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Planting trees and excluding people: the social consequences of the creation of green spaces in 19th Century Bogota

This research examines the socio-ecological consequences of the creation of green spaces during the modernisation of 19th century Bogotá. Bridging the disciplines of human geography, urban studies and ecology, this research focuses on the political role of urban nature. This study investigates how the adoption of plants as organising elements in urban space impacted upon people's daily practices in the city. To do so, the research follows a historical methodology based upon diverse sources of information, including newspaper articles, personal letters, maps and photographs, alongside original sources such as, poems, stories and herbarium collections.

The research results suggest that the creation of modern green spaces led to a systematic process of social exclusion in Bogotá. This research uncovers how the colonial squares which had been used as marketplaces were turned into parks. Endowed with fences and gardens, the modern parks were places of spatial segregation used almost exclusively by the elites. Equally, the creation of urban forest in the mountains close to Bogota, which was based on the adoption of exotic trees, meant not only the erosion of the natural ecosystems but also the impoverishment of the traditional knowledge linked to these spaces. As a result, deprived of the native forest, many people turned into industrial labourers or beggars.

This research offers a unique approach to the understanding of the relationships between environmental policies, ecological transformation and the creation of inequalities as displayed in cities of the global South such as Bogotá.