonial social configuration are enabled by the renovation or update of discourses and disciplining mechanisms.
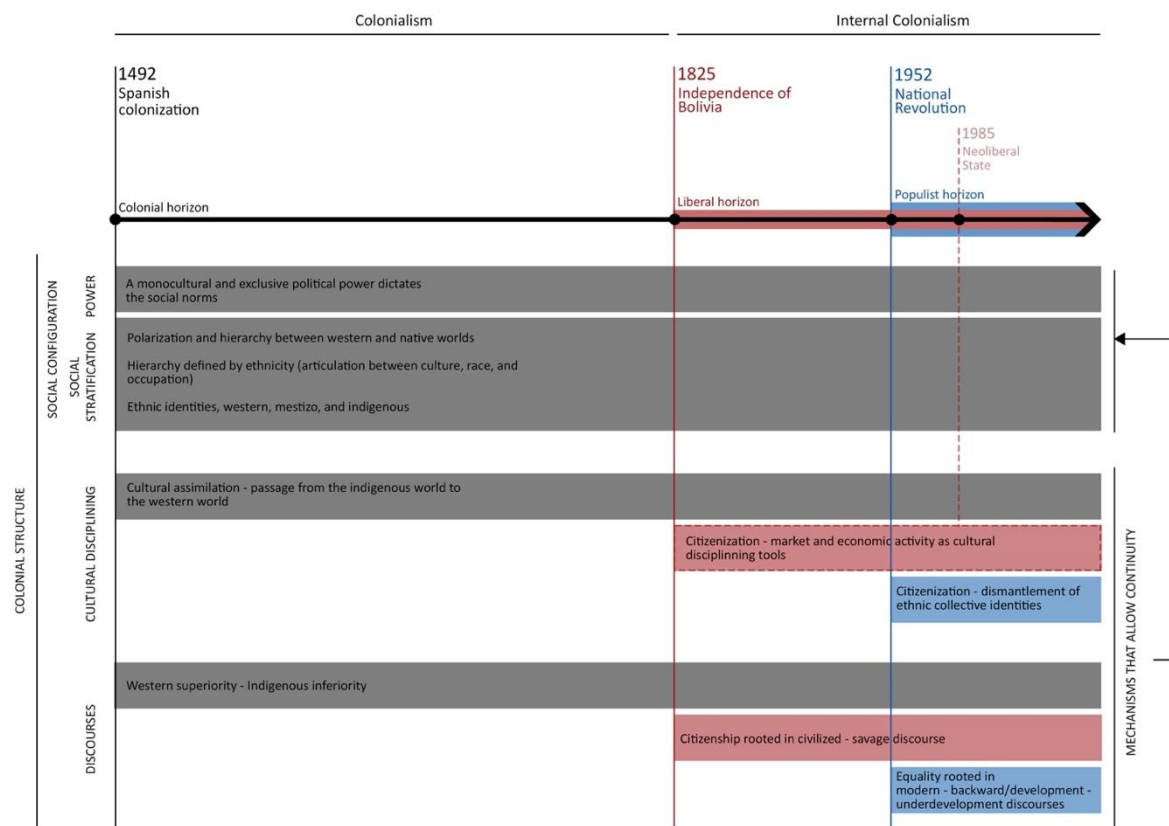
Diagram 1: Historical horizons, renovation, and continuation of colonial structures

Latin American cities throughout history

This section makes a chronological review of the history of Latin American cities starting from the end of the 15th century to the 21st century. The study of the history of Latin American cities is usually divided into three different periods that correspond to three different stages in which Latin America was incorporated into Western civilization and the global economy (Almandoz, 2002). The first stage corresponds to the formal colonial period when Latin

America was conquered and put under Spanish and Portuguese power. The second stage corresponds to the decades after independence in the 19th century, and it was guided by other European powers such as Britain and France. The third stage comprehends most of the 20th century when the United States set the rules of Latin America's modernization (ibid.). In addition to these periods, the first decades of the 21st century are also revised.

Cities as instruments of colonial control and acculturation

Latin America was incorporated into Western civilization and the global economy when Spain and Portugal conquered it at the end of the 15th century, and the conquered territory was put under absolute dependence on the interests of the metropolises (Rama, 1984). During this period, cities were understood as symbols of the Crown's power. Colonial cities took advantage of pre-existing indigenous networks, their farming areas, their markets, and, above all, their labor force. Control and violence enforced over the indigenous population enabled cities to become places of accumulation and concentration of resources and wealth (Rama, 1984). Colonial cities had the function to control the territory and the people that surrounded them, and serve as acculturation instruments through the "evangelization" of indigenous communities (Rama, 1984). These two functions were reflected in the urban form and socio-spatial organization of cities.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, many colonial cities were founded in non-urbanized areas, and their spatial organization was traced according to the urban model that the *Leyes de Indias* dictated, such as the case of La Paz. This model was based on Renaissance ideas where the square was the organizing core from which the streets were drawn (Gutierrez, 1983). In other cases, colonial cities were founded over existing indigenous urban centers, such as the case of Cusco or Mexico City. The spatial organization of pre-colonial towns and cities responded to indigenous social organizations and worldviews, but this was, of course, not considered by the colonizers who imposed the European urban model. In these cases, the establishment of a colonial city over an existing indigenous one represented an acculturation action that erased the singularities of the different indigenous nations and tended to homogenize them (Gutierrez, 1983). Later on, in the 18th century, baroque ideas about space and urban composition were transferred from Europe to America. Therefore, some baroque notions were applied in the existing cities through attempts to order and regulate space to transform

the cities into scenic objects (Gutierrez, 1983). Moreover, the most salient architectonic objects were religious buildings that were crucial acculturation instruments as they allowed the introduction of the Christian religion in the conquered territory (Gutierrez, 1983). In many cases, churches replaced (were built on) sacred indigenous temples. Cathedrals and other religious buildings were constructed in European styles; however, in some places (as is the case in Bolivia), a "*mestizo*" style emerged due to the participation of the indigenous population in the construction and design of these buildings. According to Gutierrez (1983), the combination of European architectural elements and figures from indigenous worldviews represented the beginning of a transculturation process. Colonization ignored and tried to erase indigenous cultures; however, they prevailed and infiltrated the imposed European culture (Rama, 1984).

The colonial order generated a social division between Spanish and indigenous that was reflected in the socio-spatial structure of the cities. Colonial cities were organized in three parts that not only reflected the social divisions but also helped to maintain them (Rama, 1984). The first part constituted the urban core that was configured by a square and surrounding blocks. The main public buildings were located in the square; they represented the two powers of the conquest: political and religious. The square was the place where political, religious, and commercial activities would take place. The surrounding blocks were destined for residences of the Spanish and high-ranking Creoles[3] who were in charge of executing the colonial project according to the Crown's orders. They were the ones who articulated the metropole with the colonial societies. A second area was configured by blocks that surrounded the core; they were a spatial continuation of it, but were differentiated by the use of the buildings. In this area were located secondary public buildings, hospitals, and convents. A third area was defined by a periphery spatially different from the other two areas, which was mostly inhabited by the indigenous population, and it was where the artisanal, commercial, and farming activities were located. This area was characterized by settlements organized around the roads that connected the city with the rest of the territory, and by a less dense urban fabric that would gradually become rural. An important characteristic of this area was the *tambo* buildings, which were commercial facilities usually organized around

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[3] Creole: Spanish descendent born in America

courtyards. The spatial segregation between Spanish and indigenous was clear at the beginning of the colonial period; however, this segregation would start to fade during the second half of the 17th century due to social and cultural integration between the two worlds (Gutierrez, 1983).

Economic dependency, internal colonization, and urbanization

In the 19th century, the independence and creation of new nation-states in Latin America coincided with the expansion of the global economy. The articulation of a global economy, the emergence of new global powers, and the integration of Latin American countries into the global market strongly impacted the urban agglomerations of the region. From the 19th century onwards, Latin American urbanization processes have been explained through notions of internal colonization (Calvert, 2001) and dependence (Quijano, 1968). According to Calvert (2001), Latin American countries continued to be colonized after independence, but in this case by their own ruling elites. This resonates with Cusicanqui's (2010) argument that suggests that after independence, the renovation of a colonial structure reinforced exclusive political power that allowed a territorial dispossession comparable to that of the formal colonial period. The political and territorial power of the elites is concentrated in a city, usually the capital, which typically houses the seat of government and the principal market for goods and services (Calvert, 2001). While Calvert's idea of internal colonization explains dynamics of domination within Latin American nation-states, Quijano (1968) focuses on international dynamics. According to Quijano (1968), Latin American urban dynamics respond to internal structures of power that are subordinated to, or dependent on, the interests of metropolitan societies. In alignment with this idea, Cusicanqui (2010) argues that after independence, the elites adopted a "modernization" project that entailed the articulation of the national economy with the international capitalist market. This economic dependency led to urbanization processes that generated urban agglomerations, usually the capitals of the countries, that concentrated powerful groups that enabled dependent relations. Therefore, these cities act as hinges between their countries and metropolitan centers, and have become internal metropolises.

Dynamics of dependence and internal colonization led to significant changes in urban-rural configurations. On one hand, capital cities concentrated political power and much of the

manufacturing industry; therefore, they became poles that attracted population from rural areas (Calvert, 2001; Quijano, 1968). On the contrary, the rural economy experienced a disarticulation process of its occupational structures and economic relations (Quijano, 1968). This occurred as a result of the enclosure of commons—a process where land was appropriated by the elite to increase its profitability, which in many cases was enabled by legislations that allowed to take over common land that "was not being efficiently used" (Calvert, 2001: 59). In the context of Bolivia, the disarticulation of rural economic networks and the appropriation of land by the elites was enabled by liberal and populist reforms. These reforms allowed elitist landownership expansion first, and then, the dismantlement of communal rural organization by the imposition of individual property (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The disarticulation of rural organizations generated poor living conditions in the countryside and forced a great part of the population to look for alternative economic activities in the cities. In other words, the economic decline of rural areas generated massive rural-urban migration (Calvert, 2001; Gutierrez, 1983; Quijano, 1968). In sum, during the 19th and 20th century, while rural areas declined and lost population, urban agglomerations rose as industrial and political centers that attracted population from the countryside and therefore experienced significant growth[4].

Although cities were industrial centers, industrialization was characterized by dependency (Quijano, 1968). This means that industrial production was subjected to external dynamics determined by the powerful countries. As a dependent process, industrialization in Latin America was marked by the marginalization of large parts of the urban population that could not find a place in the industrial production system (Quijano, 1968). Moreover, in the last decades of the 20th century, the economic "adjustment policies" imposed by metropolitan powers in Latin American countries expanded the dismantlement of rural productive dynamics and replaced them with unstable jobs or "informal" economic activity in the cities (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). Therefore, industrialization and neoliberal economic policies

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[4] In the mid 19th century demographic urban changes started to be noticeable in cities (Almandoz, 2002). And in the 20th century Latin America's urban population grew from 42% in 1950 to 65% in 1980 (Clichevsky & Herzer, 1990).

attracted population to urban centers, but the integration of this population into the hegemonic economic system was characterized by exclusion. This resulted in marginalized and impoverished urban groups constituted by rural immigrants (Clichevsky & Herzer, 1990).

The significant urban growth and the marginalization of most of the migrant population resulted in significant changes in urban configurations, which gave Latin American cities their contemporary character (Clichevsky & Herzer, 1990). The old city centers, which previously accommodated public buildings and the elite's residences, became the administrative and political centers of the city and gradually lost their residential function (Gutierrez, 1983). Therefore, new residential locations were developed for the upper and middle classes. These wealthy neighborhoods, characterized by European and U.S. American architecture styles (Gutierrez, 1983), contrasted with low income neighborhoods mostly destined for the rural immigrants. These areas were characterized by overcrowding, lack of urban services, and poor living conditions (Almandoz, 2002; Clichevsky & Herzer, 1990; Gutierrez, 1983). In other words, Latin American cities were characterized by spatial segregation that evidenced severe inequalities.

Cultural dependency, urban planning, and architecture

Latin America's dependent relations with the metropole were not only economic but also cultural. From the 19th century onwards, Latin American elites adopted European and North American cultural models (Almandoz, 2002; Quijano, 1968). Almandoz (2002) argues that the economic and cultural dependence of Latin America on Europe in the 19th century launched an era of neo-colonialism. Manuel de Ugarte called the 19th-century subjugation of Latin American elites to European Enlightenment thought "the second conquest" (Almandoz, 2002). And for Cusicanqui (2010), the "civilizing" and "modernizing" ideologies introduced after independence served as mechanisms to renovate the colonial order.

The aspiration of the ruling elites to be like European countries (especially France and England) becomes clear in the physical transformation of cities (Gutierrez, 1983; Almandoz, 2002). The elites understood cities as the receiving spaces of European culture and therefore the places from which to build a "civilized" society. The elites copied external models in an attempt to overcome "backwardness" and become like the more "developed" countries and

their "cosmopolitan" cities (Gutierrez, 1983). In the 19th centur,y European urban interventions such as the Haussmann plan for Paris became symbols of modernization that were imported to Latin American capitals. The "Haussmannization" of the Latin American capitals consisted of the implementation of monumental eclectic buildings, boulevards, and avenues superimposed on the old colonial layout, and the use of public parks and tree-lined avenues in the expansion areas (Almandoz, 2002). While the elites abandoned models of colonial architecture and adopted models from the "developed" European countries, the rest of the population continued to build as they did during Spanish colonial rule, because popular architecture responded to basic life needs and to construction technology that had not substantially changed since independence (Gutierrez, 1983). Later on, in the 20th century, local governments and architecture professionals saw the urgency of adopting urban plans in response to urban growth. In many cases, these plans were guided by trends of European urbanism (e.g., zoning) and were developed with the involvement of renowned European architects such as Le Corbusier (Almandoz, 2002). However, the accelerated urban growth outpaced planning attempts from the local authorities, and in practice, cities were planned by urban land speculators (Gutierrez, 1983). Many of the peripheral urban areas emerged as "irregular" and self-constructed areas, characterized by a lack of urban services and precarious housing (Clichevsky & Herzer, 1990).

Moreover, the public and residential architecture of the 20th century clearly shows the cultural dependency of the Latin American elites (Gutierrez, 1983). The public buildings were designed in neoclassic and rationalist styles to achieve monumentality and sobriety, which aimed to express the power of the State. This was done not only in governmental buildings, but also in educational and financial institutions. In the case of residential buildings, European styles were used first, and later on, with the rise of the United States as a global power, U.S. American styles became the trend, and Latin American countries went through an Americanization process (Almandoz, 2002). In many cases, the residential Californian model was adopted in the second half of the 20th century, which generated wealthy neighborhoods characterized by tiled-roof chalets. Moreover, U.S. American style skyscrapers started to appear throughout the continent as symbols of "modernity and advanced technology" (Gutierrez, 1983). The transfer and adoption of European and North American architectural models was in great part enabled by Latin American architects educated in Europe and by the

constant visits of European architects to Latin America. Some architects understood modern and rationalist architecture as expressions of historical rupture that allowed to leave "tradition" behind to achieve "progress" enabled by technological development (Gutierrez, 1983).

Unequal urban development in the 21st century

In the 21st century, Latin American cities are characterized by sharp divisions between luxury enclaves and sprawling self-planned and built peripheries (Angotti & Irazábal, 2017). These divisions have been studied and explained through different perspectives. From an economic perspective – resonating with Quijano's (1968) and Cusicanqui's (2010) ideas of Latin American subjugation to metropolitan powers – Cobos (2014) argues that the spatial divisions are the result of Latin America's subordinated integration to the capitalist global economy. The author suggests that dependent capitalism has been unable to offer employment and stable income, housing, and infrastructure to large parts of the population. Therefore, they have been forced to find alternative ways of subsistence, which have often been referred to as "informality" (Cobos, 2014). Angotti & Irazábal (2017) argue, from a planning perspective, that the urban planning actions of the previous centuries produced the Latin American cities that we have today. They argue that the imported models from the more "advanced" nations of Europe and North America generated unequal and segregated cities instead of creating the ideal cities of wealth and harmony imagined in the North. Therefore, Latin American cities are now characterized by a "planned" city, which is the central enclave where wealth and power is concentrated, and has the infrastructure and resources, and an "unplanned" or "informal" city, a city made by the inhabitants themselves, where the vast majority of the population lives (Angotti & Irazábal, 2017).

The sprawling self-built or "informal" peripheries that host different generations of rural-urban migrants are characterized by built forms that differentiate them from the luxurious enclaves. The most salient built forms of these areas are the residential buildings, which are usually progressively built, and not only serve as living spaces but also accommodate economic and social activities (Roch Peña et al., 2010). In the Andean region of Bolivia, these incrementally constructed buildings have been termed as "*utilitario popular*" (Alejo Mamani, 2021) or Alteño type (Paladines Valarezo, 2024). This building typology has been developed

collectively in response to the social, economic, and cultural needs of the indigenous rural-urban migrant families. These buildings are usually built progressively, beginning with a couple of rooms and eventually growing vertically. As families' economic conditions improve, the buildings expand floor by floor, integrating commercial spaces, event halls, and private residences. A distinctive feature of this typology is the top-floor "chalet-style" (Alejo Mamani, 2021; Paladines Valarezo, 2024). The "*utilitario popular*" architecture typology has been the structural base from which a variety of architectural styles have been elaborated. Among these, the neo-andean style (Paladines Valarezo, 2024), or most commonly known as "cholet"[5]. This architecture style is an expression of the higher socio-economic status of its owners: the emerging Aymara elite that has managed to accumulate wealth within the informal economy (Alejo Mamani, 2021). They are characterized by elaborate ornamentation, vivid colors, and iconographic references to Tiwanaku and Andean textile patterns, which are clear expressions of an Andean culture (Paladines Valarezo, 2024). The architects of the neo-Andean buildings understand them as efforts to modernize the urban areas where they are embedded, and according to Alejo Mamani (2021), neo-Andean buildings are an expression of a "self-modernizing" process which has taken place within "informality".

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[5] This emerging architectural style has been named in different ways: neo-andean, emergent architecture, and cholet, being the latter the most prominent. The word cholet merges to words: chalet, a European traditional gabled-roof house, and cholo, a term use to refer to indigenous people that go through a process of acculturation while they enter urban life. Generally, the word cholo has often been used in a discriminatory way, and therefore the word cholet has pejorative resonances. However, due to its widespread use, even Alteño architects use it for patent registration and informal talk. The term has the potential to be re-signified, but its use in either a derogative or contentious way depends on by whom and in which context it is used (Paladines Valarezo, 2024).

CHAPTER 1: COLONIAL SOCIETY AND URBAN SPACE

This chapter makes a revision of the characteristics of the urban space and the urban society of La Paz during the formal colonial period, from the 16th to the 18th century, and the after-independence period in the 19th century. The chapter starts with a general overview of the context under which La Paz was founded. The next sections explain how, during the formal colonial period, ethnicity and occupation were articulated to generate a hierarchical society, and how this society occupied the urban space. The final sections of the chapter show the continuation of both the social and spatial structures in the first hundred years after independence.

Foundation of La Paz

The city of La Paz was founded by Spanish settlers in 1548, in the Chuquiago mountain valley between the Altiplano and Yungas regions. This area was highly transited due to its intermediate location between the mining centers of La Plata (Sucre) and Potosí, and the colonial center of power, Lima. Moreover, the region was densely inhabited by indigenous communities dedicated to agriculture and farming. Therefore, the city of La Paz was founded for two reasons: first, as a midway support station for the Lima-La Plata/Potosí commercial circuit, and second, as a political center to control the territory and population of the Altiplano (central area) and the Yungas regions (Cuadros, 2002) (Map 1).
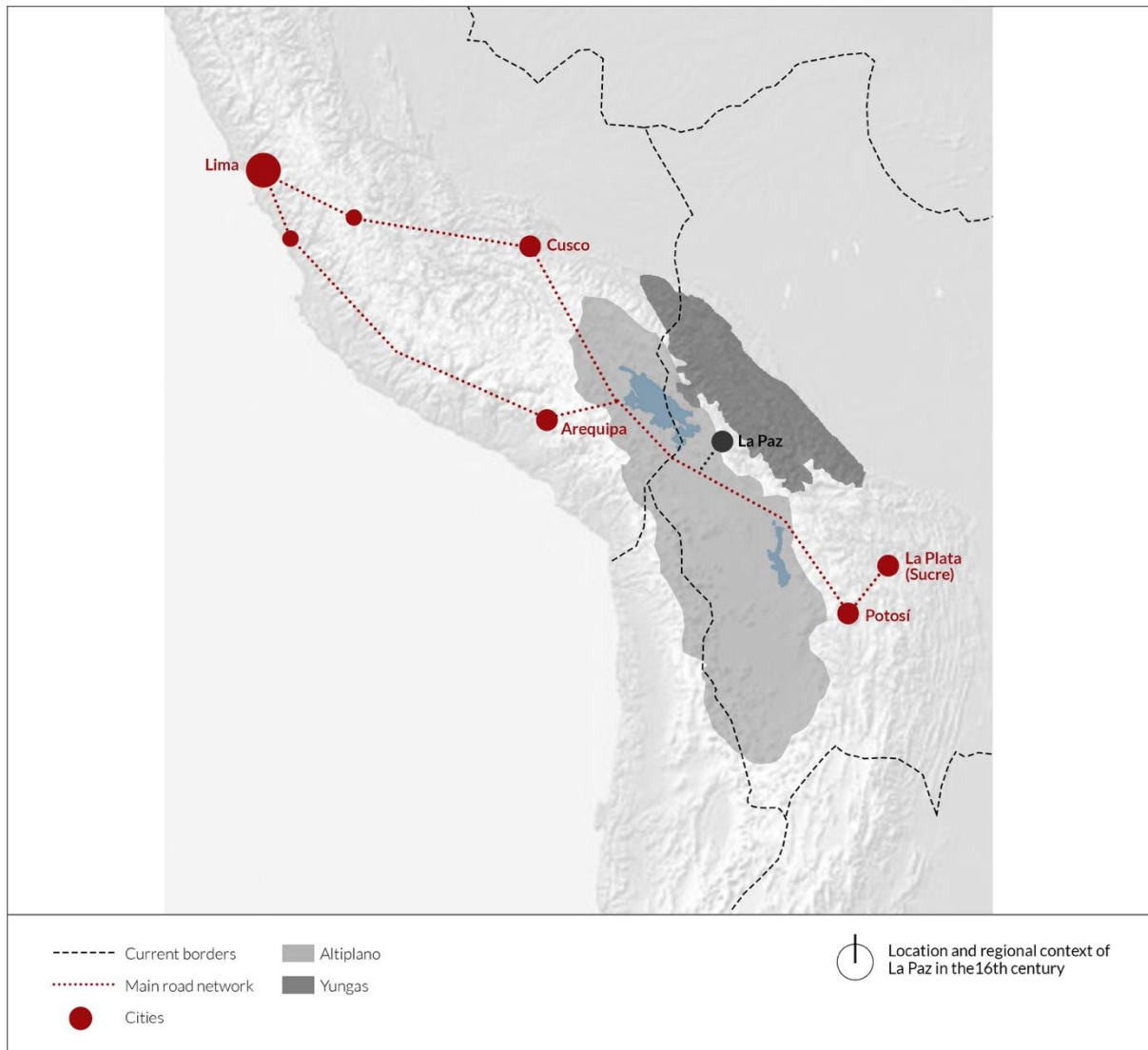
Map 1: Location and regional context of La Paz in the 16th century. Elaborated by the author based on (Cuadros Bustos, 2002)

The creation of two worlds: Spanish and indigenous

The area where La Paz was founded was characterized by a mosaic of different communities, ethnic groups, and languages (such as Quechua, Puquina, and Aymara)(F. Cajías et al., 2007; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). However, the Spanish colonization generated a process of ethnic unification of the native groups. As a Spanish and Creole identity appeared, an *indio* or indigenous identity emerged through the unification of different ethnic groups with language and cultural affinities (Barragán Romano, 1990). These two identities were recognized by the *Leyes de Indias,* which was a legislation that "considered the colonial world to be divided in

two separate entities: the Spanish Republic and the *Indio* Republic" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 46, translated by the author). Therefore, at the beginning of the colonial period, the population of La Paz was divided into two ethnic groups or identities, the Spanish and the indigenous.

These two groups were associated with particular occupations and economic activities. On one hand, the Spanish were colonial agents with the task of managing and controlling the territory and its indigenous people. Colonial control was achieved through a system of land expropriation that converted indigenous communal land into private property of the settlers. Therefore, the Spanish population was associated with colonial government and land ownership activities (Cuadros, 2002). On the other hand, the indigenous population was dedicated to agriculture, farming, and trading activities. While they supported the commercial network of the region, they had to constantly contest modes of exploitation and land expropriation (Cuadros, 2002). In sum, the Spanish and indigenous identities were not only differentiated by cultural characteristics, but also by occupation and their role in the colonial economic and political system.

Spanish city and indigenous towns

The *Leyes de Indias* stated that the Spanish and indigenous population should be spatially separated (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010); therefore, when La Paz was established, the Spanish and indigenous were assigned different spaces. The Spanish built their city in an area located between two already existing indigenous towns, which was delimited by rivers and a hill, and established that the areas on the opposite side of the rivers were exclusively for the indigenous population (Cuadros, 2002). Therefore, the city was constituted by two parts, a central area or Spanish city, and peripheral areas or indigenous towns (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002) (Map 2). The Spanish city was the control center where political, religious, and prestigious social activities took place (Cuadros Bustos, 2002). These activities were symbolically reinforced by the religious, public administration, and upper class residential buildings (ibid). On the other hand, the Indigenous towns were characterized by agricultural and commercial activities (Cuadros Bustos, 2002). These areas were located on commercial routes, so they became trading centers and developed infrastructure for the commercial activity (ibid.). There were multifunctional buildings called *tambo* that functioned as trading

and gathering centers, as well as shelters for travelers and transport animals (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002). In sum, at the beginning of the colonial period, La Paz was characterized by two areas with different functions, which reflected and reinforced the differentiation between the Spanish identity and the indigenous identity. On one hand, the Spanish city was the center of political power and colonial administration (which controlled the Valley of Chuquiago, and part of the Altiplano and Yungas), and on the other hand, the indigenous towns were agricultural areas and commercial centers dedicated to gathering and distributing products of different regions.
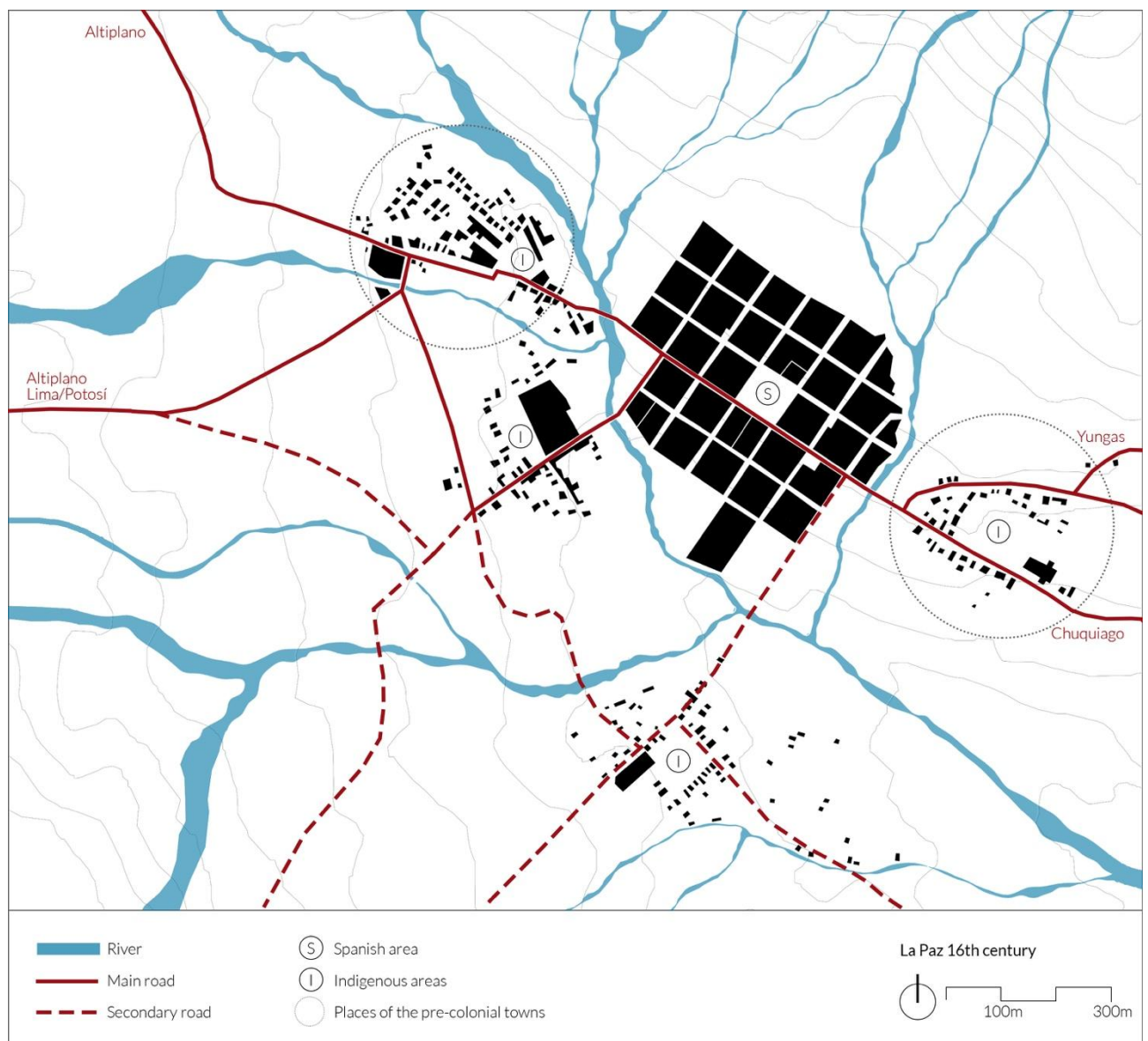
Map 2: La Paz 16th century. Elaborated by the author based on (Cuadros Bustos, 2002)

The *mestizo* identity

Even though the *Leyes de Indias* established that Spanish and indigenous people and culture should be politically and spatially separated, this law was not always followed, and there was constant interaction between the Spanish and indigenous worlds. As a result of this interaction, some of the differences between indigenous and Spanish were "erased" and a *mestizo* identity progressively emerged (Barragán Romano, 1990; F. Cajías et al., 2007). The *mestizo* people were not only the result of "racial" mixing, but most importantly of cultural assimilation. A *mestizo* could be a person with a Spanish father and an indigenous mother (this was usually the case), or a native person who had assimilated aspects of the Spanish culture (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). Therefore, after a long process of cultural assimilation the *mestizo* identity emerged, and the society of La Paz came to be constituted by three identities or ethnic groups: Spanish/creoles, *mestizo,* and indigenous.

Like at the beginning of the colonial period, during the 17th and 18th centuries, the ethnic groups were associated with occupational activities. The Spanish and Creole, who in 1650 represented 5% of the total population, remained as the dominant group engaged in colonial governance and property administration of the Chuquiago valley, Altiplano, and Yungas, and they also participated in import/export commercial activity (Cuadros, 2002). The *mestizo* and indigenous, which represented 12% and 83% of the population respectively, were dedicated to trading and agricultural activities, as well as the elaboration of handmade products and domestic services (Cuadros, 2002). Although a third identity emerged, the work activities remained hierarchically associated with ethnicity.

Spanish city, indigenous towns, and permeable spatial boundaries

The two occupational groups continued to be reflected in the urban space. La Paz maintained the two areas, the Spanish city and the indigenous towns, clearly differentiated by activities, urban morphology, and architecture. The Spanish city was the center of political and colonial rule, where the dominant group of Spanish and creole landowners was located. Therefore, this part of the city was characterized by political and religious buildings, and by large aristocratic residences. The spatial organization responded to the *damero* scheme, with blocks of the same size organized in a grid pattern (Cuadros, 2002). On the other hand, the

indigenous towns, predominantly inhabited by the *mestizo* and indigenous population, were dedicated to both agriculture and commerce. Over time, agriculture diminished as trade activities became more prominent. The commercial activity attracted people, and these areas started to expand; therefore, their spatial layout was a result of the gradual urbanization of agricultural plots. As commercial centers, these towns were characterized by the *tambo* buildings that were located on the main roads (ibid.). It is evident that the city was segregated in terms of ethnicity and occupation; however, the spatial boundaries were permeable. The intense economic activity in the indigenous towns attracted some Spanish and Creole people, who decided (and in part were forced) to relocate as the administrative and religious buildings increasingly occupied space in the Spanish city (Cuadros, 2002). Moreover, fairs and even a *tambo* were allowed in the Spanish city, so *mestizo* and indigenous people had access to these areas due to commercial activity (ibid.). Finally, some of the indigenous and *mestizo* population lived in the Spanish city to work in domestic services for the Spanish and creole aristocratic families (ibid.). In sum, by the end of the colonial period, the city remained divided along ethnic and occupational lines. It was characterized by two distinct functional areas, though their spatial boundaries were permeable, so the three ethnic groups were constantly interacting.
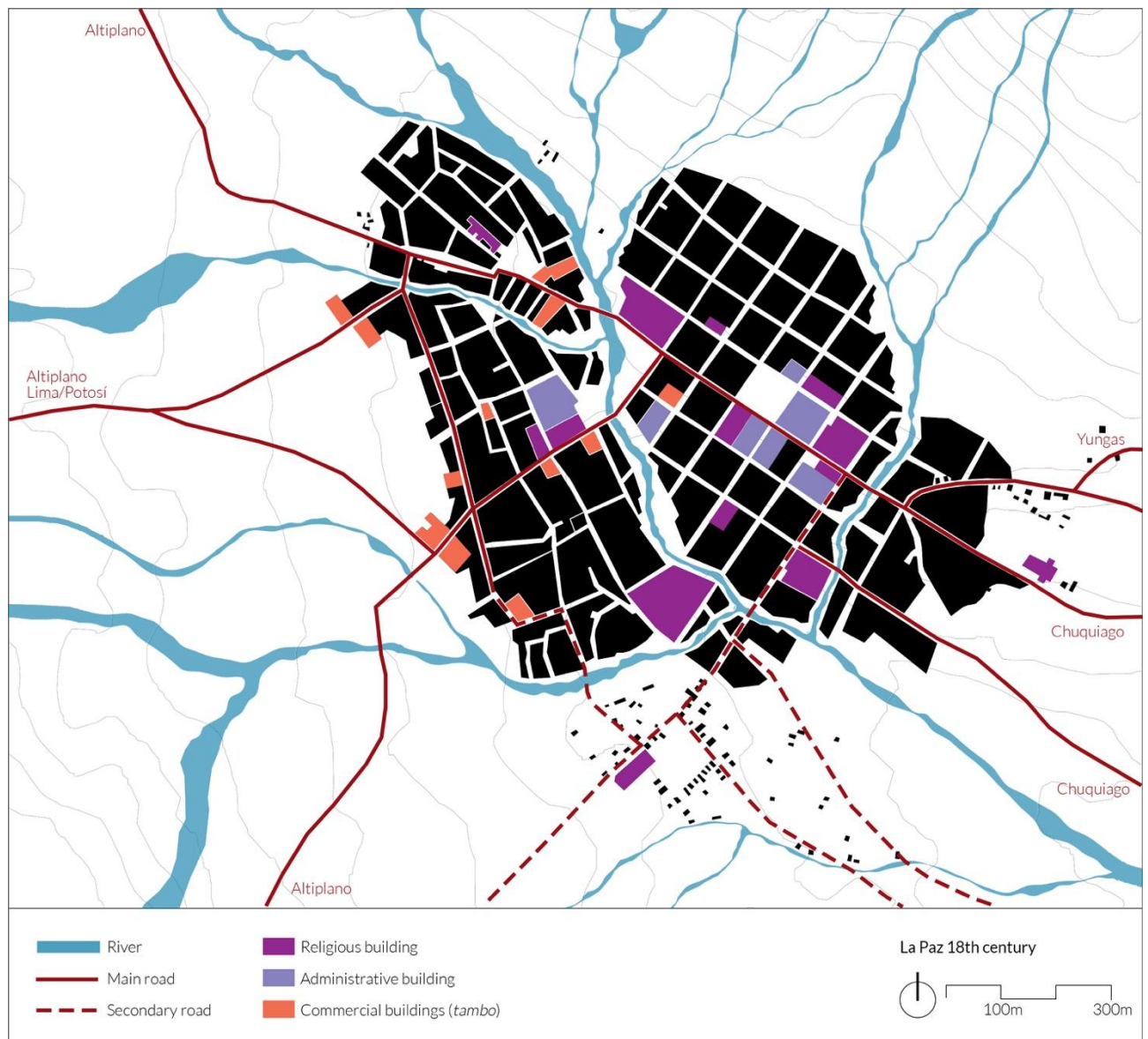
Map 3: La Paz 18th century. Elaborated by the author based on (Cuadros Bustos, 2002)

Continuity of the colonial social structure after independence

In 1825, Bolivia became an independent state; however, this did not lead to ruptures and significant changes in the social and economic structure. La Paz inherited the colonial social structure based on ethnicity and occupation. In the 19th century the white[6] population continued to perform governmental activities, property ownership administration (of urban

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[6] In the 19th century the terms Spanish and creole were replaced by the term white to refer to the European and Europeanized population (Barragán Romano, 1990).

property in La Paz, productive rural land in the valley, Altiplano and Yungas, and also mines in the south-east part of the Altiplano), import/export commercial activity, and many of them started to engage in liberal professions. In the case of the *mestizo* and indigenous identities, a differentiation in terms of occupation was established. The *mestizo* population became associated with the activities of retail trade, the elaboration of handmade products, and domestic services (performed only by women). Whereas the indigenous population was associated only with agricultural activities (Barragán Romano, 1990; F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002). It is important to mention that, contrary to the white population that were landowners, most of the *mestizo* and indigenous population in La Paz did not own urban land; they lived in rented properties that belonged to the dominant group (Cuadros, 2002). These three ethnic-occupational groups represented the three categories of the social hierarchy. These categories, however, were not rigid and had porous boundaries that allowed social mobility (Barragán Romano, 1990). As mentioned before, the *mestizo* identity appeared mostly due to cultural assimilation; therefore, if an indigenous person abandoned many defining aspects of him/her identity, such as clothing, community, and learned to speak Spanish, they could come to be recognized as *mestizo* (ibid.). Moreover, the *mestizo* who embraced "European customs" in their clothing, stopped speaking Aymara or Quechua in favor of Spanish, engaged in prosperous economic activities, and became more integrated into Western society could eventually be regarded as white (ibid.). This social mobility becomes evident with the apparent decrease of the indigenous population and the increase of *mestizos* and whites. In 1650, the Spanish population represented just 5% of the population, the *mestizo* 12% and the indigenous 83% (Cuadros, 2002). While in 1881 the white population reached 32%, the *mestizo* 47% and the indigenous 21% (F. Cajías et al., 2007). These figures do not mean that indigenous people were "biologically" disappearing, but that after a long process of cultural assimilation, many of them came to be recognized as either *mestizo* or even white (ibid.). The intertwining of cultural and occupational aspects generated a society characterized by an ethnic-occupational hierarchy, where the boundaries between the different strata were porous and social mobility was possible[7].

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[7] As Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (1993) notes, it is important to highlight that the cultural assimilation and social mobility that represented a transit between the indigenous world to the Spanish world was not exactly

White city and indigenous towns: a continuation of the colonial urban structure

The urban configuration of La Paz did not present significant changes after independence; the city was still characterized by two distinct functional areas, as well as permeable spatial boundaries, that reflected the social hierarchy and population composition. The white city was still the area of residence of the majority white population, and the space of political power and administration (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002). During this century, prestigious buildings such as the Government Palace, a new Cathedral, a theater, and educational facilities were built in this area (Map 4), which symbolically reinforced it as a space that belonged to the dominant group (Cuadros, 2002). Moreover, this area was privileged with the majority of public investments and the implementation of urban services such as public lighting and water piping. (Cuadros, 2002). On the other hand, the indigenous towns were mostly inhabited by *mestizos* and indigenous peoples. They had consolidated as commercial economic centers and were also characterized by craft production and small-scale agricultural activity (Cuadros, 2002). As in the previous centuries, the city was generally segregated in ethnic-occupational lines, but the needs of the dominant group generated permeable spatial boundaries. Therefore, around 30% of the indigenous and 38% of the *mestizo* lived in the city center (Barragán Romano, 1990), most likely to perform commercial and housework activities. Moreover, political, cultural and educational buildings occupied large areas of the white city, which limited the space for residences, therefore, around 42% of the white population lived in the indigenous towns (Barragán Romano, 1990), particularly in the northern part and close to the river (Cuadros, 2002). This, however, was not a sign of a less segregated city, for these parts of the peripheral areas were privileged with urban services such as public lighting, evidencing the higher social status of its inhabitants (ibid.). In sum, the socio-spatial structure and dynamics of La Paz in the 19th century were a continuation of social and spatial colonial logics that responded to a social-occupational hierarchy.

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voluntarily, most of the time it was a forced choice to escape the oppression and violence that the Spanish imposed over the indigenous.
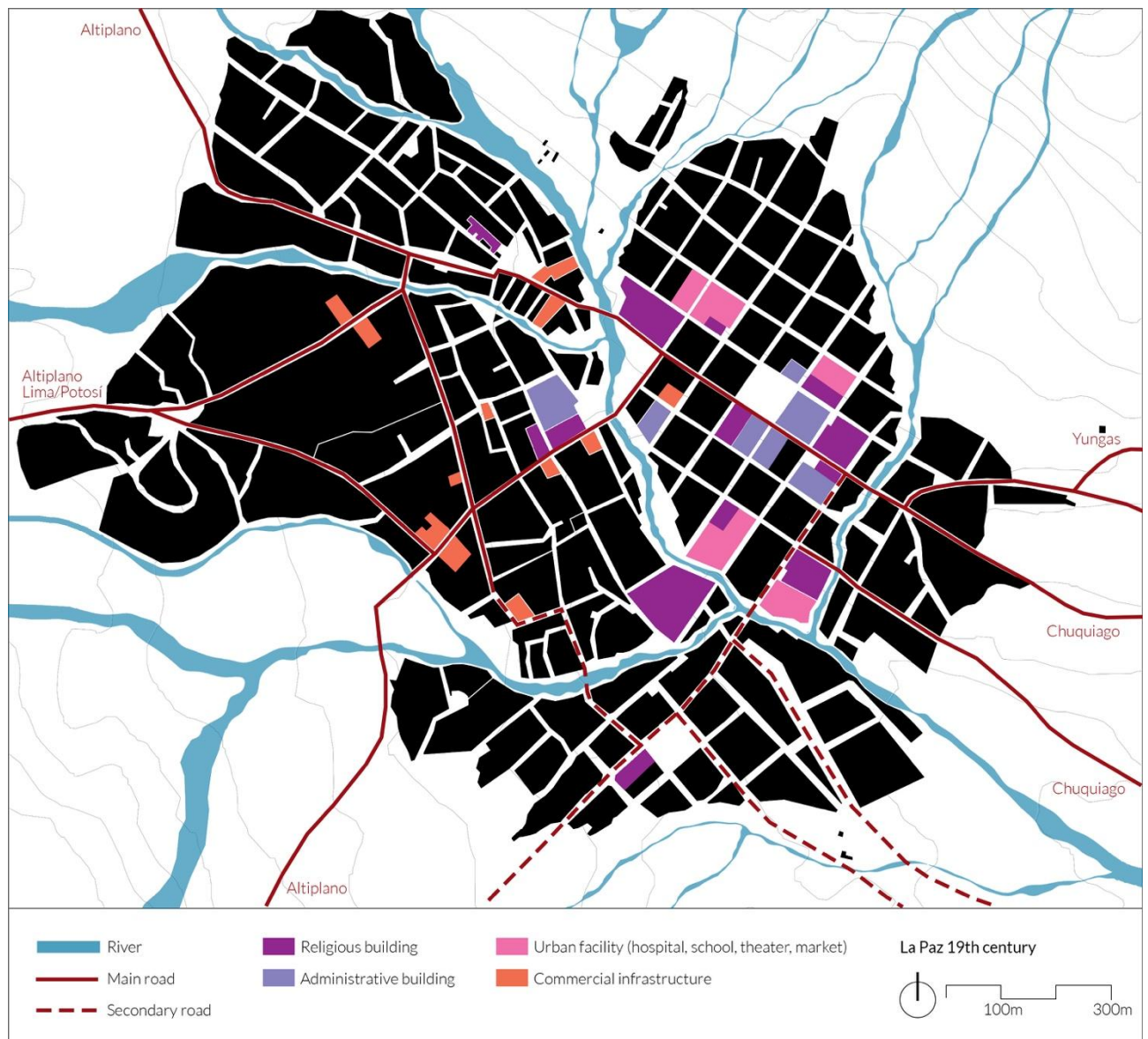
Map 4: La Paz 19th century. Elaborated by the author based on (Cuadros Bustos, 2002)

Chapter summary

This chapter explained the colonial roots of the socio-spatial structure of La Paz and how they continued in the 19th century after independence. The next chapter will revise the socio-spatial characteristics of La Paz in the 20th century, where some important changes in terms of urbanization and urban space will be presented, but also some continuities in terms of social hierarchical organization and spatial segregation will be identified.

1492
Beginning of
Spanish
colonization

1825
Independence
of Bolivia

1952
National
Revolution

1988
Foundation
of El Alto city

1548
Foundation
of La Paz city

1899
La Paz as
Seat of
Govern-
ment

2000

SOCIETY

Emergence of two ethnic worlds

From a multicultural to a dual society: Spanish and Indigenous

Emergence of the mestizo identity

The mestizo emerge due to cultural assimilation
Society constituted by three ethnic groups: Spanish, mestizo, and Indigenous

Hierarchical social structure

Ethnicity and occupation intertwine

Spanish: governance, property administration, internatitonal commerce, liberal professions
Mestizo: trade, artisanal work, domestic work
Indigenous: agriculture, farming

SPACE

Colonial city

Dual city with permeable spatial boundaries

(S) **Spanish city**: colonial administration center

(I) **Indigenous towns**: agriculture and commerce

(A) Altiplano and Yungas: agriculture and mining

Oligarchic city

Dual city with permeable spatial boundaries

(S) **White city**: oligarchic administration center

(I) **Periphery**: agriculture and commerce

(A) Altiplano and Yungas: agriculture and mining

35

CHAPTER 2: SOCIO-SPATIAL DIFFERENTIATION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

This chapter explores the characteristics of the urban space and the urban society of La Paz in the 20th century. The chapter is organized into two parts that correspond to the first and second half of the 20th century; both parts follow the same structure. First, important events that contributed to important changes in the city and significant urban growth are explained. Then, the characteristics of the urban society are exposed, where an entanglement of ethnicity, occupation, and class configure a stratified society. Subsequently, the socio-spatial characteristics of the city are explained, which include the spatial distribution of the different social groups and the material characteristics of the different areas of the city. Moreover, both parts of the chapter show how urban governance dynamics had an important role in shaping the socio-spatial characteristics of the city. Throughout the chapter, El Alto emerges as an important area of La Paz that becomes administratively independent by the end of the 20th century. Therefore, the last parts of the chapter focus on El Alto city, and review its relation with La Paz and the particular characteristics of its society and space. Finally, the chapter closes by giving an overview of the socio-spatial characteristics of the urban agglomeration of La Paz-El Alto.

La Paz as the new seat of government

La Paz entered the 20th century as the new seat of government of the country. After independence, in 1825, Sucre was assigned as the capital of the country. However, by the end of the 19th century, the aristocracy of La Paz had gained economic and political power and represented the opposition party to the ruling party located in Sucre. The aristocracy of La Paz controlled wholesale trade, as well as tin mining that had become more profitable than silver mining (which was controlled by the aristocracy of Sucre), and they had expanded landownership in the Altiplano (Cuadros, 2002). Therefore, by the end of the 19th century, La Paz had become the economic and commercial center of the country (Cuadros, 2002). In 1899, a federal revolution took place that resulted in the creation of an oligarchic power

composed of alliances between mine owners and land owners[8], that assigned La Paz as the new seat of government of Bolivia (Cuadros, 2002).

Modernity and the continuation of a stratified social structure in the first half of the 20th century

During the first half of the 20th century, the society of La Paz and the Altiplano went through a process of renovation of the colonial hierarchical social structure (Loureiro, 1999). The white elites, who resided in La Paz, adopted the modernity discourse that emerged in Europe to justify their power and maintain themselves at the top of the social hierarchy. They recognized themselves as "whites" or American-European (Guevara, 2021), and therefore as the bearers of "modernity and progress" (Guevara, 2021; Loureiro, 1999). In contrast, they labeled the indigenous population as "backward" and decided that they needed to go through a "civilizing" process, which meant their incorporation into the "modern" capitalist economic model as workforce masses dedicated to agricultural production, mine work, or underpaid jobs in urban centers (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Guevara, 2021; Loureiro, 1999).

Therefore, in the first half of the 20th century, the society of La Paz was constituted by class categories (upper, middle, and lower class) that intertwined with ethnicity (white, *mestizo*, and indigenous) and occupation. The upper class was composed of the white population, who were mine owners, land owners, wholesale traders, privileged public workers, and liberal professionals (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002; Loureiro, 1999). The middle class was composed of groups with different occupations and ethnicities. The first group consisted of factory workers whose ethnicity is not mentioned by the reviewed authors (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002; Schoop, 1981). Another middle class group was the *mestizo* public employees (Loureiro, 1999). A third group, considered lower-middle class, was constituted by the *mestizo* dedicated to craft work and retail trade (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Loureiro, 1999). The lower class was composed of an undervalued workforce of indigenous migrants from the rural areas that were dedicated to construction, transportation, domestic work, and

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[8] It is estimated that in 1950, 70% of the private agricultural land was concentrated by 4,5% of landowners (M. Cajías, 2024).

agriculture (Barragán Romano, 1990; Loureiro, 1999). In short, in the first decades of the 20th century, the society of La Paz continues to be characterized by a hierarchical structure based on the articulation of class, occupation, and ethnicity.

Urban transformation and socio-spatial differentiation in the first half of the 20th century

The change of status to seat of government, the concentration of political power, economic power, and commercial activity, in addition to the emerging industries[9], attracted people to the city and generated significant urban growth (Cuadros, 2002) (Map 5). During the first half of the century, people from other cities of the country moved to La Paz; they mostly belonged to the white population and upper class of the country (Schoop, 1981). Moreover, La Paz also received foreigners dedicated mostly to international trade; they belonged to the upper class and represented 4% of the population of the city (ibid.). The city's growth was also generated by the immigration of indigenous people from the countryside (Cuadros, 2002). Therefore, in the first half of the 20th century, La Paz went from 60.031 inhabitants in 1902 to 142.549 inhabitants in 1928, and by 1942 it had reached 287.097 inhabitants (Cuadros, 2002).

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[9] In 1938 La Paz concentrated 61% of the industries in the country (Cuadros, 2002).
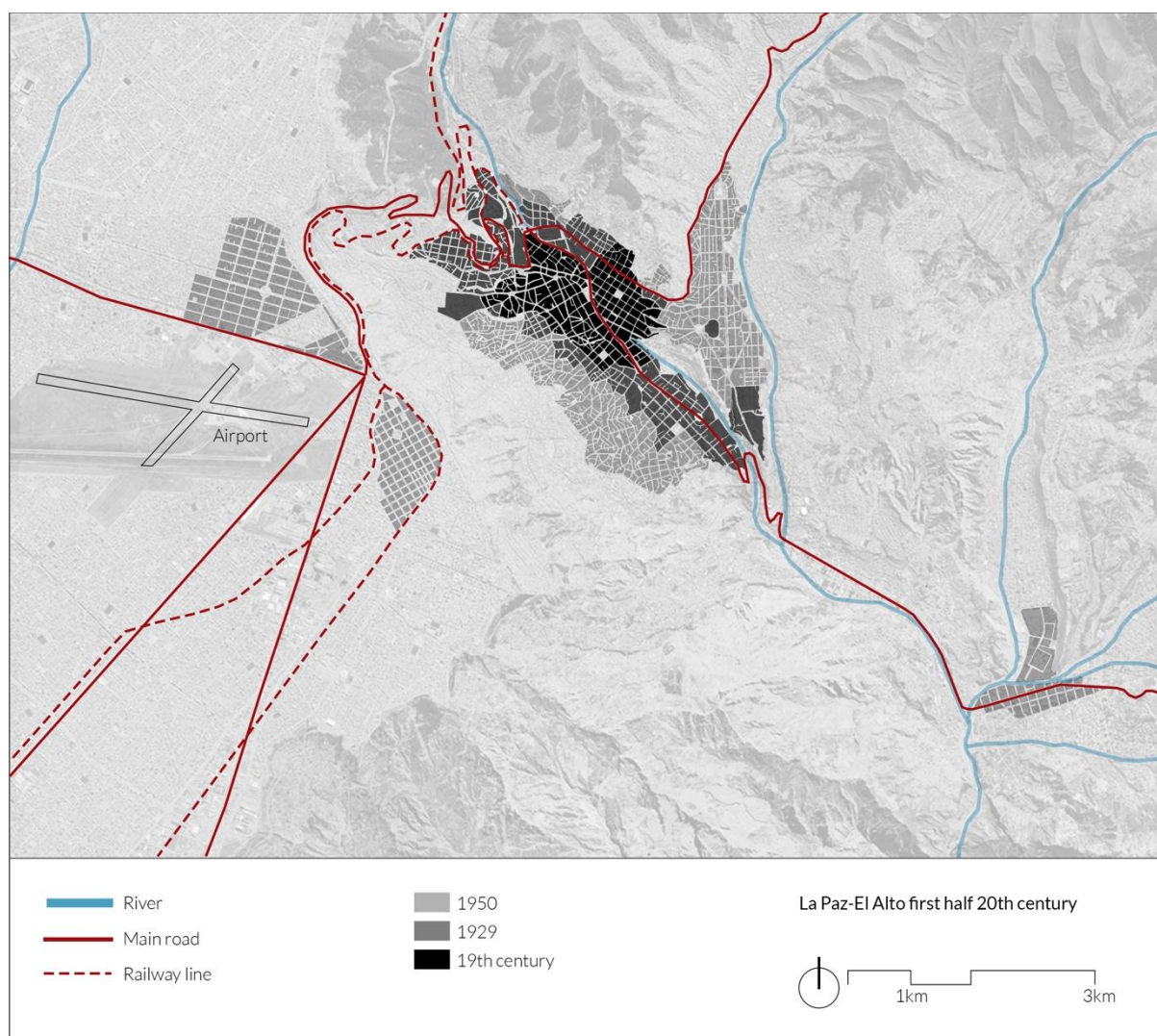
Map 5: La Paz-El Alto first half 20th century. Elaborated by the author based on Cuadros (2002), GAML map (2007), and GAMEA (n.d.)

In the first decades of the 20th century, La Paz started to develop as a modern city and progressively lost its colonial attributes (Mesa Gisbert, 1999, in F. Cajías et al., 2007). The substantial increase in urban population resulted in the extensive growth of the urban area (Map 5). This expansion caused La Paz to lose the characteristic duality of the previous centuries, white city and indigenous towns, and led to the emergence of differentiated neighborhoods (Guevara, 2021) (Map 6). During the first decades of the century, the city center (previously the white city) reinforced its role as the administrative, political, and financial center of the city, and gradually lost its residential character (Cuadros, 2002). Therefore, the upper class relocated to the south to a relatively flat area (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002; Guevara, 2021). On the other hand, an expansion area for the emerging

industries and their workers was developed in the north (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002). The area to the west of the city center, which was previously known as one of the indigenous towns, maintained a population dedicated to artisan work and trade that belonged to the lower-middle class (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002). In the 1930s, more expansion areas started to consolidate. A middle-class area was planned and designed in the east of the city, destined for residences and urban infrastructure such as hospitals and a stadium (Cuadros, 2002). Moreover, the flatter areas of the lower south part of the valley started to be occupied by middle and upper class families (Cuadros, 2002). And on the other hand, the migrant population of the countryside started to settle in the sloped areas of the north-west (F. Cajías et al., 2007). Later on, in the 1940s, the Altiplano area located next to the valley, called El Alto, started to be urbanized to host workers of the factories located in La Paz (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002). In sum, during the first half of the century, La Paz lost its dual character but continued as a segregated city where the upper classes tended to locate in the east and south, and the lower classes in the north and west. And since the lower classes were mostly composed of indigenous and *mestizo*, and the upper classes by whites, it can be said that the city was not just segregated by class but also by ethnicity (Schoop, 1981).
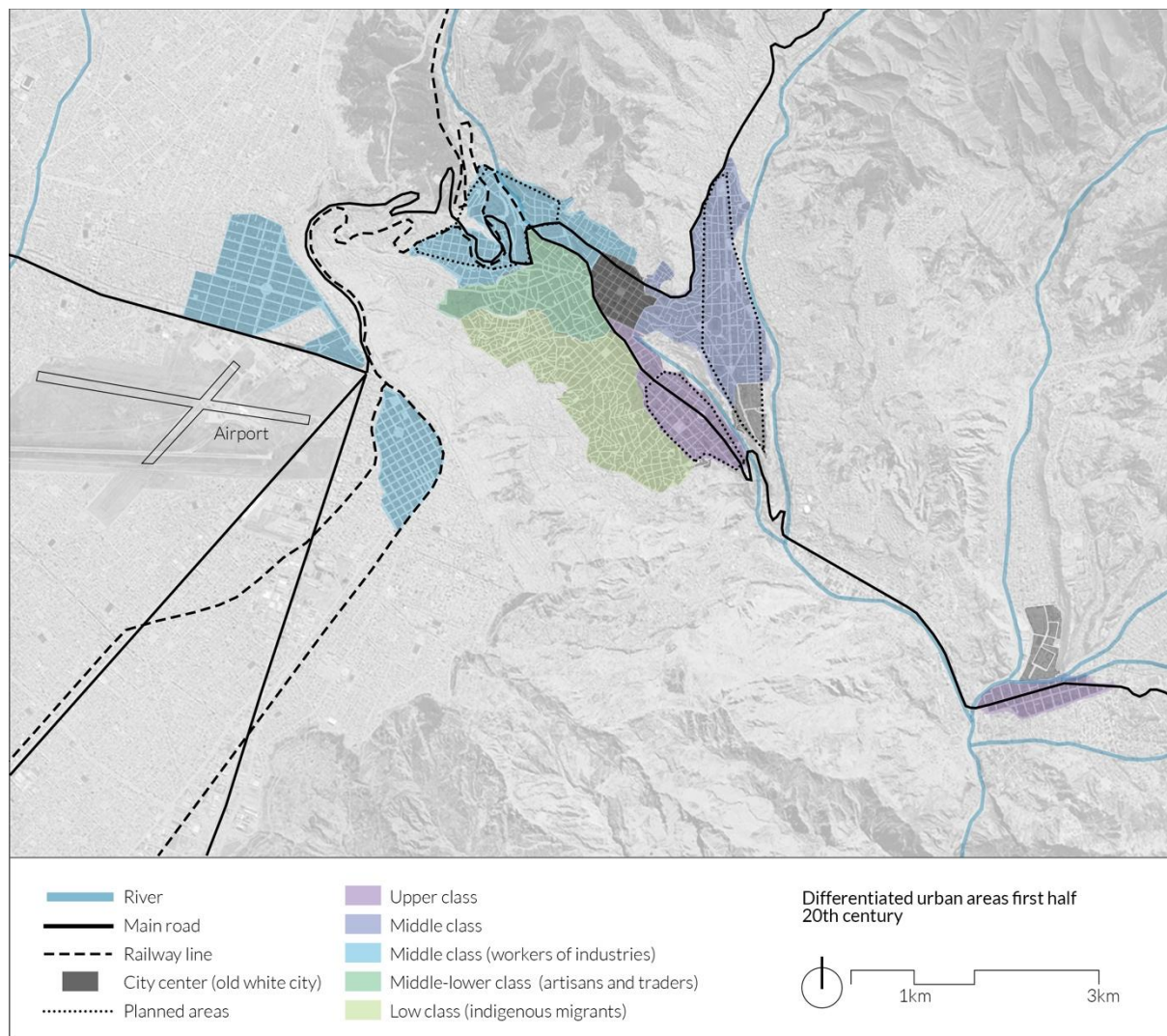
Map 6: Differentiated urban areas first half 20th century. Elaborated by the author based on Cajías et al. (2007), Cuadros (2002), GAML map (2007), and GAMEA (n.d.)

The areas of the city were not only differentiated by the socio-economic class and ethnicity that inhabited them, but also by the built forms. The buildings of the city center and the middle and upper class neighborhoods contrasted with the constructions of the rest of the city. In the city center, new governmental, administrative, and financial buildings were constructed, they were characterized by the European architecture styles that symbolized the status of the city as the seat of government (Cuadros, 2002) (Image 1). The neighborhoods of the middle and upper classes were characterized by good quality and even luxurious residences with architectural designs that also responded to European styles (Cuadros, 2002; Schoop, 1981) (Image 2). These material transformations in the city were understood by the elites as synonyms of progress and modernity (Guevara, 2021). On the other hand, the old

middle-low class neighborhoods, where the artisan a trader population was located, were characterized by colonial architecture, and the low-class areas, where the indigenous migrants from the countryside settled, were characterized by houses made of adobe (Image 3), similar to the ones in the Altiplano (Schoop, 1981).
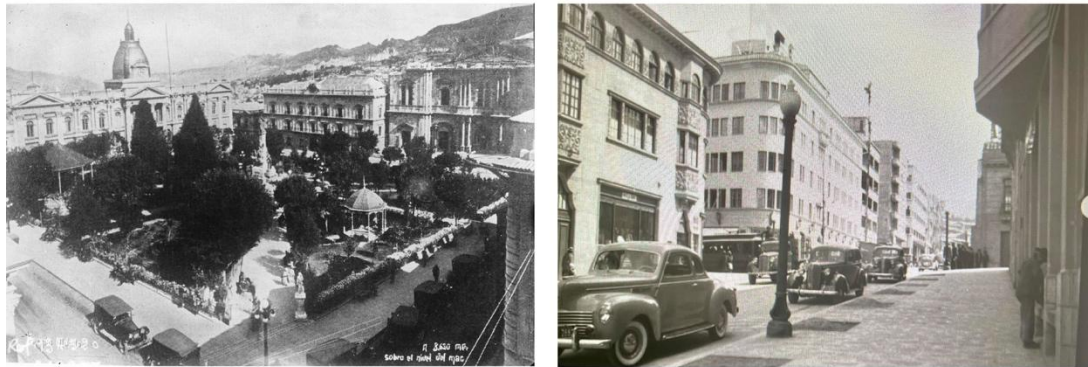
Image 1: City center during the first half of the 20th century. Sources:

https://www.facebook.com/AhoraHistoriasyLeyendasdeBolivia,

https://www.facebook.com/photo
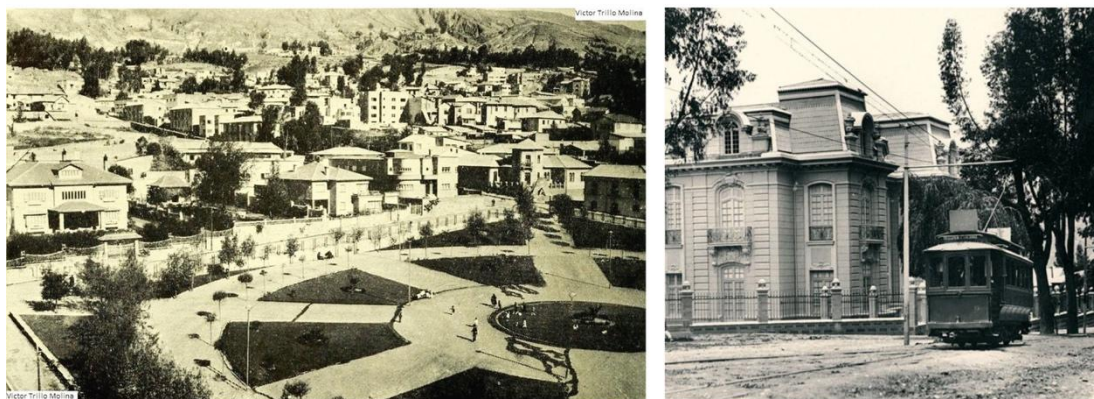
Image 2: Left, upper class neighborhood in the first half of the 20th century. Right, upper class residence in the first half of the 20th century. Sources:

https://www.facebook.com/photo, https://estebanmoralesb.wordpress.com
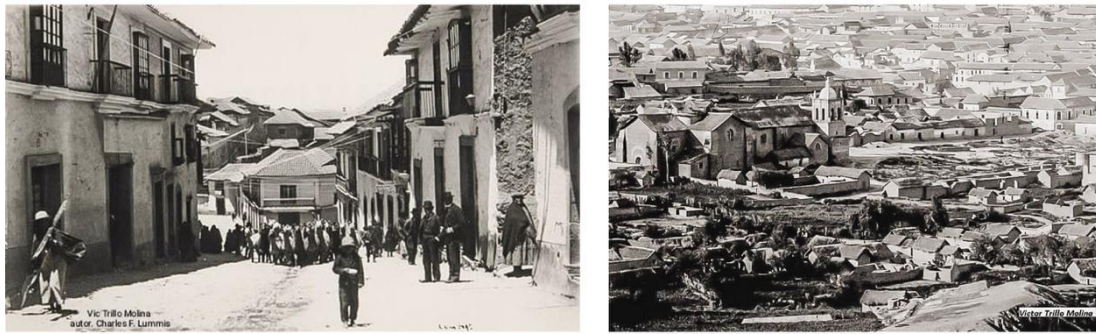
Image 3: Left, street of an old middle-lower class neighborhood at the beginning of the 20th century. Right, old lower class area at the beginning of the 20th century. Sources: https://www.facebook.com/groups/LaPazFotosAntiguas, https://www.facebook.com/photo

Socio-spatial differentiation and urban governance in the first half of the 20th century

In the first half of the 20th century, the local government planned some expansion areas and undertook infrastructure projects in the valley. In the first decade,s the government established the expansion areas for the upper class, in the south, and for the working class and industries, in the north (Cuadros, 2002) (Map 6). Moreover, it was the local government the one that assigned the location, planned, and designed the middle class neighborhood located in the east (ibid.) (Map 6). However, while middle and upper class areas benefited from planning actions and public investment, the expanding neighborhoods of the indigenous migrant population were not taken into account by the local government. Cuadros (2002) argues that this was because of two reasons: first of all, the local government had a classist and racist approach that did not see the areas inhabited by indigenous migrants as a priority. Secondly, it was not able to foresee such unprecedented population growth, and therefore did not manage to design urban strategies to respond to the needs of the increasing urban population.

In the case of El Alto, the urbanization process was a product of land speculation. Until the 20th century, El Alto remained a rural area controlled by the elites and served as a space for La Paz's complementary urban services and infrastructure, such as the airport. However, in the early decades of the century, the rising demand for urbanized land led landowners to subdivide their properties and sell them as urban plots (Cuadros, 2002) (Image 4). It is

estimated that the speculative process of land subdivision generated 134.000 properties (Cuadros, 2002; Poupeau, 2010).

Image 4: Urbanization of El Alto in the first half of the 20th century (it is possible to observe the border of the Altiplano and the mountain valley in the distance). Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo

Social stratification in the society of the second half of the 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century the three categories (white, *mestizo* and indigenous) that had been used to describe the society of La Paz were challenged by Albó et al. (1983), who argued that the society of La Paz was configured by two poles or worlds that were in constant tension. On one hand, there was the Western world, which represented the dominant culture that sought to homogenize, modernize, and assimilate the differences, but at the same time, it discriminated, segregated, and tried to distance itself from the indigenous world. On the other hand, the indigenous Aymara[10] world tried to contradictorily assimilate the dominant culture that allowed social mobility, and at the same time preserve its own customs and language (Albó et al., 1983 in Barragán & Soliz, 2009). These two worlds did not represent two parallel societies, but instead they configured one single heterogeneous

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[10] In the 20th century the indigenous world started to be referred to as Aymara because this was the predominant language spoken among indigenous people.

society with cultural variations that reflected the society's class stratification (Greaves, 1973 in Albó et al., 1983).

Therefore, in the second half of the 20th century, the society of La Paz continued to be characterized by a hierarchical structure based on the articulation of class, occupation, and ethnicity or cultural aspects[11]. The people who configured the upper classes were referred to as non-Aymara whites (Albó et al., 1983). They represented the western face of La Paz and were usually workers in private companies as well as in public institutions, and in many cases held high positions (Albó et al., 1983; Barragán & Soliz, 2009). On the other hand, the lower and middle classes were composed of people who belonged to the Aymara world. The Aymara urban culture was heterogeneous; the majority of the Aymara population were immigrants from the countryside, but many of them had been born in the city and presented various non-Aymara cultural characteristics. In general, the Aymara population was dedicated to low-ranking jobs in public institutions or private companies (e.g., industrial workers, construction workers, cleaning staff, etc.), and many women worked for wealthy households performing domestic work (Albó et al., 1982). Moreover, a large group of the immigrants and second-generation immigrants was self-employed and worked in small family businesses dedicated to artisanal work (mostly clothes making), commercial activities, transportation, and a few were dedicated to agriculture (ibid.). In addition, there were many immigrant women dedicated to "subsistence" commercial activity and who worked in small shops and street stalls (ibid.).

Unprecedented urban growth in the second half of the 20th century

During the second half of the 20th century, significant national events generated rural-urban migration that led to an unprecedented urban growth in La Paz. The city went from having 292.507 inhabitants in 1950 to approximately 735.000 inhabitants in 1980 (Cuadros, 2002).

First, in 1952, a National Revolution replaced the oligarchy (constituted by mine and land owners) with a revolutionary party, which implemented important reforms that aimed to

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[11] Different authors used different terms to refer to cultural characteristics. Albó used the term cultural aspects, whereas the authors van Lindert & Verkoren, who studied spatial segregation in La Paz, used the term ethnicity.

redistribute rural and urban land. The Agrarian Reform redistributed lands from oligarchs to indigenous people. This reform eliminated serfdom, but the lands were given back under the logic of individual property rather than communal property. This generated small, low-productivity agricultural plots, and the government redirected its investments in agriculture to the east of the country (Coordinadora de Historia, 2024; Cuadros, 2002; Poupeau, 2010). The Urban Reform improved urban living conditions by expropriating peri-urban large properties (whose owners belonged to the oligarchy), limiting the size of urban holdings, and providing urban land to the peasants that previously worked in those properties, as well as to low-income families, rural immigrants, and union members (Coordinadora de Historia, 2024; Cuadros, 2002; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). These two reforms generated massive migration from the countryside to the cities. Then, at the beginning of the 1980s, a drought produced by the El Niño phenomenon forced many farmers to leave the countryside (Coordinadora de Historia, 2024; Poupeau, 2010). Moreover, in 1985, the government decided to adopt the neoliberal political-economic model. It liberalized the economy and reduced the state apparatus and fiscal spending, to try to stop hyperinflation in Bolivia. In consequence, around 21.000 to 27.000 mine workers were fired from the state mining company, and were left with no other option but to seek new job opportunities in the cities (Coordinadora de Historia, 2024; Cuadros, 2002; Poupeau, 2010; Valencia, 2016). In sum, the creation of unproductive small agricultural properties, the elimination of serfdom, the underinvestment in agriculture in the Altiplano, the possibility to access to urban land, environmental conditions, and the laid off of thousands of mine workers, generated massive migration from the countryside to the cities that resulted in an unprecedented population growth and expansion of La Paz (Map 7).
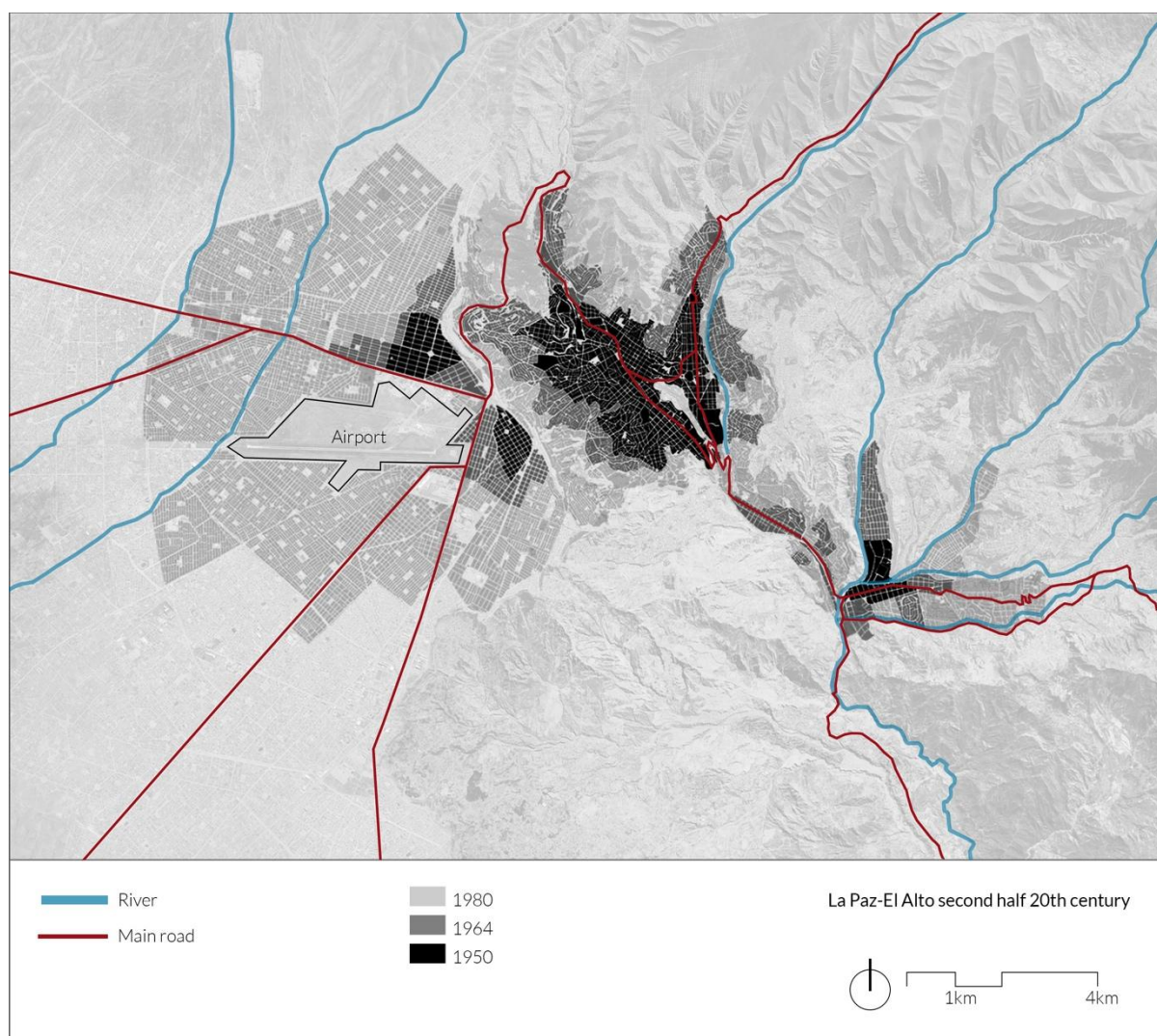
Map 7: La Paz-El Alto second half 20th century. Elaborated by the author based on Cuadros (2002), GAMLP map (2007), GAMEA map (n.d.), and https://potelalto2045.maps.arcgis.com/

Socio-spatial segregation in the second half of the 20th century

During the second half of the 20th century, La Paz expanded, following the socio-spatial trends of the first half of the century, and developed as a socio-spatial segregated city (Map 8). The segregated character of the city was defined by the differences among areas in terms of housing quality and access to urban infrastructure and services (van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). The middle and upper classes progressively moved from the north towards the lower areas of the south, and their neighborhoods consolidated as the city's most privileged areas (Cuadros, 2002) (Map 8). These neighborhoods were located in relatively flat areas, and they were characterized by good quality housing, urban services, and infrastructure (van Lindert &

47

Verkoren, 1982). Moreover, these neighborhoods were differentiated from the rest of the city by private and prestigious spaces such as leisure and sports clubs, hotels, schools, supermarkets, bakeries, cinemas, apartment buildings, and gated neighborhoods (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). On the other hand, the lower classes, mostly composed of migrants, were located in the sloped areas of the valley and El Alto (Map 8) (Cuadros, 2002; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). These areas experienced rapid urbanization in the second half of the 20th century due to massive immigration. They became self-constructed low-income neighborhoods, characterized by low-quality housing and a lack of basic urban infrastructure (ibid.). Like in the first half of the century, the city was not only segregated in class terms, van Lindert & Verkoren (1982) argue that the place of residence was not only defined by the socio-economic class and level of income, but also by ethnicity. Therefore, in the latter half of the 20th century, La Paz maintained its class and ethnic segregated character.
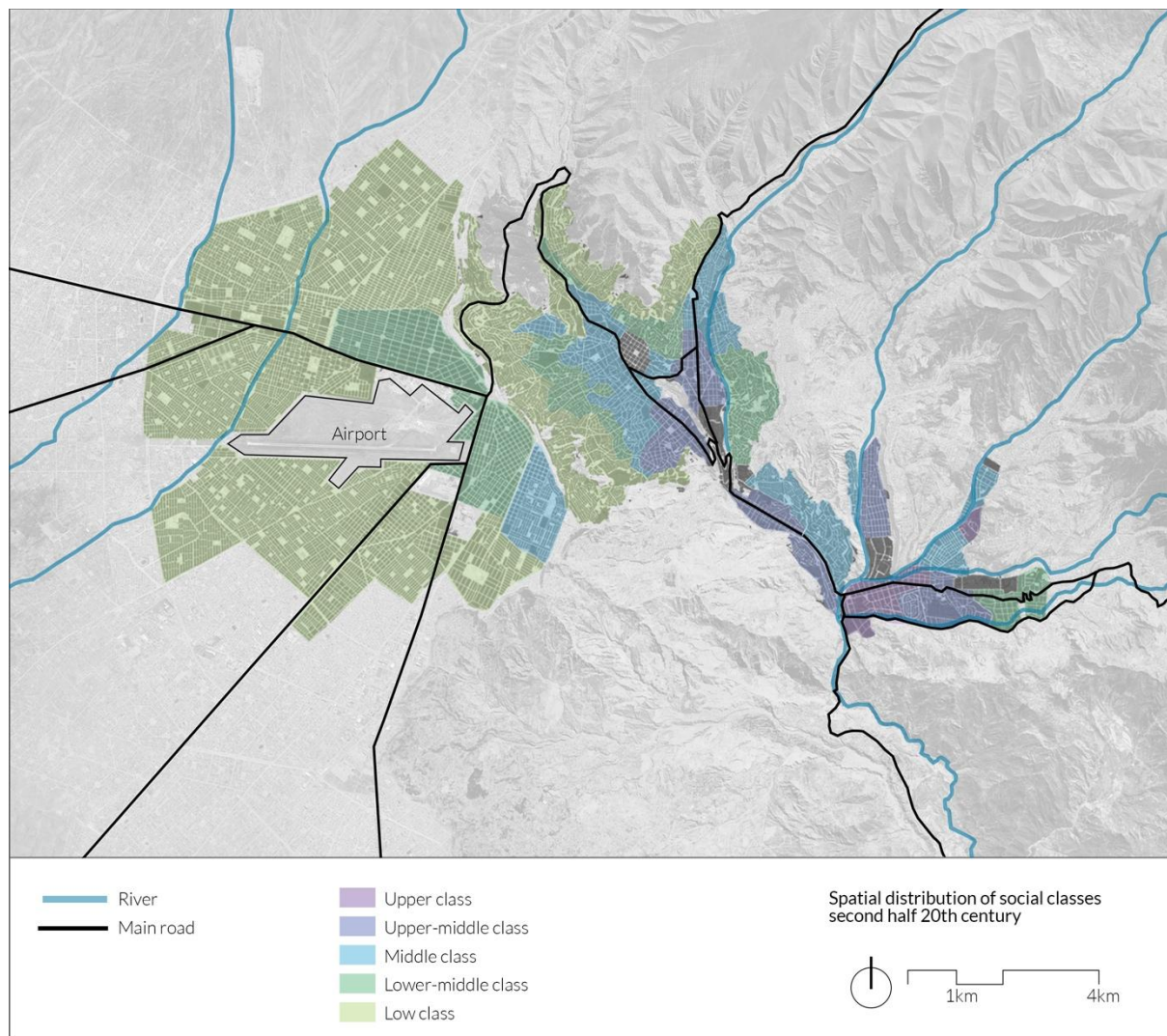
Map 8: Spatial distribution of social classes second half 20th century. Elaborated by the author based on Schoop (1981), Popeau (2010), Cuadros (2002), GAMLP map (2007), GAMEA map (n.d.), and https://potelalto2045.maps.arcgis.com/

The different urban areas were also differentiated by the architecture. The upper and upper middle-class areas in the south were characterized by single-family houses surrounded by private gardens (Image 5, left). In the city center and upper class areas located in the north of the city, the skyline started to shift as buildings in the international style, ranging from ten to twenty five stories, became increasingly common (Image 5, right) (Cuadros, 2002; Schoop, 1981; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). These high-quality buildings were destined for apartments for the upper classes, private offices, and administrative offices for public administration (Cuadros, 2002; Schoop, 1981), and configured the "modernizing axis" of the city (Schoop, 1981).

The lower-middle and middle class areas where the artisan and trader population lived were characterized by buildings of three to five stories made of concrete and brick walls, which were usually left unpainted (Image 6) (Schoop, 1981). The low class areas, previously characterized by adobe houses, became progressively characterized by houses made of brick and cement, and corrugated iron roofs (Image 7) (Cuadros, 2002; Schoop, 1981).
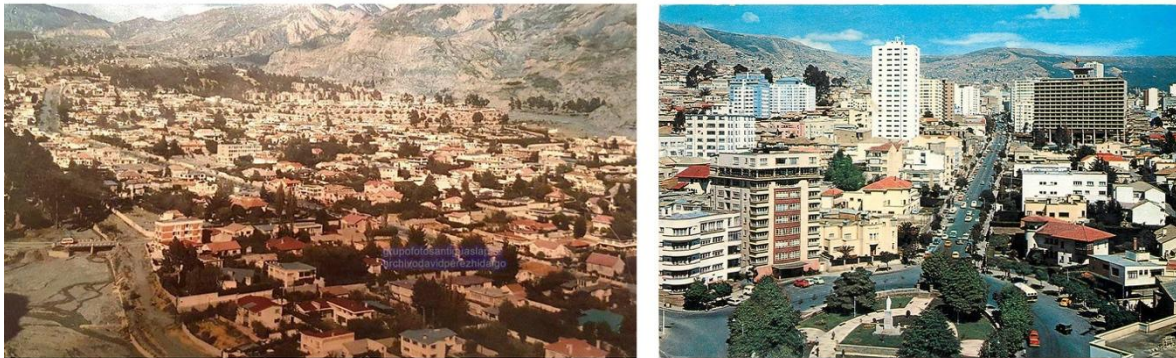
Image 5: Left, upper class neighborhood in the south in the second half of the 20th century. Right, skyline shifting in the second half of the 20th century. Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo
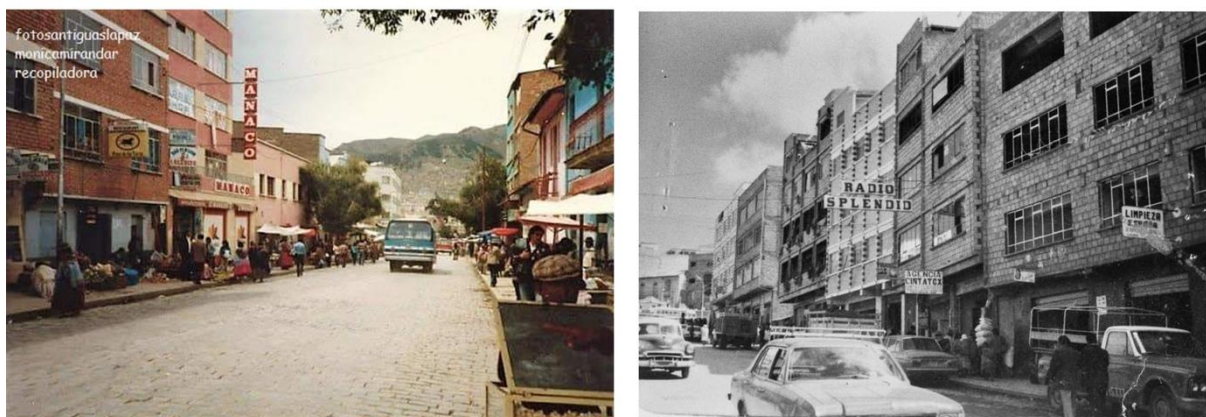
Image 6: Lower-middle class artisans and traders area in the second half of the 20th century. Source: https://www.facebook.com/photo
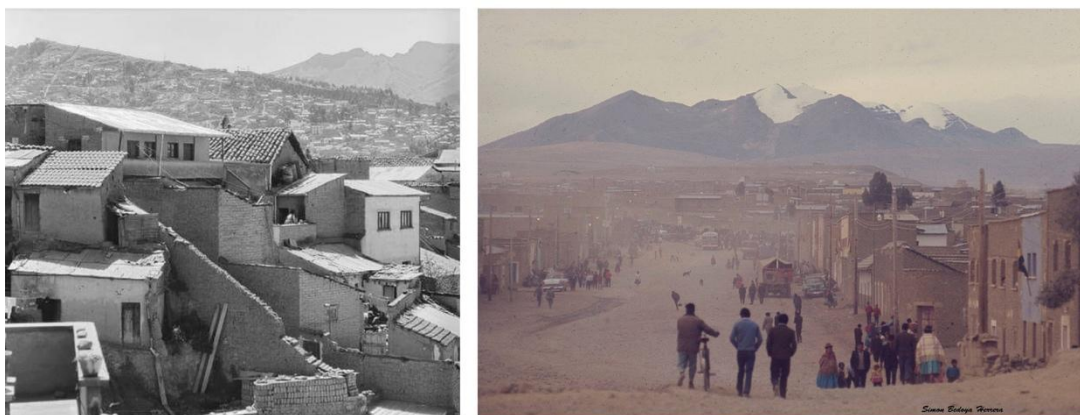
Image 7: Left, low class neighborhood in a sloped area of the valley. Right, low class neighborhood in El Alto. Source: https://www.facebook.com/groups

Socio-spatial segregation and urban governance in the second half of the 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century, the local government and private initiatives had an important role in shaping the segregated character of the city. The middle and upper class areas, located in the lower and flatter parts of the valley, concentrated most of the public investments (65% in 1960) and public interventions (Cuadros, 2002). The local government favored these areas by prioritizing them with the provision of basic urban infrastructure[12], and with urban services such as hospitals and schools (Cuadros, 2002; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). Moreover, these areas concentrated most of the private initiatives of urban services such as schools and sports clubs (Cuadros, 2002), and also apartment buildings constructed by private companies that targeted high-income clients (van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). The high property prices in these areas were, of course, not affordable for the low income families, who had no other option to settle in the peripheral sloped areas of the valley and El Alto. Contrary to the upper class areas, the expanding low class areas received little intervention from the local government. These areas were located on peri-urban properties

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[12] In 1976 only 47% of the population had domestic water supply. The water infrastructure was mostly located in the city center and the lower areas of the valley.

that, following the Urban Reform, were progressively transformed into urban land. In the years following the issuing of the Urban Reform, the government carried out land expropriations and allocation, but the organization of the urban space was managed by the beneficiaries themselves (Cuadros, 2002). Later on, the urbanization of peri-urban land was led by organized groups of land dealers, and by the 1980s, real estate agencies, who negotiated with land owners and conducted the subdivision and sale of land (Cuadros, 2002; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). The process of allocation and sale of land usually did not include the development of urban services and infrastructure. Therefore, the low income neighborhoods emerged as self-constructed areas that often lacked basic urban services and infrastructure (ibid.).

The national government also contributed to the segregation of the city by benefiting certain lower-middle class groups with housing and tax waivers. In the 20th century, the national government developed some social housing projects for specific population groups such as miners, teachers, and public employees (Cuadros, 2002; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982) (Image 8). These neighborhoods were provided with urban services and infrastructure, and were exempt from paying taxes for ten years (van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). The living conditions of these areas contrasted with the surrounding self-built neighborhoods that did not enjoy urban services and had to pay taxes (ibid.).

Las viviendas de interés social disponen de los servicios esenciales
Viviendas CONAVI — El Alto La Paz
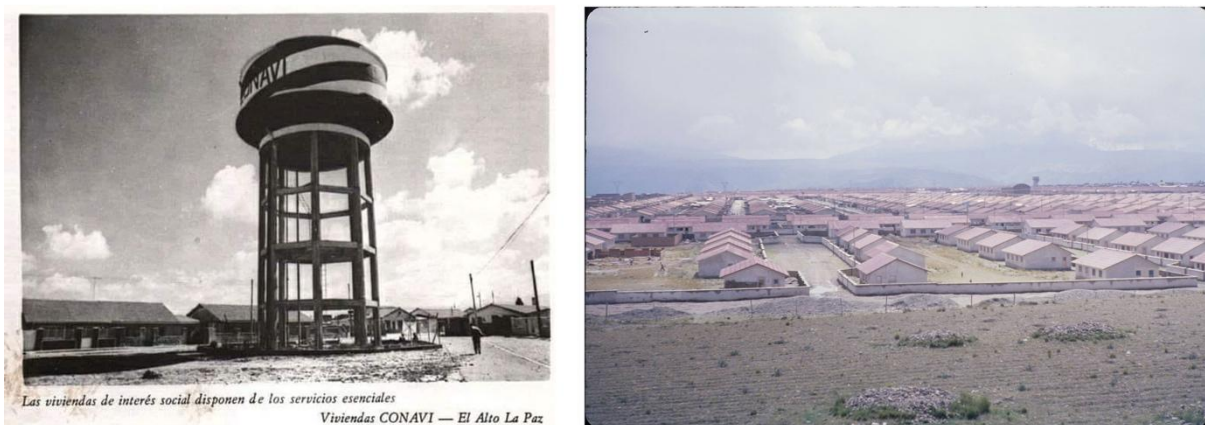
Image 8: Social housing in El Alto for public employees. Source:

https://www.facebook.com/groups

Foundation of the city of El Alto

In 1988, El Alto gained administrative autonomy from La Paz and was founded as a city (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002). The administrative separation of La Paz and El Alto was the result of two reasons. First of all, El Alto suffered years of neglect from the local government. The government of La Paz saw El Alto as La Paz's industrial area and space of complementary urban services and infrastructure, and barely invested in improving the living conditions of its inhabitants. In spite of the significant population growth (95.434 inhabitants by 1985), lack of urban infrastructure and services, and constant demands for public intervention through *juntas vecinales* (neighborhood councils), it only allocated between 1% to 8% of the total budget to El Alto (Cuadros, 2002). The government claimed that the inhabitants of this area did not pay taxes and were not formally integrated into the city, but according to Cuadros (2002), the treatment that El Alto received from the local government was clearly discriminatory. Second, the majority of the population of El Alto (who were mostly migrants from the countryside) did not feel a sense of belonging to La Paz, and administrative autonomy was understood as an opportunity to generate a self-identity (Cuadros, 2002). Therefore, the persistent neglect of the local government and the need to build a self-identity led the population of El Alto to demand administrative autonomy.

The administrative separation of El Alto from La Paz did not mean, however, the creation of two independent urban agglomerations. La Paz and El Alto continued to depend on each other in order to operate. First of all, there were some urban services, such as phone service and internet, that were installed and managed as a single network in the whole urban area (Cuadros, 2002). Secondly, El Alto hosted important infrastructure (such as the airport) that was regularly used by the population of La Paz, and also manufactured various products that were consumed in La Paz (ibid.). Moreover, La Paz accommodated urban infrastructure and services that were still being used by the population of El Alto. Finally, although El Alto developed its own mechanisms to generate jobs and became an autonomous destination for immigrants (Hilari, 2020), a considerable amount of people from El Alto (around 20%) continued to commute every day to La Paz to work and study (Hilari, 2020; Urquizo, 2006). In a nutshell, La Paz and El Alto, although administratively separate, formed a single urban agglomeration (Cuadros, 2002; Urquizo, 2006).

Even though El Alto and La Paz can be considered a single urban agglomeration, El Alto developed its own dynamics. In the last years of the 20th century, its population increased at a pace of 5% to 9% annually, whereas La Paz grew at a pace of 1.7%. In 1985, El Alto had 95.434 inhabitants, and ten years later it had reached 405.492 inhabitants (F. Cajías et al., 2007). Moreover, the society of El Alto had particular characteristics. It was an heterogenous society configured by three different groups: the migrants from the rural areas that were characterized by their Aymara cultural traits, the people that came from the mines and towns in the Altiplano who presented both Aymara and western customs, and the long-term residents whose culture was strongly influenced by western manners (F. Cajías et al., 2007).

The different groups of people were located in different areas of the city (Map 8). In the south-east part of the city, one of the oldest and better equipped areas, was located a middle and lower-middle class group constituted by long-term residents, many of them were workers of public institutions that lived in the housing project developed by the national government in the 1970s (Cuadros, 2002; Poupeau, 2010). The southern area was home to migrants from the mines and low-income employees, whereas the northern area was the place where the migrant population from the rural areas settled (Poupeau, 2010). Moreover, the city had areas where intense commercial activity concentrated; these areas belonged to the lower-middle class population. The main commercial area was located in the intersection of the main roads that connected El Alto with La Paz, followed by the lower-middle class area located in the northeast that started to gain importance as a commercial center (Cuadros, 2002).

La Paz-El Alto by the end of the 20th century

By the end of the 20th century, La Paz-El Alto had become a socially and spatially segregated urban agglomeration, comprising a total population of 1,120,000, with 405,000 residents in El Alto and 635,283 in La Paz (Cuadros, 2002). Although interconnected and mutually dependent, La Paz and El Alto presented important differences between themselves. The Aymara migrant-dominated demographic of El Alto and a majority low class population distinguished it from La Paz, which was strongly characterized by the significant presence of the State and a westernized upper class. Moreover, they also presented internal differences; they were characterized by heterogeneous societies and differentiated urban areas. In La Paz,

the wealthy areas were located in the lower parts of the valley, and the low income neighborhoods were located in the sloped areas of the north. On the other hand, in El Alto, the middle class neighborhoods were located in the southeast part close to La Paz, and the low income neighborhoods expanded to the north and south, separated by the large area of the airport. In a nutshell, at the end of the 20th century, La Paz-El Alto came to be a heterogeneous and socio-spatially segregated urban agglomeration.

Chapter summary

This chapter explored the socio-spatial structure of La Paz in the 20th century. It showed the continuation of a hierarchical social structure based on economic activity and ethnicity, as well as the persistence of two cultural worlds. Although significant urban changes took place in the 20th century – the presence of state power, industrialization, unprecedented urban growth, and administrative separation of El Alto – socio-spatial segregation along socio-ethnic terms continued. The next chapter will revise the socio-spatial characteristics of La Paz in the 21st century, where the persistence of two cultural poles is evidenced and continuities in terms of socio-spatial segregation are identified.

1492
Beginning of
Spanish
colonization

1825
Independence
of Bolivia

1952
National
Revolution

1988
Foundation
of El Alto city

1548
Foundation
of La Paz city

1899
La Paz as
Seat of
Govern-
ment

2000

SOCIETY

Reestructing of the colonial social hierarchy

White elites identifed with European modernity and claimed they embodied progress. They viewed Indigenous people as "backward" and sought to "civilize" them by incorporating them as cheap labor into the capitalist economy

Social hierarchical structure

Overlapping categories of class, ethnicity, and occupation
Upper class: composed by **whites** who were mine owners, land owners, wholesale traders, privileged public workers, and liberal professionals
Middle class: configured by **mestizo** dedicated to factory work, artisanal work, retail trade, public employees
Lower class: composed by **rural indigenous migrants** dedicated to construction, transportation, domestic work, and agriculture

La Paz as Seat of Government

Center of political, economic, and commercial power

Urban growth

Growing population that came from other cities, countries, and from the countryside

From colonial dual city to "modern" city

SPACE

(C) **City center** (former Spanish city): administrative and financial core, characterized by European style administrative buildings

(S) **South**: upper class neighborhoods characterized by luxurious residences in European architectural styles

(E) **East**: middle-class neighborhood

(N) **North and El Alto**: industrial and working class neighborhoods

(W) **West**: lower-middle-class artisans and traders, and rural-urban migrants areas

(A) Altiplano
(B) National/interna-
tional cities

1492
Beginning of Spanish colonization

1548
Foundation of La Paz city

1825
Independence of Bolivia

1899
La Paz as Seat of Government

1952
National Revolution

1988
Foundation of El Alto city

2000

SOCIETY

Western and Aymara cultural poles

Society was shaped by two cultural poles in constant tension
Western world: dominant, assimilative, and discriminatory
Aymara world: simultaneously seeks to adopt elements of the dominant culture for social mobility while maintaining its own traditions and language

Stratified society

Class, occupation, and ethniciy intertwine
Upper classes: primarily non-Aymara whites involved in high-status jobs in public and private sectors
Middle and lower classes: mainly composed of Aymara people, including rural migrants and urban-born population with varying degrees of cultural assimilation, dedicated to lower-tier jobs or are self-employed and operate small family businesses

Unprecedented urban growth

Reforms of the National Revolution, environmental factors, and neoliberal economic reforms triggered rural-to-urban migration
Reforms of the National Revolution:
  Agrarian Reform: redistributed land to indigenous people, ending serfdom but promoting small, inefficient, individually (instead of communal) owned plots
  Urban Reform: redistributed peri-urban land to low-income families, rural migrants, and union members, making urban settlement more accessible

Socio-spatial segregation

(C) **City center**: hosts the new government, the area is characterized by European and international style buildings
(S) **Northern and southern flat areas**: upper/upper-middle class neighborhoods characterized by international style tall buildings or single family houses, urban infrastructure, and exclusive amenities
(N) **Northern steeped areas and El Alto**: lower-middle/lower class neighborhoods, largely composed by rural-urban migrants, generally lack adequate housing and basic infrastructure

(A) Altiplano

SPACE

1492
Beginning of
Spanish
colonization

1548
Foundation
of La Paz city

1825
Independence
of Bolivia

1899
La Paz as
Seat of
Govern-
ment

1952
National
Revolution

1988
Foundation
of El Alto city

2000

SPACE

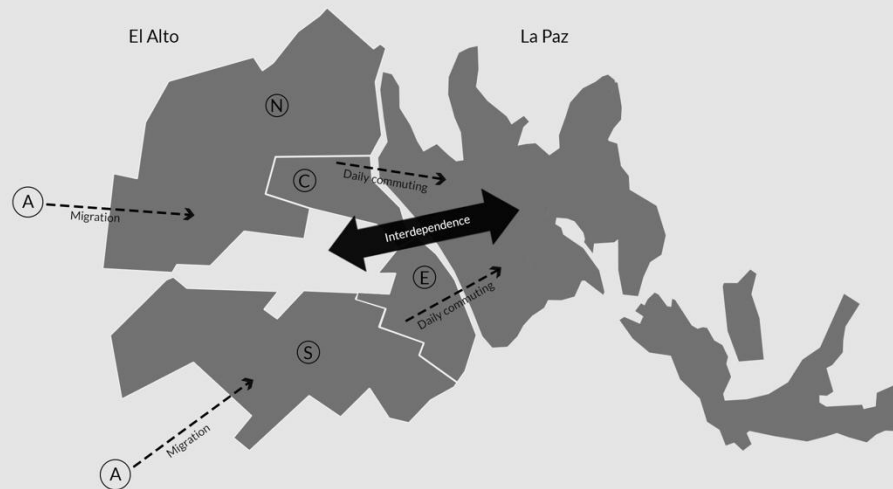## Administrative separation of La Paz and El Alto

El Alto demands and gains administrative independence from La Paz due to neglect from the local government and the emergence of an Aymara identity consciousness

La Paz and El Alto interdependence

La Paz and El Alto are interdpendent cities. Some urban services are managed as single networks in the whole metropolitan area. El Alto hosts important infrastructure used by the Paceño population and manufactures products consumed in La Paz. At the same time, La Paz has urban infrastrcutre and services used by people from El Alto. Additionally, people from El Alto commute every day to work in La Paz.

Heterogenous population and urban areas

(E) **Southeast**: middle and lower-middle class group constituted by long-term residents, many of them were workers of public institutions

(S) **South**: migrants from the mines and low-income employees

(N) **North**: migrant population from the rural areas

(C) **Commercial areas**: lower-middle class areas were commercial activity is concentrated

El Alto   La Paz

(N)

(C)   Daily commuting

(A) ---→
Migration

Interdependence

(E) ---→
Daily commuting

(S)

(A) ---→
Migration

CHAPTER 3: SOCIO-SPATIAL STRUCTURE OF CONTEMPORARY LA PAZ-EL ALTO

This chapter provides a revision of the social and spatial structure of La Paz-El Alto in the 21st century. First, it explores the characteristics of the urban society that is characterized by an articulation of ethnicity, economic activity, and class. Second, the socio-spatial segregated character of La Paz-El Alto is analyzed through maps that show the spatial distribution of the different social groups according to ethnicity, class, and economic activity. It becomes clear that the entanglement of these three elements shapes the socio-spatial structure of the urban agglomeration. Then, the materiality of the different areas of the city is explored through the identification of the different types of architecture. Finally, some aspects of urban governance that contributed to the material differences between La Paz and El Alto are reviewed.

The society of contemporary La Paz-El Alto

In the 21st century, the society of La Paz-El Alto continues to be characterized by an articulation of ethnicity, occupation, and class. The ethnicity of the population was enquired by the National Census of Population and Housing (CNPV) of 2001 by asking the population to self-identify as either part of an indigenous group (such as Aymara, Quechua, Guaraní) or as not belonging to any indigenous group. The result of the census shows that in La Paz-El Alto, 62% of the population considers itself as belonging to the indigenous Aymara[13] group; however, there are some differences between the two cities. In the case of La Paz, 50% of the population identifies as Aymara and 39% as not belonging to any indigenous group. In the case of El Alto 74% of the population identifies as Aymara, many of them are immigrants from the rural areas in the Altiplano but more than half of the population was born in the city, and only 18% as not being part of any indigenous group (Barragán & Soliz, 2009; Urquizo, 2006). Although El Alto presents a higher percentage of Aymara population, both cities are mostly Aymara. Later on, in 2017, the Local Survey of Racial Categorizations (ELCR) used the same categories of the CNPV 2001 to investigate the ethnic self-identification of the people in La Paz and El Alto. The results of this survey show that in 2017, 53,4% of the population of La

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[13] The Aymara indigenous group is the predominant group in La Paz-El Alto.

Paz-El Alto identified as Aymara. However, there are important differences between the two cities. In La Paz, 18,6% of the population identifies as Aymara, and 72,2% consider themselves as not belonging to any indigenous group. Whereas in El Alto, 75,7% of the population consider themselves Aymara, and only 18,5% of the people do not identify with any indigenous group (Loayza Bueno, 2018). Although the self-identification as Aymara diminished in the whole urban agglomeration, it mostly diminished in La Paz, whereas in El Alto it slightly increased. The results of these surveys show that, in general terms, the Aymara live in El Alto, whereas those who self-identify as not belonging to any indigenous group live in La Paz (ibid.).

When the Aymara and non-Aymara groups are analyzed in terms of occupation, important dichotomic differences can be identified. The CNPV 2001 shows that 60% of the people that identifies as being part of an indigenous group (mostly Aymara in La Paz-El Alto) is self-employed, usually dedicated to "informal" economic activities, whereas 57% of the people that do not identify with any indigenous group are public or private employees (Barragán & Soliz, 2009). In La Paz-El Alto, the non-Aymara people are mostly employees of public institutions or private companies, and many of them work in high positions (López et al., 2006); they belong to middle and upper socio-economic classes. On the other hand, the Aymara population presents particular characteristics that distinguish it from the non-Aymara world, but at the same time, it is socially and economically heterogeneous (Barragán & Soliz, 2009). In contrast to the non-Aymara people who are mostly staff workers, Aymara people have different occupations: private and public employees, traders, artisans and manufacturers, construction workers, and transport workers (Barragán & Soliz, 2009). Moreover, the Aymara world is divided into upper, middle, and lower classes. The middle class is divided into two groups: those who are staff workers and those who are self-employed, who are mostly dedicated to "informal" commercial activity and transport (Barragán & Soliz, 2009). The Aymara upper class is composed by an emerging Aymara *bourgeois* dedicated to "informal" commercial activity and transport (Arbona & Kohl, 2004; Derpic, 2019; Urquizo, 2006), their commercial networks are not only national, but they extend to other regions of America, and Asia and Europe (Urquizo, 2006). The Aymara lower class is composed of immigrants who come from the rural areas of the Altiplano; they usually work in construction or domestic services (Albó, 2006).

Furthermore, it is important to mention that different studies show that the ethnic categories used in previous centuries (white, *mestizo*, and indigenous) might now be associated with class. The Local Survey of Racial Categorizations (ELCR) 2017 found out that although 72% of the population in La Paz identifies as not belonging to any indigenous group, 71% identify as *mestizo*. In the case of El Alto, even though 75% of the people consider themselves Aymara, 48% identify as *mestizo* and 50% as indigenous. This study shows that people who identify and do not identify as Aymara can also identify as *mestizo*. Barragán (2009) argues that in the 21st century, the category *mestizo* might be associated with the middle class. Moreover, the people who belong to the elites of La Paz are often described as whites (López et al., 2006), whereas the emerging elites of El Alto are referred to as the Aymara *bourgeois*.

## Socio-spatial segregation in the 21st century La Paz-El Alto

In the first decades of the 21st century, La Paz-El Alto continues to expand (Map 9), and an important part of this expansion is due to rural-urban migration (Barragán & Soliz, 2009).
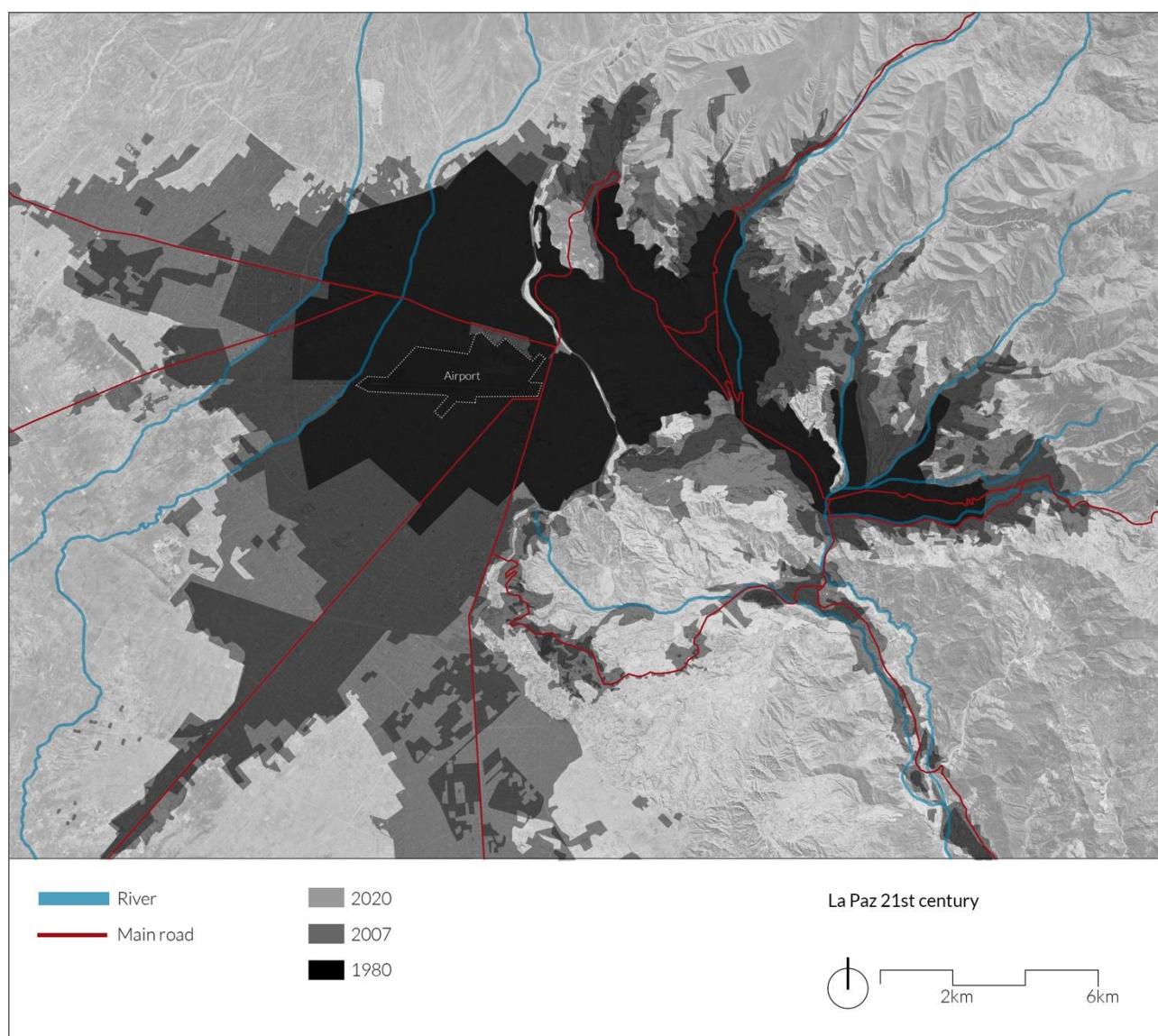
Map 9: La Paz-El Alto 21st century urban growth. Elaborated by the author based on
(Cuadros, 2002; GAMEA, n.d.)

The different ethnic-socio-economic groups of La Paz-El Alto are spatially distributed in a heterogeneous manner. Map 10 shows the spatial distribution of the Aymara and non-Aymara population, where it is possible to observe that these two groups are spatially distributed in the city, generating areas where there is less concentration of one or the other. In the case of La Paz, the Aymara people are mostly located in the peripheries (CODEPO et al., 2006). In the case of El Alto, the concentration of the Aymara population is slightly higher in the northern part of the city (CODEPO & IRD, 2005). On the other hand, the population that does not identify as Aymara is concentrated in the lower part of the valley in the case of La Paz, and in the case of El Alto it is concentrated in the eastern area next to La Paz.
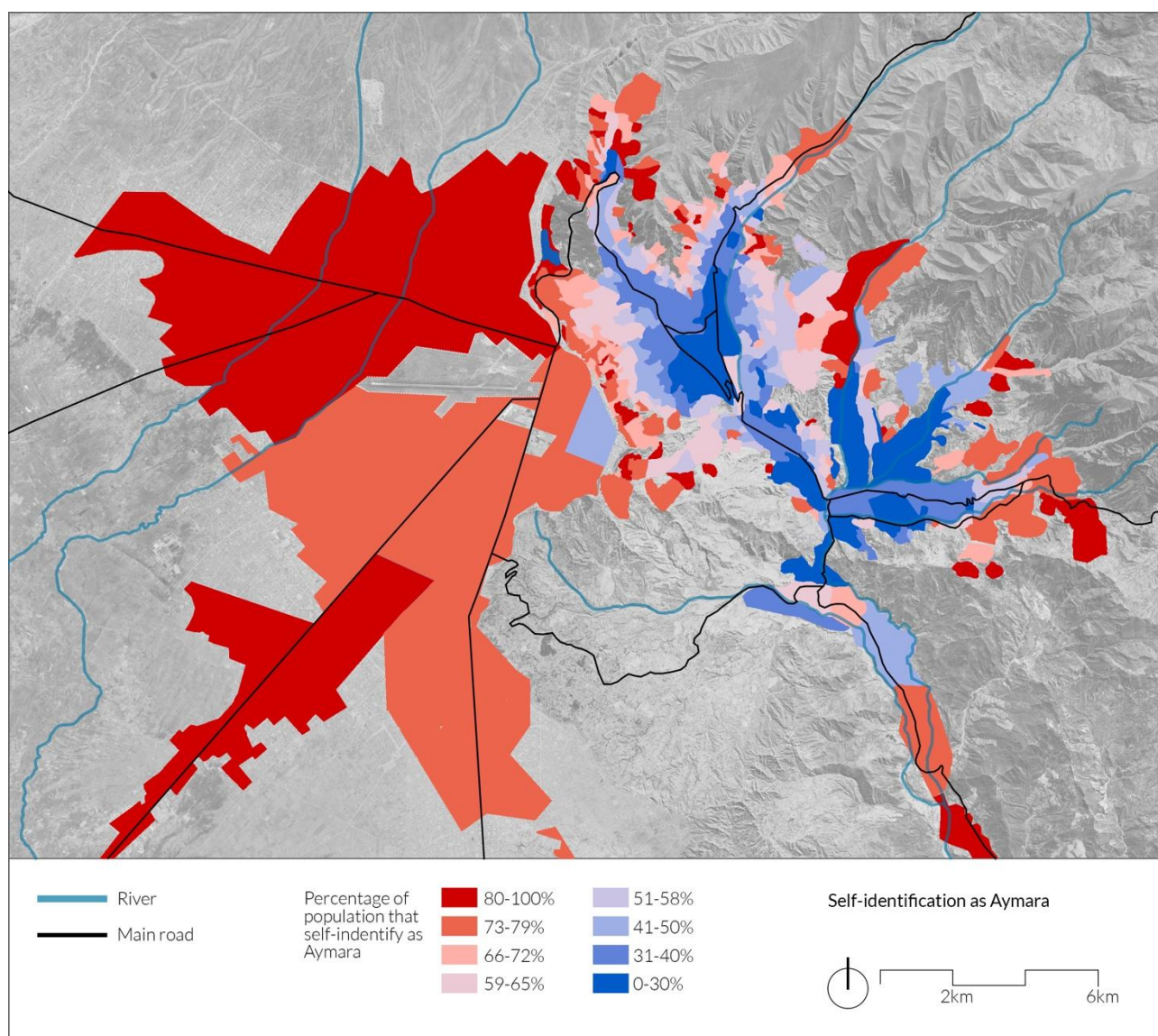
Map 10: La Paz-El Alto 21st century - self-identification as Aymara. Elaborated by the author based on (Albó, 2006; CODEPO et al., 2006; CODEPO & IRD, 2005)

Map 11 shows an approximate distribution of socio-economic classes. It is possible to observe that the upper classes are located in the lower parts of the valley and mostly in the southern area. In the case of La Paz, the middle class areas are located next to the upper class areas, and in El Alto, the middle class areas are located in the central eastern part of the city. The lower classes are located in the sloped areas of the valley in La Paz and the periphery of El Alto. When comparing La Paz and El Alto, it is clear that the latter presents larger poor areas. In the first years of the 21st century 65% and 70% of the population of El Alto is considered to be poor (F. Cajías et al., 2007; Poupeau, 2010).
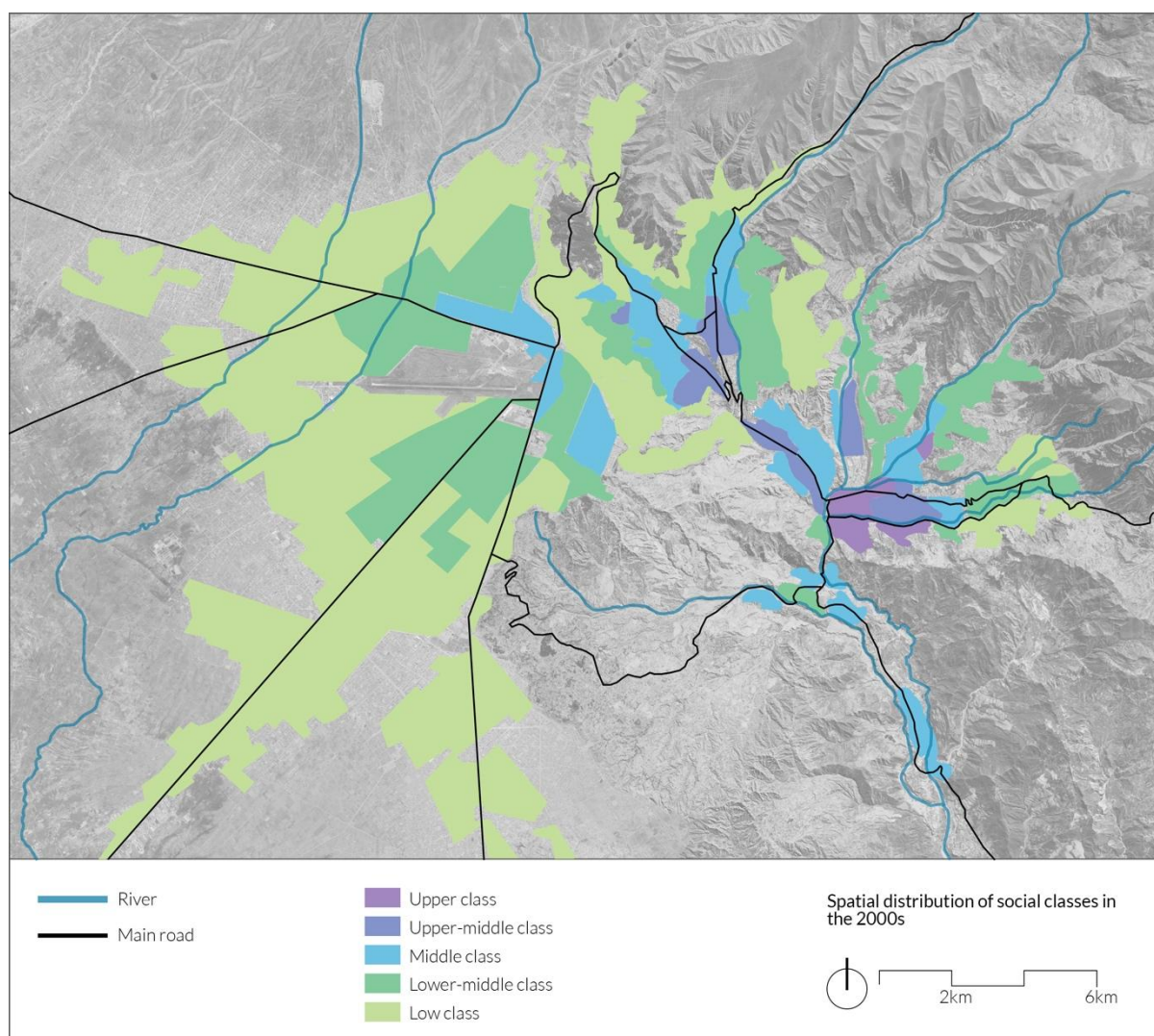
Map 11: La Paz-El Alto 21st century - self-identification as Aymara. Elaborated by the author based on descriptions in (Barragán & Soliz, 2009; Urquizo, 2006)

When comparing maps 10 and 11, it is possible to recognize that in La Paz, the wealthiest areas are the ones that present less concentration of Aymara population, and the poorest areas in the peripheries are the ones that present the highest concentration of Aymara population. In the case of El Alto, most of the population self-identifies as Aymara, and most of the city presents lower-middle and lower class areas. The area with the least concentration of Aymara population in El Alto is also one of the few middle class areas in this city.
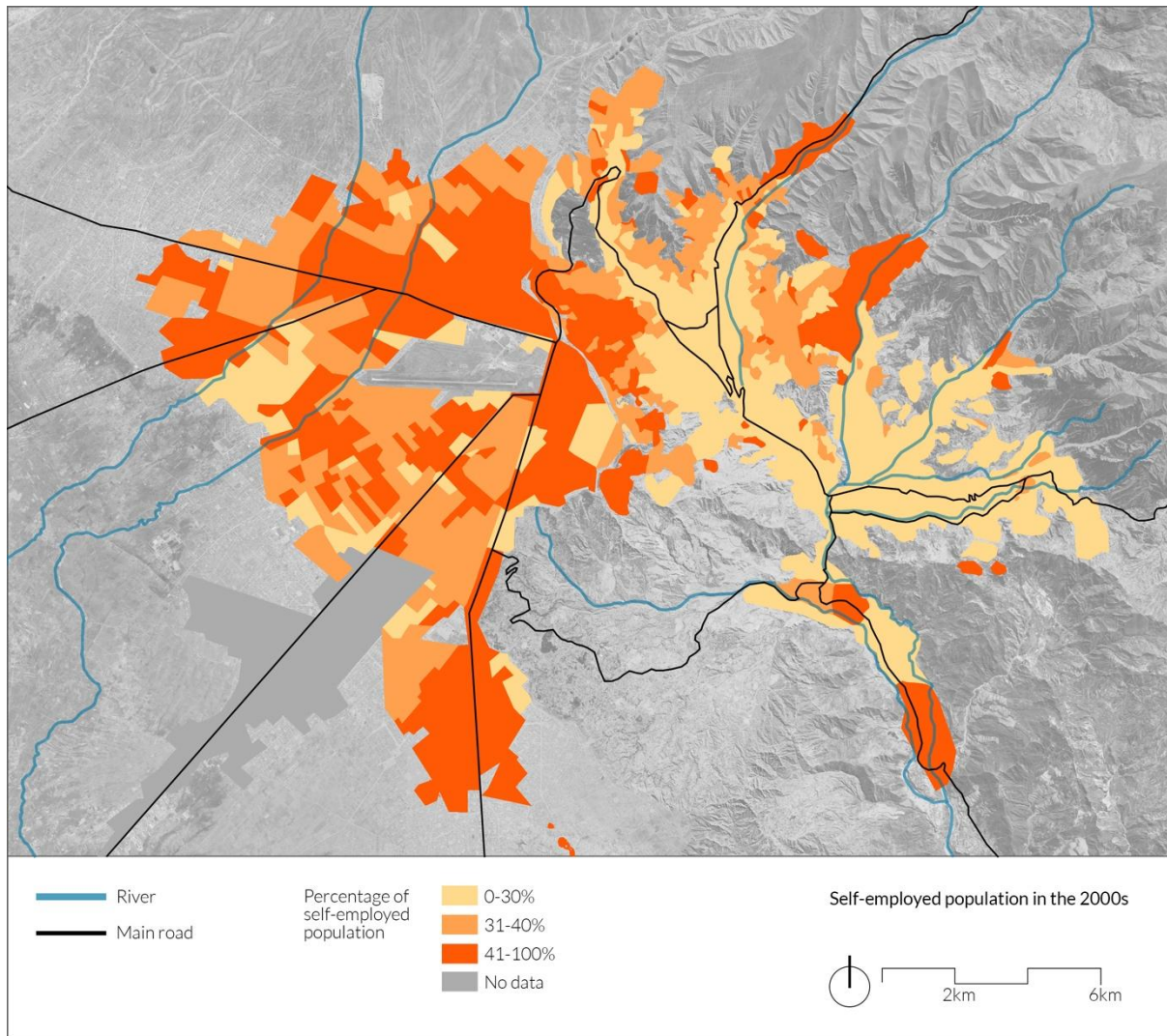
Finally, map 12 shows the spatial distribution of people who are self-employed and dedicated to what is usually referred to as "informal" activities. It is possible to observe that most of the self-employed population is located in El Alto, particularly concentrated in the central and

northern areas. In the case of La Paz, the peripheries are the areas that present a higher percentage of self-employed people. In La Paz, the area next to El Alto stands out as one of the areas with the highest concentration of self-employed population. The north area in El Alto and the west area in La Paz, with a high percentage of self-employed population, are also the two most important commercial areas of the urban agglomeration. These commercial areas are characterized by shops on the ground floor of the buildings, fairs, and street commerce (Image 9). It is important to highlight that La Paz`s area has been a commercial hub since the formal colonial period, when it was one of the indigenous towns of the colonial city. As mentioned before, the majority of the population that identifies as belonging to an indigenous group (Aymara in La Paz-El Alto) is dedicated to "informal" economic activities. The correlation of "informal" economic activity and ethnicity becomes evident when comparing maps 10 and 12, which show that the areas with a higher percentage of Aymara population are also those areas with more concentration of self-employed or "informal" workers. Moreover, when comparing both maps, El Alto stands out as a city whose mostly Aymara population depends on the "informal" economy (Arbona, 2008).

Image 9: Commercial area in El Alto. Sources: https://commons.wikimedia.org/

Map 12: La Paz-El Alto 21ˢᵗ century - self-employed population. Elaborated by the author based on (CODEPO et al., 2006; CODEPO & IRD, 2005)

The three maps above show the spatial distribution of a society that is characterized by a structure where ethnicity, class, and economic activity overlap. The different social groups are located in different parts of the city that are spatially distinct due to architecture. First of all, the old city center remains as the national and local center of governmental and administrative activities. This part of the city is characterized by public buildings and offices of private companies with multiple architectural styles, republican, eclectic, brutalist, and "modern". The wealthiest areas, which are also the ones that present less concentration of Aymara population, located in the lower part of the Chuquiago valley are characterized by residential architecture that responds to the "modern" style (López et al., 2006) or contemporary western architecture (Arbona & Kohl, 2004; Hilari, 2022) (Image 10).

Moreover, these areas count with exclusive recreational and educational facilities, and they are the places where U.S.A style supermarkets and fast-food restaurants first appeared (López et al., 2006). The upper-middle and middle class areas with less concentration of Aymara population in La Paz are characterized by tall buildings and single-family houses in the "modern" style (Image 11). Both upper and middle class areas have commercial hubs or axis that present supermarkets, shopping malls, office buildings, and cafes and restaurants.

Image 10: Upper and upper-middle class predominantly non-Aymara neighborhoods in La Paz in the 21st century. Sources: https://commons.wikimedia.org/

The middle and lower class areas where there is more concentration of Aymara population, in both La Paz and El Alto, are characterized by houses and low-rise buildings of three to five floors, that Alejo Mamani (2021) calls "*utilitario popular*" style (Images 13 and 14). Many of these buildings are not only destined for residential use, but they also present spaces destined to economic activities (Alejo Mamani, 2021). These buildings, made of concrete and brick, are usually built in different phases that respond to the economic possibilities of the family (Albó, 2006): first, the family usually starts with a few rooms in the back of the plot, which are made of adobe walls and a corrugated iron roof. Then, a few floors of concrete and brick are built in the front of the plot. After some time, the building is finished by adding a few more floors (Alejo Mamani, 2021). After these buildings are technically finished, they are usually left unpainted on the outside to keep the "construction in progress" status, which allows the owners to pay less taxes (Albó, 2006). Moreover, the presence of the emerging Aymara *bourgeois*, dedicated to "informal" commercial and transport activities, becomes evident in some of these areas due to the neo-Andean style buildings (Image 15). These buildings can

be mostly found in El Alto (Map 13), they are usually located in or close to commercial areas (Hilari, 2022), they are destined to residential use, commercial activity, festivity events, and they are conceived to express the socio-economic status of the owners (Alejo Mamani, 2021). The neo-Andean buildings present the same spatial and volumetric characteristics of the "*utilitario popular*" typology, but are differentiated by the decoration of the facades (ibid.). Their finished character, that is, a completed building volume and a painted façade, shows the capability of the owners to pay higher taxes and therefore their higher economic status (ibid.). According to Hilari (2022) the architecture of La Paz's city center and upper class neighborhoods shows a clear intention to emulate Western contemporary architecture. Whereas in El Alto and in the periphery of La Paz, there is a more experimental approach to architecture that aims to generate an Aymara contemporary aesthetic. Although the neo-Andean buildings are not considered "modern" by the elite and designers of La Paz, who often pejoratively call them "cholets", the citizens and architects of El Alto do consider them as modern buildings. In fact, one of the well-known neo-Andean style architects, Freddy Mamani Silvestre, expressed that these buildings are an effort to modernize El Alto's urban landscape (Sanjinéz C., 2019), and according to Alejo Mamani (2021), these buildings are a phenomenon of "popular self-modernization".

Image 11: Lower-middle class and low class predominantly Aymara neighborhoods in La Paz in the 21st century. Sources: https://commons.wikimedia.org/

Image 12: Lower-middle class predominantly Aymara neighborhoods in El Alto in the 21st century. Sources: https://commons.wikimedia.org/; author

Image 13: Neo-Andean buildings of the Aymara *bourgeois* in El Alto in the 21st century. Sources: https://commons.wikimedia.org/
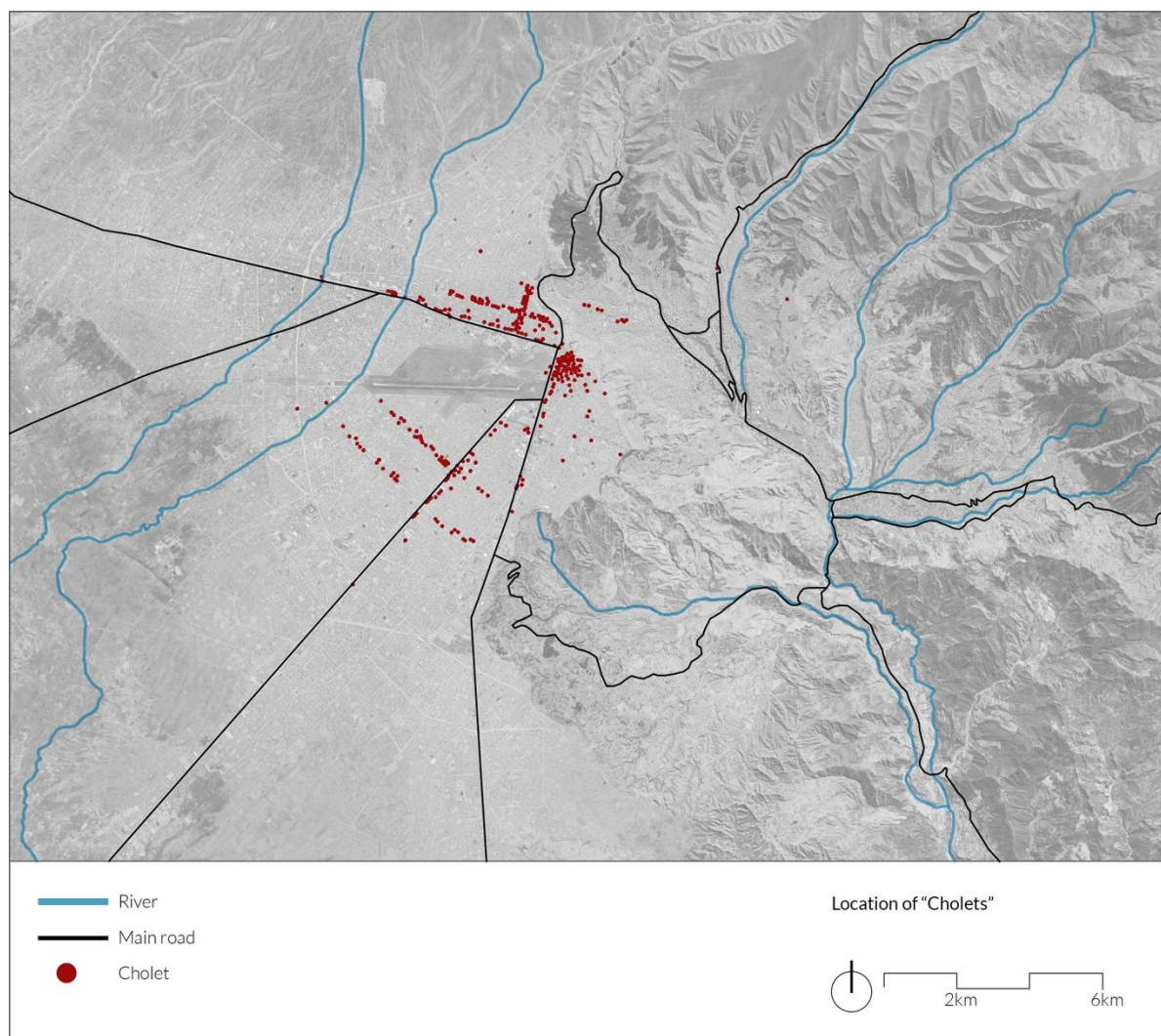
Map 13: Location of neo-andean buildings. Elaborated by the author based on Hilari (2022)

Socio-spatial segregation and urban governance in La Paz-El Alto of the 21st century

In the 21st century, the administrative division of the two cities played an important role in the material differences between La Paz and El Alto. When El Alto became an administratively independent city, it gained control of its own budget; however, its local government has always had fewer resources than La Paz (Arbona & Kohl, 2004). According to Arbona (2004),

La Paz's government raises about five times more tax revenues than El Alto's government. This difference is in part because of the high poverty levels of El Alto, but the Bolivian tax law has an important role in generating a discrepancy in municipal revenues between the two cities (Arbona & Kohl, 2004). The law requires businesses to pay taxes to the municipality where their administrative offices are located, regardless of where the business operates (ibid.). Therefore, all the companies whose factories are located in El Alto and offices are located in La Paz, pay taxes only in La Paz (ibid.). This lack of municipal resources becomes evident in the important differences between La Paz and El Alto in terms of access to urban infrastructure. According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE), in 2001, 65% of the population of La Paz had access to domestic water, whereas in El Alto it was just 35% (Arbona & Kohl, 2004). The INE showed that in 2017, almost 60% of the population of La Paz had their basic urban needs covered, whereas in El Alto, just 27% of the population had access to all basic urban services and infrastructures (Loayza Bueno, 2018). Most of the inhabitants of El Alto continue to self-organize through *juntas vecinales* (neighborhood councils) to demand provision of basic urban services and infrastructure, and in many cases they end up building by themselves, and with their own resources, urban infrastructure such as streets and sidewalks (Albó, 2006; Arbona, 2008).

Chapter summary

This chapter presented the socio-spatial structure of La Paz in the 21st century. It showed a society that continues to be defined by the articulation of ethnicity, occupation, and socio-economic class, and that this social characteristic is reflected in the demographic distribution. Moreover, it showed the persistence of two cultural poles evidenced in the ethnic differences between La Paz and El Alto, and in the architectural forms that characterize predominantly Aymara and non-Aymara neighborhoods.

1492
Beginning of Spanish colonization

1548
Foundation of La Paz city

1825
Independence of Bolivia

1899
La Paz as Seat of Government

1952
National Revolution

1988
Foundation of El Alto city

2000

SOCIETY

Non-indigenous and Aymara

Ethnicity, occupation, and class articulate to configure the social structure of La Paz-El Alto

La Paz
Non-indigenous | Aymara | Other — 2001
Non-indigenous | Aymara Other — 2017
White | Mestizo | Indigenous

El Alto
Non-indigenous | Aymara | Other — 2001
Non-indigenous | Aymara | Other — 2017
White | Mestizo | Indigenous

People who identify and do not identify as Aymara, can also identify as mestizo. The mestizo category might be associated with middle class

Non-indigenous
Private/public employee | Self-employed

Middle and upper socio-economic classes: work in public institutions or private companies

Aymara
Private/public employee | Self-employed

Upper class: "informal" commercial activity and transport
Middle class: staff workers, "informal" commercial activity and transport
Lower class: immigrants from the countryside, domestic and construction workers

SPACE

Socio-spatial segregation

Percentage of population that self-identify as Aymara

- 0-30%
- 31-50%
- 51-65%
- 66-79%
- 80-100%

Upper and middle class areas

- Upper and upper-middle class
- Middle class

*Not highlithed areas are lower-middle and lower class

Location of "cholets"

- "Cholets"

DISCUSSION: INTERNAL COLONIALISM AND URBANIZATION IN LA PAZ-EL ALTO

> "In La Paz, Bolivia, you feel [coloniality] all the way, all the time, in your bones: modernity is constantly reproducing coloniality. Which means that the rhetoric of progress, of salvation, of technology, of democracy goes hand in hand with the logic and practice of oppression, racial discrimination, political concentration of power in the hand of a Creole/*Mestizo*/an elite." (Mignolo, 2007: 495)

This section aims to understand the ways in which the renovation of the colonial order is reflected in the urbanization process of La Paz-El Alto and how the continuation of colonial structures has been materialized in the urban space. The renovation of the colonial order refers to the articulation of the liberal and populist cycles to the colonial horizon to re-purpose colonial structures and transform them into modes of internal colonialism (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The first part of this section will attempt to understand this process through the history of La Paz-El Alto's urbanization from the 16th to the 21st century. Then, the second part will explore the materialization of persistent colonial social structures, which refers to a social organization based on a hierarchical order dictated by the polarization between the Western and the indigenous cultures that has allowed a minority Western group to monopolize the power throughout history (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010).

Renovation of the colonial order and urbanization of La Paz-El Alto

The urbanization process of La Paz-El Alto evidences the reconfiguration of the colonial order in modes of internal colonialism because it materializes the articulation of the liberal and populist cycles with the colonial horizon, as well as the continuous link between the colony and later nation-state with metropolitan powers. The formal colonial period established a western power, articulated with the metropole, that would internally impose social, economic, and political norms on the native world, with the aim to acculturate it and assimilate it to the western world, but at the same time to exclude it and maintain social

hierarchies. This period initiated a cycle of cultural disciplining and social exclusion that has been renovated with each historical cycle and is evidenced in the city because the acculturation reforms and renovated modes of exclusion introduced by each cycle have generated massive transformations in the socio-spatial configuration of La Paz-El Alto and the surrounding territory.

After independence, the hinge with the metropole continued, and the internal dynamics of the new nation-state were articulated with the metropole through the cultural and economic subjugation of the western ruling elites to the metropolitan societies (Almandoz, 2002; Quijano, 1968). Therefore, the ruling elite initiated a project of "civilization" and "modernization" through liberal reforms that consisted of articulating the national economy to the capitalist international market (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The liberal cycle introduced acculturation mechanisms that entailed the engagement of the mestizo-indigenous population with economic activities that aligned with the modernization project (ibid.), meaning that parts of the mestizo-indigenous population were incorporated into productive activities such as mining and industrial work (Cajías et al., 2007). This "civilizing" mechanism became evident at the beginning of the 20th century in La Paz because the city started to designate new urban areas for industries and industrial workers. The local government decided to locate the industrial activity in the northern area of the city, and the growing group of industrial workers – indigenous peasants that migrated to the city – started to settle in El Alto (Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002). Although it is known that many of the industrial workers were indigenous people that came from the rural areas, the ethnicity of this group is never mentioned, contrary to other urban groups who are described as either white, mestizo, or indigenous (Cajías et al., 2007; Cuadros, 2002; Schoop, 1981). I believe that this is because when an indigenous person engages in economic activities associated with the Western world (such as industrial work), acculturation takes place and their ethnicity becomes unclear. Moreover, the industrial activity in La Paz attracted population from the countryside and generated urban growth. But, as in most Latin American countries, the industrialization in Bolivia (concentrated in La Paz) was subjected to external dynamics determined by the powerful countries (Quijano, 1968). Therefore, large parts of the growing urban population did not find a place in the industrial production system, which resulted in impoverished and marginalized urban groups constituted by rural immigrants (Quijano, 1968; Clichevsky &

Herzer, 1990). This became evident in La Paz with the large low-class area located in the north-west part of the city that hosted the indigenous migrants that were not integrated in the industrial system and were dedicated to activities such as transport, domestic work, or agriculture (Barragán Romano, 1990; Loureiro, 1999, Cajías et al., 2007). The marginalization of this population evidences, first, the contradictions of the modernization project of the ruling class, which integrated parts of the population into the "modern" economic system, but at the same time excluded large portions of the population. Second, the fact that the rural migrants who did not become factory workers were considered indigenous shows the crucial role that economic occupation played in shaping ethnicity.
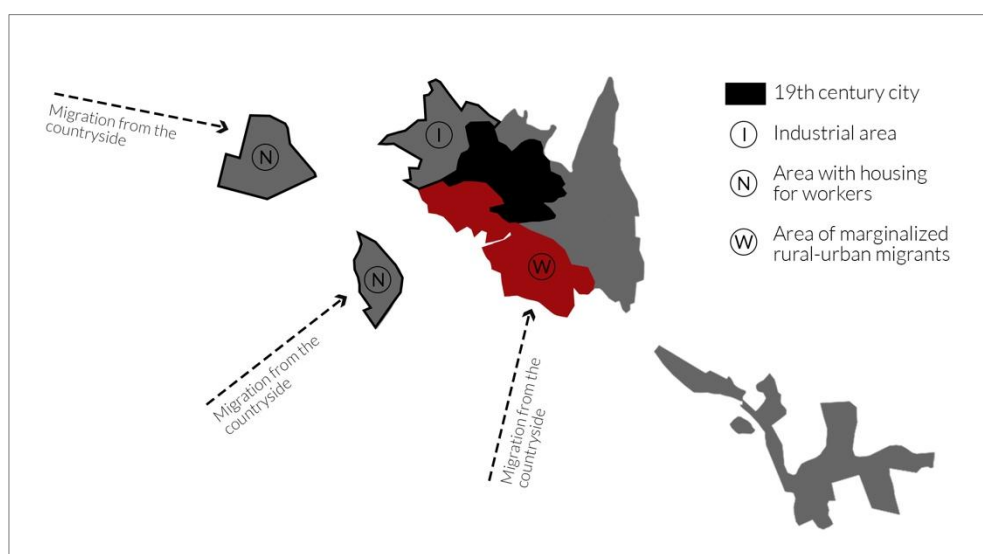

Diagram 2: Industrialization and rural-urban migration

After the National Revolution, the populist reforms gave continuity to the "civilization" and "modernization" project initiated with the liberal cycle. The State, established in 1952, promoted the idea of a unified "*mestizo* nation" without indigenous peoples, oligarchs, or colonial rule. While it promised equal citizenship, these populist ideologies excluded non-Western cultures, and indigenous people were denied rights unless they adopted the manners of the dominant culture. Therefore, to build the homogeneous "*mestizo* nation", the state implemented reforms that entailed severe cultural disciplining (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). One of the most aggressive civilizing instruments was the Agrarian Reform (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010), justified by the action of returning the land – which had been controlled by the western ruling class for centuries – to the indigenous people and eliminating serfdom,

it imposed the subdivision of communal indigenous land. The creation of rural individual property meant the dismantlement of indigenous networks and ethnic collective identities, and the generation of low-productive agricultural plots (Coordinadora de Historia, 2024; Cuadros, 2002; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). This comprehensive acculturation action, which transformed "backward" communal land into "modern" individual property, generated massive rural-urban migration that was, of course, evident in the city of La Paz with the unprecedented urban growth of the second half of the 20th century. At the same time, La Paz's urban expansion was also generated by the possibility of accessing urban land enabled by the Urban Reform. This reform redistributed urban land – that, once again, had been in the hands of the elite – and provided urban property to peasants, low-income families, rural immigrants, and union members (Coordinadora de Historia, 2024; Cuadros, 2002; van Lindert & Verkoren, 1982). The significant urban growth generated a large marginalized urban population, which shows the contradictions of the modernization project: the city represented the space that was supposed to provide equal access to citizenship rights, but it operated as a marginalizing machine. Moreover, the elites understood the cities as the "modern" spaces from where to build a "civilized" society (Gutierrez, 1983). Therefore, the forced (due to the Agrarian Reform) and encouraged (by the Urban Reform) migration to the city can be understood as another acculturative action because the transition from the countryside to the city meant the transition from the "backward" indigenous rural world to the "modern" and "civilized" western urban world. However, this transition would not be completed by the majority of the migrant peasants because they would end up becoming part of the *mestizo*-indigenous marginalized urban population that could not manage to complete the acculturation process. After all, the "modern" economic model needed them as an underpaid labor force and did not have space to accommodate them in economic activities associated with the Western world.

Area that tended to concentrate the increasingly marginalized urban population

Migration from the countryside
Transition from the "backward" indigenous rural world to the "modern" western urban word

Imposition of individual property

Migration from the countryside
Transition from the "backward" indigenous rural world to the "modern" western urban word

1950
1964
1980
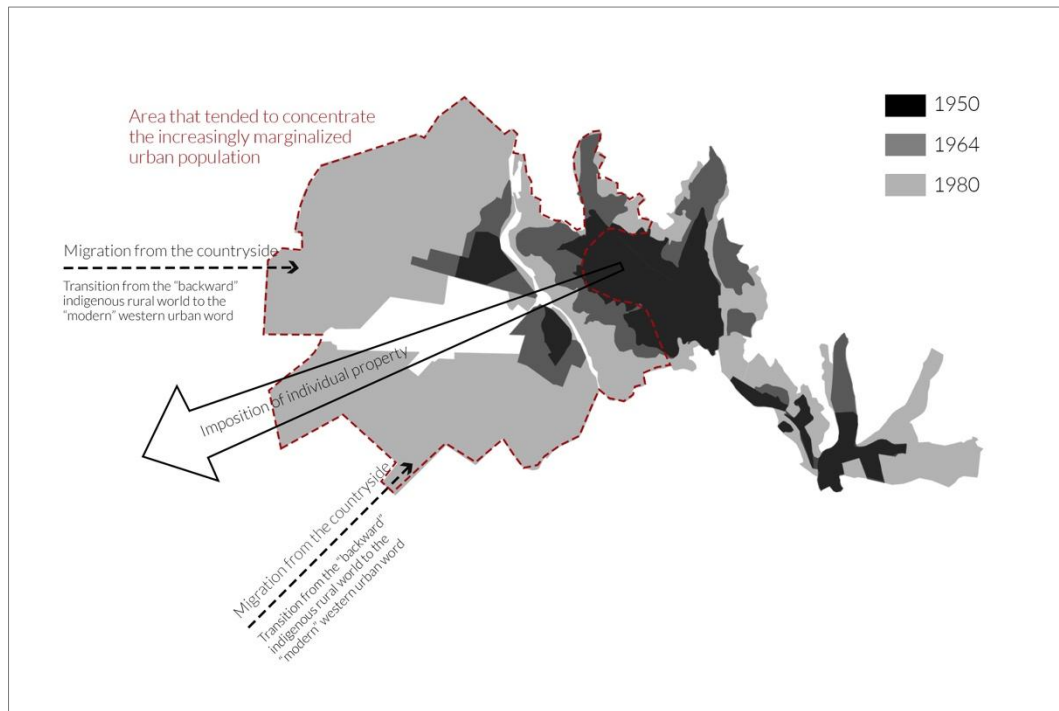
Diagram 3: Urban growth after the National Revolution

Later on, in a context where "adjustment policies" were being imposed in Latin American countries by neocolonial powers, the neoliberal reforms introduced in Bolivia in 1985 completed the long process of forced and exclusionary citizenization through "the expansion of a market of material and cultural goods designed to dismantle the productive dynamics of the native communities and to forcefully integrate them to the market" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010: 104 translated by the author). Indigenous economic logics were replaced by unstable salaries or "informal" activity that did not allow the marginalized urban population to access the goods that the neoliberal changes claimed to offer (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The contradictory citizenization process that aims to "modernize" but at the same time excludes most of the population is evidenced in the demographic structure of La Paz-El Alto at the beginning of the 21st century. Most of the population of this urban agglomeration considers itself Aymara (62%), who are mostly (60%) dedicated to "informal" economic activities (Barragán & Soliz, 2009; Urquizo, 2006). The overlap between ethnic-cultural identity and economic activity is visible in the urban space, where most of the areas that present higher percentages of people who self-identify as Aymara are also the areas that present higher percentages of population dedicated to "informal" activities. The "informalization" of rural-

urban migrants and the Aymara urban population shows how the neoliberal reforms used the market as a renovated mechanism to continue excluding the indigenous-*mestizo* population.
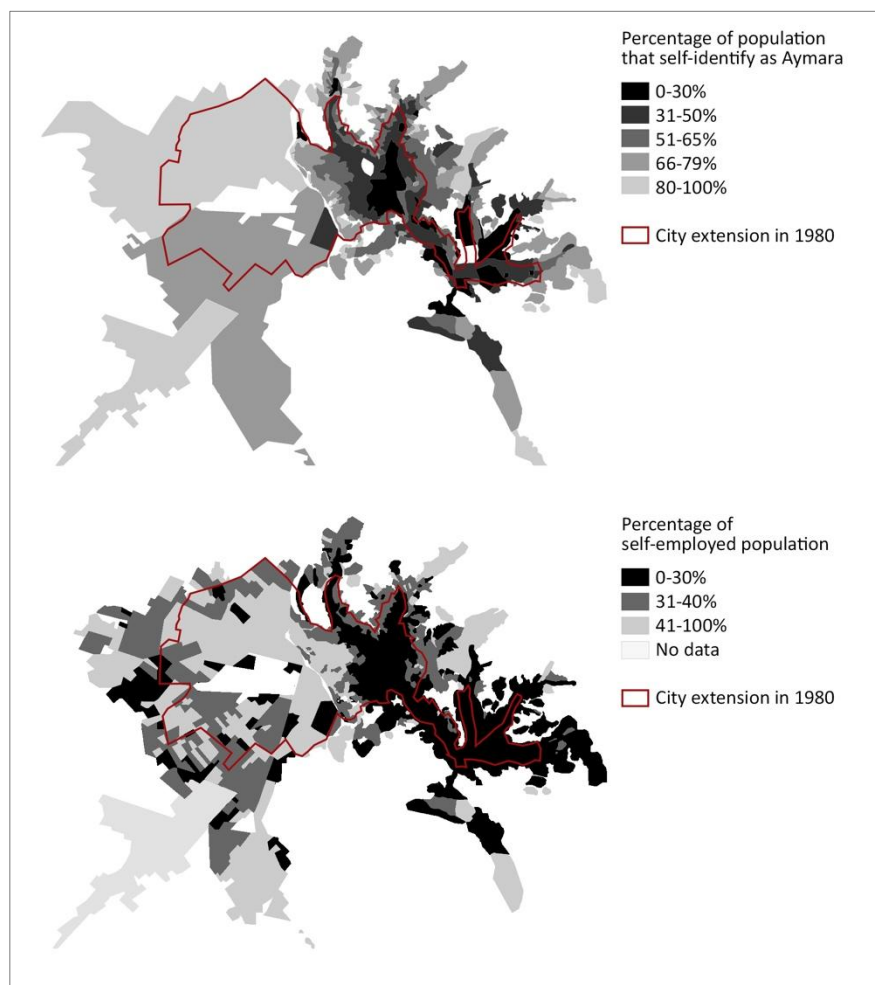

Diagram 4: Ethnic self-identification and "informalized" population

The massive rural-urban migration produced by the populist reforms, and later on by the neoliberal reforms (that caused the migration of thousands of miners to the city), generated an unprecedented urban expansion particularly in El Alto, which started to grow at a pace of 5% to 9% annually (Cajías et al., 2007). Even though El Alto was the urban area experiencing the most significant expansion at the end of the 20th century, the local government barely invested in providing urban services and infrastructure to the area. After decades of administrative neglect and urban marginalization, the *Alteño* people started to demand administrative autonomy, and after years of protests and negotiations, El Alto was declared an independent city in 1988 (Cuadros, 2002). The claim for administrative independence coincided with the emergence of an Aymara ethnic consciousness during the 1970s and

1980s. During these years, indigenous movements from the west of Bolivia claimed that the citizenship model had assigned the indigenous population a position of "second class citizens" and they postulated the Aymara identity as the structural axis for contestation and vindication (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). Therefore, the administrative separation of La Paz and El Alto was the result of contestation by the *mestizo*-indigenous Aymara population to persistent modes of exclusion.

The urbanization process described above shows how the continuous renovation of mechanisms of cultural disciplining and exclusion has shaped La Paz-El Alto. Therefore, the city has become the material and visible expression of internal colonialism.

Colonial social structures and urban space

The re-articulation of the colonial order has given continuity to a colonial social structure that is characterized by a hierarchy based on the polarization of two cultural poles that has enabled a stratification where the Western minority is placed at the top. This social organization has shaped the socio-spatial organization of La Paz-El Alto, and it is therefore evidenced in the contemporary urban space. The following section explores how the concentration of power in a Western minority and the persistence of two cultural poles have been materialized in the city.

Concentration of power in a minority Western group

The formal colonial period generated a polarization and hierarchy between the native world and the Western world, where Western culture was considered superior and placed at the top of the hierarchy. Therefore, this period established a colonial social structure where a minority Western group would concentrate the power to dictate social, economic, and political norms (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The concentration of power in the hands of a minority Western group will persist throughout history, enabled by the liberal and populist reforms, and will be constantly reflected in the urban space.

During the formal colonial period, the city of La Paz was the result of the configuration of a colonial order that created a city from which Spanish colonizers and Creoles could control the surrounding territory, take over indigenous land, dismantle indigenous systems, and subsume

the conquered territory to the interests of the metropolitan power. This western power was located in La Paz's Spanish city (La Paz was divided into a Spanish city and Indigenous towns). This area was a symbol of the Western power and the hinge with the metropole. These two functions were materialized through western urban forms: the *damero* urban layout and European administrative and religious buildings (Cuadros, 2002). After independence, La Paz continued to be a control center from which the Creole elites dominated the surrounding territory. During the liberal period, a process of internal colonization (Calvert, 2001) took place where the creole aristocracy of La Paz expanded land ownership and therefore continued to dismantle rural systems and exploit indigenous peasants (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The expansion of agricultural land and mining allowed the *paceño* aristocracy to concentrate political power, which ultimately resulted in La Paz being assigned as the Seat of Government at the end of the 19th century. In other words, the assignment of La Paz as the new Seat of Government was the result of a process of internal colonization that enabled the *paceño* aristocracy to concentrate economic-political power. In the 20th century, the concentration of power in a minority Western group would be reflected in the power of a centralizing State and the wealth of the Creole or white social group. The power of the State was materialized in the old city center, which expanded its political, administrative, and financial role, and lost the residential character that it had had in previous centuries. The concentration of wealth of the Western social group was reflected in their new luxurious residential neighborhoods. Moreover, although the direct foreign domination ended after independence, the hinge with the metropole remained through the cultural and economic subjugation of the western ruling elites to the metropolitan societies (Almandoz, 2002; Quijano, 1968). The cultural dependency of the State was materialized in the new monumental public buildings such as the National Theater, the Cathedral, and the Government Palace. Moreover, the cultural dependency of the P*aceño* western upper class was materialized in their residences, which were built in European architectural styles. The cultural dependency and economic subjugation of the elites to the metropolitan powers shows that Cusicanqui's "chains of domination" go beyond national dynamics, for those on top of the internal social hierarchy (western elites) aspire to have the cultural and economic goods of those "above" them, who are located in the metropole (white Europeans and later on also white US Americans).

Diagram 5: Western power in the formal colonial period (18th century) and in the 19th century

Diagram 6: Western power in the first half of the 20th century

https://www.facebook.com/AhoraHistoriasyLeyendasdeBolivia,

https://estebanmoralesb.wordpress.com

After the national revolution of 1952, the power of the State and upper white social classes continued to be concentrated in La Paz. The city's center was the physical space from where

the populist reforms were implemented to continue dismantling indigenous rural systems, and the neoliberal reforms to economically exclude and "informalize" the growing indigenous-*mestizo* urban population. The populist reforms responded to Western ideologies of "modernization" and "civilization", and the neoliberal reforms responded to "adjustment policies" imposed by neocolonial powers. These reforms were a product of the cultural dependency and economic subjugation of the State and ruling elites to metropolitan powers – Europe and later on the United States. In the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the link of the internal western power with the metropole was reflected in the architecture of the urban areas where the State and white middle and upper social classes were located. In the 20th century, the urban landscape of the city center and some upper class areas started to be transformed as tall buildings in the international style became increasingly common; these buildings configured what has been called the "modernizing axis" of the city (Schoop, 1981). These buildings were destined for apartments and offices for the administrative and financial occupations of this class. Moreover, other western class residential areas were characterized by "Californian style" single-family houses that evidenced the "Americanization process" that started to take place in Latin American countries (Almandoz, 2002). At the beginning of the 21st century, the old city center remains as the national and local center of governmental and administrative activities. This part of the city is characterized by public buildings and offices of private companies with multiple architectural styles: republican, eclectic, brutalist, and "modern" that show the different phases of a continuous cultural dependency. Moreover, the western class urban areas are characterized by residential architecture that responds to contemporary Western architecture styles (Arbona & Kohl, 2004; Hilari, 2022). In the 21st century U.S. American style tall buildings started to appear in the southern wealthy areas as symbols of modernity, progress, and advanced technology (Gutierrez, 1983), extending the "modernizing axis" to the south of the city. Finally, the economic and institutional articulation with the metropole is evidenced in the office buildings of International Organizations that are located in these areas, and in the US American style supermarkets and fast-food restaurants (López et al., 2006).
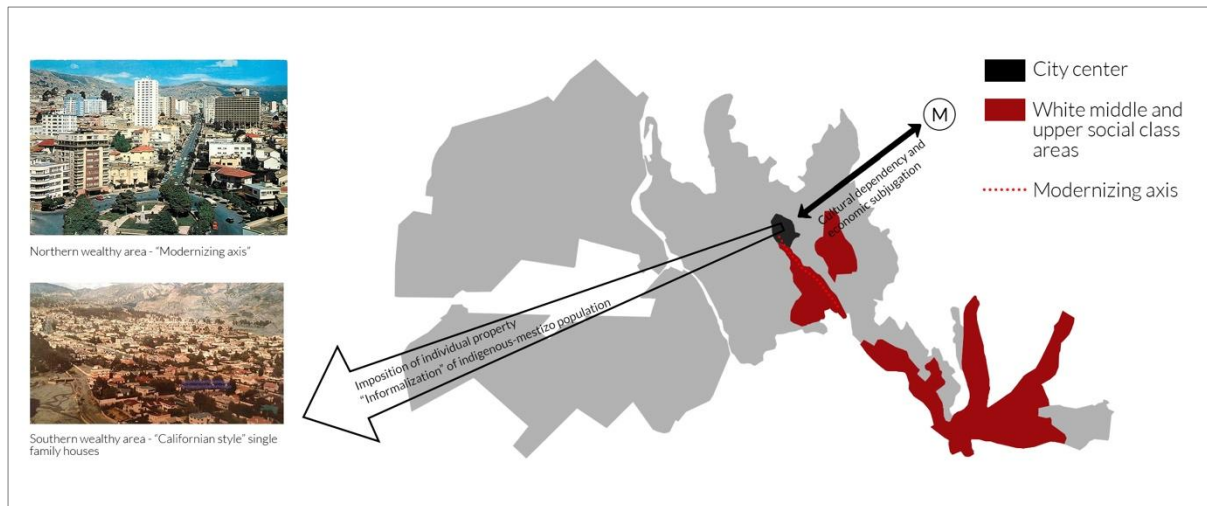
Diagram 7: Western power in the second half of the 20th century

Source of pictures: https://www.facebook.com/photo

Diagram 8: Western urban areas in the 21st century

Source of pictures: https://commons.wikimedia.org/

The western *Paceño* elite and the State have historically concentrated political and economic power and have been historically tied to the western metropolitan world. This has been evidenced in the architectural forms of the urban areas that they inhabit, architecture that is a result of the concentration of wealth and is an expression of the Western world.

The Western and indigenous cultural poles

During the formal colonial period, two cultural poles or ethnic identities were established: the Western and the indigenous. Where the Western culture was placed as superior and the native cultures as inferior (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). Therefore, the western pole is the dominant culture that seeks to "modernize" the "inferior culture", but at the same time excludes it and tries to differentiate from it. On the other hand, the indigenous world – represented by the Aymara culture in La Paz-El Alto – tries to assimilate the dominant culture to achieve social mobility, but at the same time preserve its cultural expressions (Albó et al., 1983 in Barragán & Soliz, 2009). The tension between these poles generated a social stratification where the western group is at the top of the hierarchy, those *mestizo*-western and *mestizo*-indigenous configure the middle social layers, and the indigenous people represent the lower strata (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). The two cultural poles and social stratification generated by dynamics of acculturation, exclusion, and resistance, persisted throughout time until present times, and have been materialized in the urban space.

During the formal colonial period, the two cultural poles were reflected in and reinforced by the spatial division between the Spanish, who lived in the Spanish city, and the indigenous, who lived in the indigenous towns, as dictated by the *Leyes de Indias*. Nowadays, probably the most evident expression of the persistence of a Western and an indigenous cultural pole is the division of La Paz and El Alto. Although these two cities work as a single urban agglomeration in terms of urban services, infrastructure management, and urban economic activity (Cuadros, 2002; Hilari, 2020; Urquizo, 2006), and although there are aesthetic and cultural continuities between the sloped areas of La Paz and El Alto, these two cities present important increasing differences in terms of ethnic composition. In 2001, while La Paz presented 50% of the population that identified as Aymara, in El Alto, 74% of the population considered themselves Aymara (Urquizo, 2006). By 2017, this difference seems to have increased; in La Paz, the percentage of Aymara people decreased to 19%, whereas in El Alto increased to 76% (Loayza Bueno, 2018). The administrative separation between La Paz and El Alto seems to have impacted the way *Paceños* and *Alteños* ethnically perceive themselves, and has transported the colonial spatial binary, Spanish city-Indigenous towns, to contemporary times in the form of an Aymara city (El Alto) and a Western city (La Paz). This dualism is reinforced by the strong presence of Western-style buildings in La Paz and the neo-

Andean style buildings in El Alto. Moreover, territorial and urban governance have played a crucial role in generating and maintaining socio-ethnic spatial divisions: the *Leyes the Indias* in the formal colonial period, and in contemporary times, the administrative neglect of La Paz's local government towards the area of El Alto that eventually led to the administrative separation of the two cities. Finally, as in formal colonial times, the physical geography has served to reinforce the division: during the first centuries after colonization the rivers helped to separate the Spanish city from the indigenous towns, nowadays, the topographic difference between the mountain valley (where La Paz is located) and the Altiplano (where El Alto was established) reinforces the administrative division and differentiated urban identities of the inhabitants.
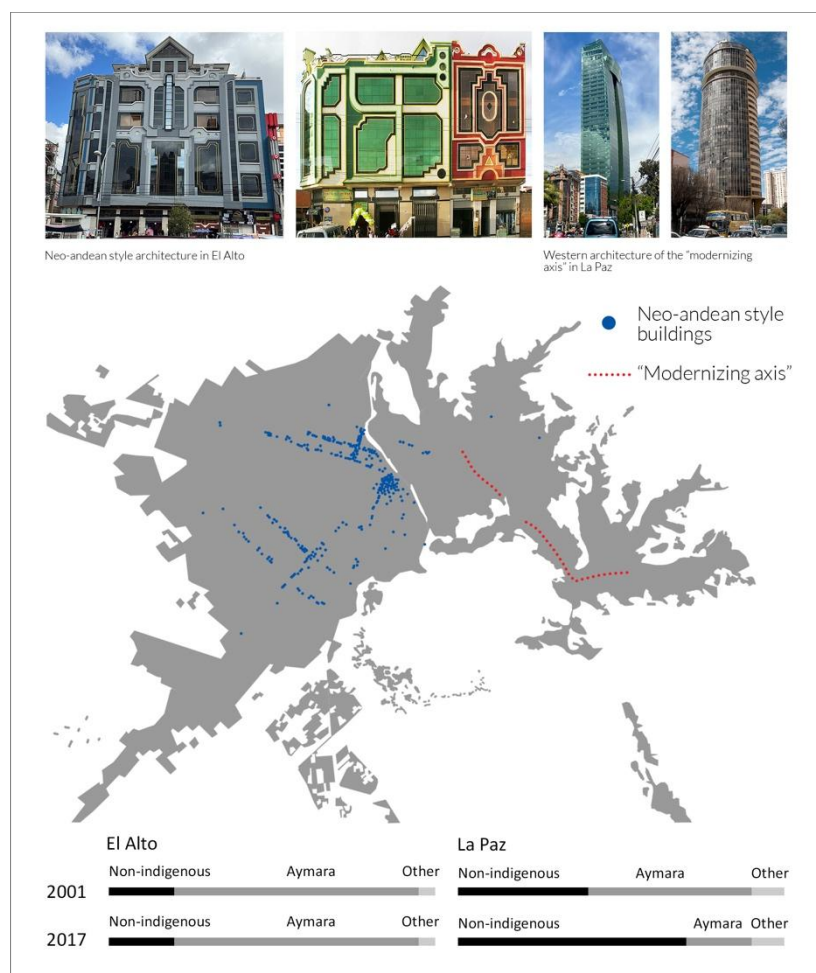

Diagram 9: The Aymara city (El Alto) and the Western city (La Paz)

Source of pictures: https://commons.wikimedia.org/

The hierarchical social structure that was established during the formal colonial period and persisted until today is reflected in the socio-spatial segregation of La Paz-El Alto. In this social hierarchy, ethnicity and socio-economic class are intertwined, where Western and Western-*mestizo* people usually belong to the upper and middle classes, and Aymara-*mestizo* to the middle and lower classes. This is evident in the different neighborhoods of the city, where the ones that present a higher concentration of non-Aymara population are usually upper class areas, whereas the ones that present a higher concentration of indigenous population are usually the lower class neighborhoods. At the same time, the fact that the city does not present rigid spatial boundaries and that most of the neighborhoods are ethnically mixed shows the "in betweens" of the tension between the two cultural poles. The socio-spatial segregation generated by socio-ethnic-economic differences has been reinforced by the local government. The local government, historically in the hands of the western ruling elite, has continuously implemented exclusionary urban policies. From the 19th century onwards, the state has benefited the western middle and upper class areas with planning actions and public investment for urban services and infrastructure. On the contrary, the indigenous-*mestizo* neighborhoods, mostly composed of migrant populations from the countryside, were continuously excluded from public urban initiatives (Cuadros, 2002). Moreover, the national government also contributed to the segregation of the city by benefiting certain lower-middle class groups with the provision of housing and tax waivers. In the 20th century, some *mestizo* groups that had been incorporated into the state's economic and cultural "modern" model, such as miners, teachers, and public employees, were provided with social housing, urban services, and infrastructure, and were exempt from paying taxes. These neighborhoods contrasted with the surrounding urban areas, where "not acculturated enough" indigenous people inhabited, which were characterized by poor living conditions, self-built neighborhoods without urban services, and had to pay taxes. The areas that nowadays are considered "informal" are a product of exclusionary urban policies that have neglected the Aymara urban areas and benefited non-Aymara neighborhoods. Therefore, it can be said that the state logics have responded to the contradictions of the "civilizing" model by acting as both a "modernizing" and an exclusionary entity at the same time.
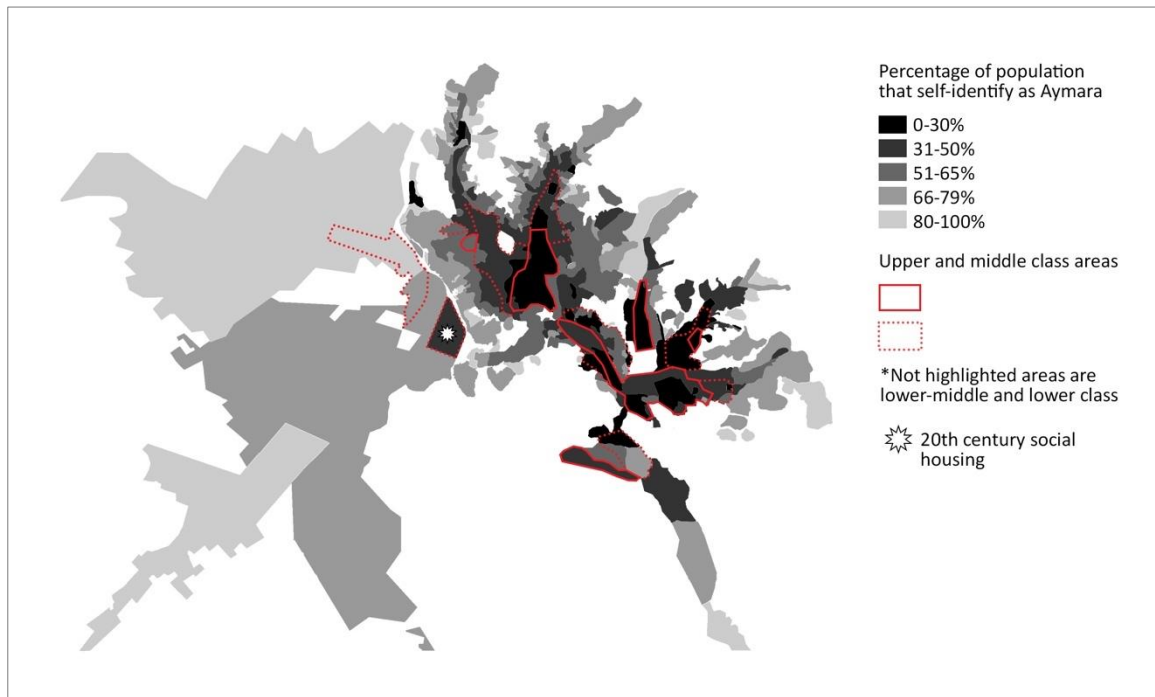
Diagram 10: Ethnicity and socio-economic class

Throughout time, the two cultural worlds have been associated with certain economic activities and socio-economic class. On one hand, the western world has been configured by upper classes dedicated to economic activities that are part of the economic model dictated by the State and that are articulated with the dominant capitalist global economy. On the other hand, the Aymara world has been configured by middle and lower socio-economic classes who have been dedicated to either underpaid labor or "informal" economic activities, although an Aymara *bourgeois* has started to emerge in the past years. These two cultural worlds, and their respective economic activities and cultural expressions, are reflected in the contemporary architectural forms of La Paz-El Alto. On one hand, as mentioned before, the buildings of the western group respond to styles that can be found in the United States or Europe, such as Californian style chalets or U.S. American style towers. On the other hand, the predominantly Aymara neighborhoods are characterized by "*utilitario popular*" architecture (Alejo Mamani, 2021). These buildings are usually mixed-use, destined for residential and economic activities such as commerce or artisanal work, and they are usually built in different phases that respond to the economic possibilities of the family. First, the family starts with a few rooms in the back of the plot, because in many cases, they are migrants from the rural areas and don't have economic resources. Then, a few floors of

concrete and brick are built in the front of the plot, and finally, after some time, the building is finished by adding a few more floors (Alejo Mamani, 2021). The fact that "*utilitario popular*" architecture is designed for both living and productive activities evidences the self-employed condition or "informal" economic occupation of its inhabitants. That is, "*utilitario popular*" architecture is a product of the exclusion of the Aymara urban population from the "formal" economic system. Moreover, some of the predominantly Aymara areas, especially in El Alto, are characterized by the presence of neo-Andean style low-rise buildings. These buildings belong to the emerging Aymara *bourgeois* that has managed to accumulate wealth through "informal" commercial and transport economic activities. These buildings present the same spatial and volumetric characteristics of the "*utilitario popular*" typology, but are differentiated by the decoration of the facades, where the higher economic status is expressed (Alejo Mamani, 2021). So, although neo-andean buildings are the result of wealth concentration, express the symbolic and economic capital of its owners, and evidence the socio-economic stratification within the Aymara world, they also represent a group that has managed to accumulate wealth within an economic system that has systematically excluded them from the "formal" economic activities. Moreover, even though these buildings are symbols of a higher social status within the Aymara world, they do not represent the same social status as a high-rise U.S. American style building located in the wealthy areas of La Paz. For, they still belong to the social group that was placed in an inferior category and has been historically socially excluded – which is evidenced when these buildings are pejoratively referred to as "cholets". Moreover, although neo-Andean buildings are not considered "modern" by the elite and designers of La Paz, the citizens and architects of El Alto do consider them as modern buildings. These buildings are understood as symbols of "self-modernization" (Alejo Mamani, 2021), that is, a non-western modernization tied (in this case) to long-standing as well as new commercial networks, to own modes of economic and social organization, and to self-cultural expressions (such as festivities and original aesthetics). As symbols of "self-modernization", the neo-Andean buildings also embody centuries of resistance to an imposed Western culture; they are an expression of contemporary Aymara culture and a vindication of the Aymara world.
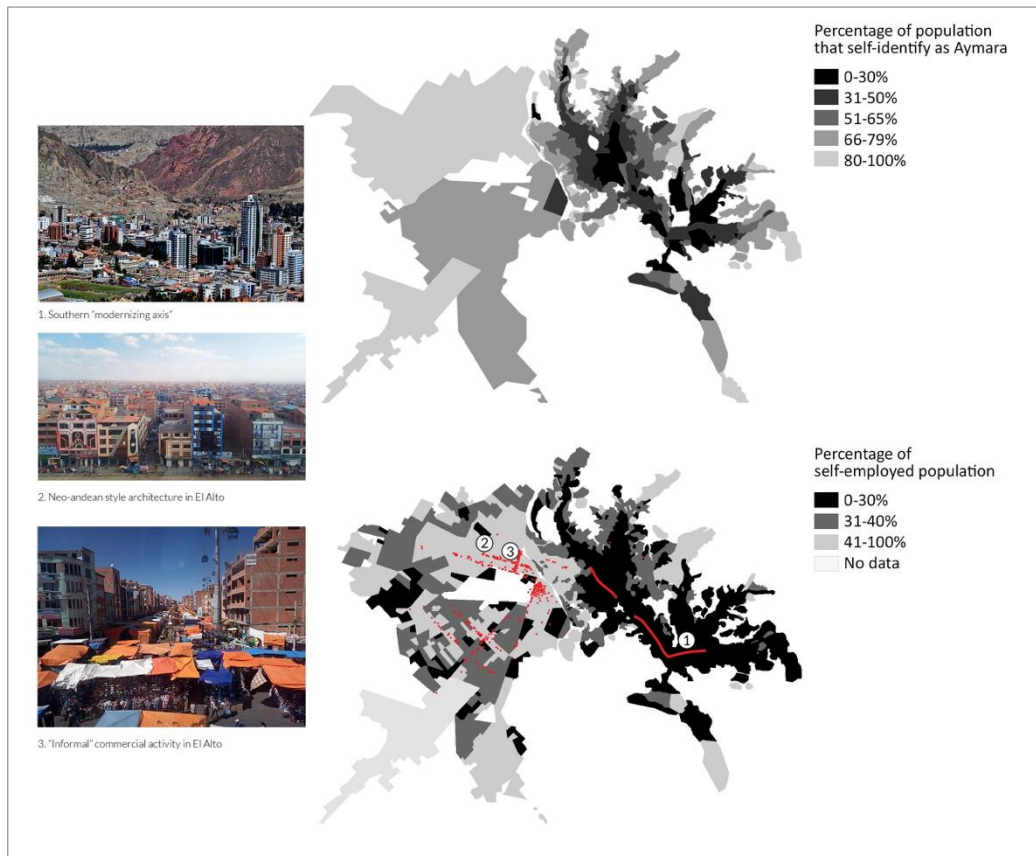
Diagram 11: Ethnic self-identification and economic activity

Source of pictures: https://commons.wikimedia.org/

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored how colonial structures have persisted and been continuously renovated through the processes of urbanization in La Paz–El Alto, Bolivia. By articulating decolonial thought – particularly the work of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui – with Latin American urban historiography and a spatial-temporal analysis of the metropolitan area of La Paz–El Alto, this work has shown that urbanization in Bolivia has been deeply intertwined with a long-standing colonial logic that continues to shape the physical and social landscapes of the city.

The analysis of the urbanization process of La Paz-El Alto showed how the continuous renovation of colonial structures through the liberal, populist, and neoliberal historical cycles has shaped the city's urban expansion and transformation. The urbanization of La Paz-El Alto evidences how the colonial domination mechanisms of cultural disciplining and exclusion established in the formal colonial period were not dismantled after independence, but instead renovated. After Bolivia's independence, liberal reforms aimed to "civilize" and "modernize" the nation by integrating its economy into the global capitalist system. This led to the incorporation of *mestizo*-indigenous populations into economic activities aligned with the "modernizing" project, such as mining and industrial labor. In the early 20th century, La Paz, these dynamics materialized through the development of industrial zones in the northern part of the city and the settlement of indigenous rural migrants in El Alto. Following the national revolution, the renovated modes of cultural disciplining and exclusion, deployed through the agrarian and urban reforms, caused massive rural-urban migration and an unprecedented urban growth. In other words, the "modernizing" reforms issued after 1952 were embodied by the urbanization process of La Paz during the second half of the 20th century. The inability of the economic model to introduce the growing urban population to the "formal" economic system and the neoliberal reforms of 1985 deepened exclusion by forcing the indigenous urban population to rely on self-labor or "informal" economic activities. The persistent exclusion of the indigenous population was particularly evident in the area of El Alto, which eventually gained administrative independence from La Paz after years of political resistance of the *Alteño* population. The urbanization process described above shows how the continuous renovation of mechanisms of cultural disciplining and

exclusion that have shaped La Paz-El Alto makes it a material and visible expression of internal colonialism.

The analysis of the socio-spatial structure of La Paz-El Alto reveals a persistent social colonial hierarchy rooted in the polarization and tension between the Western and indigenous cultures, which generates a social hierarchy where a Western minority concentrates the power and sets the norms of a majoritarian indigenous-*mestizo* society. From formal colonial times to the present, La Paz has functioned as a center of control and a symbolic hinge with metropolitan powers, a dependency materialized in elite architecture and urban planning that imitates Western styles. This long-standing cultural and economic subjugation has reinforced a duality between Western and Indigenous cultural poles, generating a stratified society where Western-*mestizo* populations dominate upper-class areas and "formal" sectors, while Aymara and *mestizo*-indigenous groups are relegated to marginalized zones and "informal" economies. Spatially, this division is most evident in the contrast between La Paz – associated with Western identity – and El Alto, which has emerged as an Aymara city. Administrative neglect and exclusionary urban policies have reinforced this segregation, with "formal" neighborhoods benefiting from infrastructure and planning, while indigenous-migrant areas remain underserved. Moreover, architectural styles reflect this socio-economic split: elite areas showcase imported architectural styles, while Aymara neighborhoods are characterized by "*utilitario popular*" buildings – mix-use structures tied to "informal" economic activities – and the iconic neo-andean buildings of the emerging Aymara *bourgeois*. Though dismissed by Western elites, neo-Andean buildings symbolize a form of non-Western modernity or "self-modernization" and resistance grounded in indigenous cultural pride, economic self-reliance, and alternative urban worlds. Ultimately, the urban fabric of La Paz–El Alto stands as a material expression of internal colonialism, but also as a site of cultural resistance and contestation.

A key contribution of this thesis is the application of a spatial lens to decolonial theory, showing how cities themselves are both products and instruments of internal colonialism. This approach aims to highlight that contemporary socio-spatial configurations, characterized by spatial segregation and inequality, are a reflection of the reproduction of colonial logics. Moreover, by analyzing the specific case of La Paz-El Alto, the research provides a concrete

example of how urbanization has been a product of internal colonial processes and that historical continuities are materialized in contemporary cities. Looking forward, future investigations could deepen the understanding of the intersection between persistent colonial structures and space through a variety of research paths. First, it would be important to explore the gender dimension of internal colonialism and its spatiality, as gender has played a crucial role in the construction of colonial structures (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010). Second, indigenous economic systems and processes of "informalization" of indigenous-*mestizo* groups can be further studied from a spatial and decolonial lens, as well as long-standing regional and more recent international indigenous economic networks. Furthermore, future research could explore comparative studies with other cities from the Global South that share a colonial history. Finally, future investigation could explore the intersection between ethnic urban identities and space to uncover the role that space plays in the construction of ethnic identities and othering. Such studies would deepen our understanding of the renovation and continuation of colonial structures embedded in urban spaces across cities in Latin America and the Global South, and only by acknowledging the existence of a colonial order in present times can alternative social and spatial configurations be envisioned.

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