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# Racialized Disaster Patriarchy: An Intersectional Model for Understanding Disaster Ten Years after Hurricane Katrina

Rachel E. Luft

*The year 2015 marked the tenth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, which made landfall just outside of New Orleans on August 29, 2005. Critical narratives point to the glaring racial and economic inequality that contextualized the catastrophe. However, most Katrina discourse has been limited by its neglect of intersectional feminist analysis. In this article I introduce a model for making intersectional sense of Hurricane Katrina with lessons for the study of other disasters. By intersectional I mean a gender- and race-conscious framework that exposes the way in which structural sexism and racism came together to produce the disaster and even the social justice response to it. Following Naomi Klein's (2005) use of the term "disaster capitalism," I call the intersectional formation "racialized disaster patriarchy" as it refers to political, institutional, organizational, and cultural practices that converge before, during, and after disaster to produce injustice. Disaster patriarchy links the intersectional experience of disaster to the experience of recovery and the politics of the grassroots social movement for a just reconstruction.*

**Keywords:** disaster / gender / Hurricane Katrina / intersectionality / patriarchy / race / social movements

It has been just over ten years since Hurricane Katrina made landfall outside of New Orleans on August 29, 2005. The storm displaced a million and a half people from the region, flooded 80 percent of the city, and cost \$135 billion in total damages (Plyer 2014). Narratives of the storm, both those that emerged

while the catastrophe was unfolding and those that have explored the ongoing aftermath, have frequently pointed to the glaring racial and economic inequality that contextualized the catastrophe.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis has been a critical corrective to the pervasive racist colorblindness that helped produce such devastating consequences. Unfortunately, however, most of the discourse has also been limited by its neglect of substantive feminist, intersectional analysis. In this article I introduce a model for making intersectional sense of Hurricane Katrina with lessons for the study of other disasters. By intersectional I mean a gender- and race-conscious framework that exposes the way in which structural sexism and racism came together to produce the disaster and even the social justice response to it. My aim is to bring gender more fully into Katrina analysis—and by extension that of other disasters—in a way that demonstrates its deeply racialized organization. I hope to move beyond the pitting of gender and race against each other, which has often characterized critical scholarship and which threatened efforts in New Orleans to respond to the disaster intersectionally. Similarly I want to avoid the fixation with any one population that has informed sexist and racist discussions of the disaster and even most of those that have sought an intersectional analysis—the ubiquitous iconographic metonym for Hurricane Katrina has been the bodies of poor Black women—in order to describe more fully the multiple and interacting positionalities, forces, and engagements that constituted the intersectional disaster in a complex matrix of domination (Collins 1990). Ultimately this project seeks to explore the deeply gendered and racialized system in which people attempt to survive, resist, and explain crisis.

I was living in New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina struck, teaching at the University of New Orleans. As a white feminist woman, I had been involved in movements for racial justice for years. In January 2006, a few months after the flood waters were pumped out of the city, I was conducting participant observation in Common Ground, a radical grassroots recovery effort. I was part of the Antiracism Working Group and we were organizing within the grassroots network to advance racial justice.

As I have described elsewhere, activists began to identify a “pervasive culture of masculinity,” not only in the mainstream recovery efforts but also in post-Katrina social movement groups (Luft 2008, 16). The valorization of physical labor, a militarized environment both within and beyond movement encampments, and the disproportionate number of men in a city still lacking basic infrastructure contributed to a palpable climate I called “disaster masculinity” that spanned racial groups (17). There was a tremendous amount of racism running through the recovery and movement networks as well, but the activists had come together explicitly to fight against it, and even mainstream reactions to the disaster were often race-conscious in a city and a disaster in which the role of race had become undeniable. I wondered at the forces that made single-issue approaches to race for understanding what had happened so much more salient than gender or intersectionality<sup>2</sup>—both for people on the ground and for

scholars writing about it—as well as at the ongoing investment in presenting gender and race analyses as mutually exclusive. Why was gender—and therefore a gender- and race-conscious intersectional analysis—deniable?

As the years went by I realized that something much broader and more systemic than gendered *culture* was at work in the post-disaster environment. Furthermore, it became clear that it was not only the critical significance of race that was contributing to the proliferation of single-issue frameworks. Indeed, the race-only models that were dominant were inflected with their own kind of racist sexism in centering some kinds of bodies and frameworks over others. There were larger structural forces that were producing both the disaster and the terms for understanding it. I call this complex *racialized disaster patriarchy*, following independent journalist Naomi Klein's use of the term "disaster capitalism" (2005). Racialized disaster patriarchy is deeply intersectional in its mutually-constructing, inseparable, gendered, racialized, and economic components. I have centered the formation *patriarchy* because of the disproportionate way in which gender has been neglected and repressed in the framing of the catastrophe. For this reason I prefer it over the equally apt phrase "patriarchal disaster white supremacy," and the even more appropriate—if also more technical—"racialized, patriarchal, disaster intersectionality." The elision of feminist gender analysis is a familiar sexist pattern, but it is also the result of another kind of crisis: the still-anxious intersection of both feminism and racial justice, and sexism and racism, in progressive scholarship and social justice activism alike. Because this conjuncture has implications for post-disaster recovery, resistance, and analysis, it is part of the machinery of disaster patriarchy. Racialized disaster patriarchy, therefore, is an intersectional model that centers gender where gender (sexism, feminism) is produced in interaction with race (racism, antiracism). Disaster patriarchy describes the disaster of patriarchy and the patriarchy of disaster, where patriarchy is not a name for the oppression of white women but an intersectional formation of racialized gender injustice. In this system there are patterned roles for women and men of color and for white women and men. *Racialized disaster patriarchy refers to political, institutional, organizational, and cultural practices that converge before, during, and after disaster to produce intersectional gender injustice.*<sup>3</sup>

In this article I introduce disaster patriarchy to explain the intersectional dimensions of at least one major disaster in the twenty-first century. Some of the practices that constitute it are particular to disaster; some are not, but interact with disaster-specific forces and events. I give extra attention to the progressive social movement that emerged after the disaster because of its role as a network of resistance. It too was constrained by disaster patriarchy. The analysis seeks to reveal the many forces that come together to produce structural and cultural barriers to post-disaster feminist, racial justice.

I begin with a methods section that describes more of how I arrived at this approach over the course of my fieldwork in New Orleans. Then I explain my

use of the term “patriarchy,” introduce Klein’s notion of disaster capitalism, and offer racialized disaster patriarchy as a complementary sister model. This is followed by three substantive sections on the constitutive components of disaster patriarchy: the intersectional construction of disaster, and of Hurricane Katrina in particular, with an emphasis on its undertheorized gendered dimension; the intersectional construction of recovery, and of the recovery from Hurricane Katrina in particular, with an emphasis on its undertheorized gendered dimension; and the intersectional social movement response to Hurricane Katrina, with lessons for other movements, with an emphasis on its undertheorized gendered dimension. In these sections I assume an intersectional framework developed by feminists of color (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1995; Roth 2004; Luft and Ward 2009; Arvin, Tuck, and Merrill 2013), draw from feminist disaster literature that is undertheorized regarding US racial formation, and contribute empirical findings from my case study of New Orleans after the storm. Disaster patriarchy is a model that emerges at the conjuncture of several scholarly and political traditions; it describes one historical disaster while establishing a framework that might be used more broadly.

## Methods

I moved to New Orleans in 2004 to take a job as Assistant Professor of Sociology; my work was in race, gender, and social movements. I had just completed a dissertation on racial justice movements, and one of my case studies, The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, an antiracism movement organization, happened to be headquartered in New Orleans. Over the course of my dissertation fieldwork, I had begun to work with them as a resource trainer. Shortly after Hurricane Katrina struck, while I was still in evacuation, Institute organizers invited me to join the race-focused social movement response to the storm. I remained engaged in this work for six years. During this time, thanks to insights shared by other activists, I began to understand the profoundly gendered dimensions of the disaster experience that had been, for me too, less apparent than its racialization, and I also became aware of the repression of feminist recovery efforts. It became clear that gender and race intersectionality was a necessary framework for a just and successful analysis and intervention. Disaster patriarchy is a model that seeks to highlight gender as a corrective to the neglect of intersectional feminist scholarly and movement responses. It is an effort to pull together a decade of post-Katrina experience into a coherent framework in order to demonstrate that neither good disaster scholarship nor gender or racial justice are possible without an intersectional approach.

I conducted participant observation in post-Katrina movement groups from Fall 2005 until 2011. I participated in thousands of hours of movement meetings, strategy sessions, and tasks; co-organized racial justice education trainings for volunteers; and facilitated leadership development of young activists.

With support from the Social Science Research Council, I interviewed or held focus groups with forty-one movement leaders or activists, plus seven others who worked in non-profit or related capacities, for a total of forty-eight. There were eighteen Black women, eight Black men, twelve white women, one white genderqueer person, six white men, two Latinas, and one Latino. Thirty were themselves hurricane survivors, and eighteen were non-locals who came to New Orleans after the hurricane.

### **Down With Patriarchy. Bring Back Patriarchy**

The concept of patriarchy had its peak in the second wave of the women's movement. Building on more than a century of analysis of gender and sexism—though not on the “proto-intersectional” work of feminists of color (Gines 2014; Luft and Ward 2009)—mostly white second-wave scholars and activists sought to go beyond analysis of sexism to the production of a systematic theory of patriarchy. Patriarchy describes four domains of domination: *signification*, or the symbolic hierarchical engendering of bodies, meanings, and relations, with men and masculinity valued over everything else; *reproduction*, or the regulation of procreation and sexuality; *labor*, or the exploitation of un- and underpaid work through coercion and mystification; and *violence*, or the patterned use of emotional and physical harm and threat of harm enabled by gendered cultures and structures (Ebert 1988, 19; Jane Ward, pers. comm., April 2016; see also Beechey 1979). The concept fell out of favor in the subsequent two generations primarily due to two kinds of important critique that can be broadly identified as intersectional and poststructuralist. The intersectional challenge, leveled mostly by feminists of color, demonstrated that patriarchy was too singular and reductive a model that did not take into account gender's intersection with race, class, sexuality, nation, and other forms of political power (Combahee [1977] 2005; Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1995; Roth 2004; Luft and Ward 2009). Without making explicit these important interactions, patriarchy falsely universalizes white middle-class heterosexual women's experiences and obscures other forms of difference. Poststructuralist arguments build on the deconstruction of the subject by asking if the categories “women” and “men” are coherent enough to theorize (Mann 2013). They also draw on Foucault's analysis of power by rejecting a top-down model and replacing it with an understanding of power as multidirectional, calling into question the notion of male rule, a position that converges with intersectional critiques (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). These challenges to the conceptualization of patriarchy have been significant cautions and correctives.

Today, forty years into the destabilization of the notion of patriarchy from within, intersectional, race-conscious, multiracial feminist activism is in a predicament. Racism, false universalizing, and reification continue to plague mainstream feminism. Meanwhile, the steady critiques have cultivated ambivalence

among activists who are otherwise sympathetic to concerns about gender and power. As early as 1979, Veronica Beechey warned that “if the concept [patriarchy] is to be abandoned, it is essential that we find some other more satisfactory way of conceptualizing male domination and female subordination” (68).

Without a systemic, racialized understanding of patriarchy and an intersectional feminism that opposes it, patriarchy goes unchecked. Fieldwork after Hurricane Katrina suggests that in the absence of anti-patriarchal practices, disaster and disaster recovery advance racialized gender injustice. Gender injustice, in turn, furthers racism, which is itself gendered. This outcome extends to the social justice movement response as well; the abdication of anti-patriarchal practice, in this case enabled by years of both racist feminism and sexist racial justice, has material effects. This project seeks to expose the consequences—both unintended and very intended—of these overlapping theoretical and social movement developments in order to make a case for renewed, intersectional, antiracist, anti-patriarchal work. The re-pivoting of “feminism” and “patriarchy” to their intersectional iterations refuses to cede the concern with gender to parochial versions.

### **Disaster Capitalism**

This project takes as its point of departure Naomi Klein’s (2005, 2007) groundbreaking notion of “disaster capitalism.” Klein argues that occasions of large-scale social trauma have been seized by government-corporate partnerships as opportunities for dramatic neo-liberal incursions. Disaster capitalism refers to the collusion of public and private practices before, during, and after disaster, which outsource and privatize critical services and reconstruction for profit, using the “shock” of crisis to dismantle the goods and rights of the public sphere. Disaster capitalism “eclipse[s] the principle that citizens qua citizens are entitled to protection, relief, and restitution in the event of disaster” (de Waal, qtd. in Gunewardena and Schuller 2008, xi). Klein’s framework encompasses national and transnational political and economic catastrophe as well as natural and technological disaster.

Disaster capitalism is a powerful lens through which to understand how disaster becomes a political and economic opportunity for neoliberal social engineering. The framework resonated quickly with activists in New Orleans after Katrina. It is a model of political economy that at times acknowledges racialized outcomes. Unfortunately, gender is not part of the analysis, and therefore the more richly intersectional—economic, racial, gendered—way in which complex inequality is reproduced in disaster and experienced by differently situated people is also missing.

Racialized disaster patriarchy as a phenomenon intersects with disaster capitalism; as a model it is analogous to it. There are three primary ways in which disaster patriarchy differs from disaster capitalism. The first is by

centering gender instead of political economy and placing it in an explicitly intersectional framework that also emphasizes race. The second is by focusing on organizational and network practices and pathways, circuits through which gender so frequently courses. Where Klein's analysis is macro and transnational, a register well suited to political economy, racialized disaster patriarchy is also meso- and micro-level, for these are critical strata for the study of gender. The third difference is that while disaster capitalism is about the radical reengineering of society, disaster patriarchy is about retrenchment. Disaster capitalism is facilitated by shock and framed by the rhetoric of opportunity: "clean sheet," "laboratory," "new leap" (Klein 2007, 4–5, 9). Disaster capitalism is a dramatic lurch in a new direction, for it is "[o]nly a crisis—actual or perceived," according to free-market champion and disaster capitalism architect Milton Friedman, that "produces real change . . . [when] the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable" (6). Disaster patriarchy, by contrast, is disastrous by degree, not different in kind. Disaster patriarchy returns to the most regressive elements of gender that are still embedded in social life and reanimates them. Disaster patriarchy as a model reveals not the radically new, but rather the way in which racialized patriarchy has been the underlying logic all along. Disaster simply unleashes, concentrates, and justifies its more prominent resurgence.

### **Toward an Intersectional Model of Disaster: Racialized Disaster Patriarchy**

In this section I present racialized disaster patriarchy as an intersectional model that describes gender, racial, and economic practices that converge before, during, and after disaster to produce intersectional injustice. As most of the critical scholarship and grassroots practice after Hurricane Katrina centered race and class, and as Klein's invaluable framework was rooted in political economy with an acknowledgement of race, I emphasize gender in this layout in order to (re)establish it as crucial to the understanding of this and other disasters. While much of this discussion takes the prosaic form of adding gender to the conversation because of its glaring omission, the point is the interactive effect that is, as Black feminists have been saying for over a century, more than the sum of its parts.

### ***The Gendered (Intersectional) Construction of Disaster***

The social construction of disaster is a foundational concept in the sociology of disaster (Phillips et al. 2010; Wisner et al. [1994] 2004). Since the 1970s, scholars have argued that "disasters are fundamentally human constructs that reflect the global distribution of power and human uses of our natural and built environments" (Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2006, 130). Explains Elaine Enarson, "[T]here is nothing 'natural' about what we call disasters. Disasters are fundamentally social events with long histories deeply rooted in human,

economic, social, environmental and political choices about human and environmental development” (2010, 15). Race appears in disaster literature as a category of “social vulnerability,” predominantly in scholarship on the global South; disaster studies of the United States rarely employ critical race theory. Only since the 1990s has the constructionist approach to disaster and social vulnerability been systematically deepened by critical feminist interventions that bring an explicitly gendered lens. The trailblazing research of gender and disaster scholars has revealed the highly gendered construction and experience of so-called natural disaster (Enarson and Morrow 1998; Bystydzienski, Suchland, and Wanzo 2013.) As with the larger field, feminist disaster literature primarily addresses race outside of the US context.

While gender and disaster research has been a significant advance, most of the literature has focused on how differently gendered people—almost always women and men in a gender binary, and overwhelmingly women in a field that still equates gender with females<sup>4</sup>—experience disaster differently. Rarely has it gone beyond the gender of people to examine the gendered meanings of decisions, arrangements, and practices. Most gender and disaster literature, in other words, puts gendered *bodies* at the center, rather than centering gender as a political and analytical force. Disaster patriarchy is an attempt to move beyond the experience of women and men in disaster in order to understand the ways in which gendered patterns help to produce disasters and how part of what is disastrous is patriarchy. Disaster patriarchy begins with the patterned gendered experience of people, but also seeks to uncover the gendered production of and consequences for social processes that run through and beyond gendered bodies. If gender analysis is “an examination of the rules, laws, and institutional arrangements of social groups” (Ferree, Lorber, and Hess 2000, xxii), then disaster patriarchy is an analysis of the gendered rules, laws, and institutional arrangements that produce and are produced by disaster.

### *The gendered (intersectional) construction of Hurricane Katrina*

Feminist analysis of disaster has produced an inventory of the gendered patterns that emerge in disaster. This section is a very brief overview of these findings, which is almost entirely missing from critical race Hurricane Katrina analysis. Disaster occurs and is experienced in profoundly gendered ways. Women tend to want to evacuate disasters sooner than men, for example, turning evacuation into a negotiation or a male privilege when it is men who control resources or decisions within a family (Laska et al. 2008, 13). As personal and professional caregivers, women undertaking disaster preparations and evacuations are often responsible for the most vulnerable members of society: children, the elderly, the sick, and the disabled. Prolonged displacement, as in the case of Katrina, means women do the bulk of navigating the basic infrastructure of daily life for themselves and their families: shelter, food, medical care, and education for children. Scholars have tracked the rise in domestic violence after disasters

(Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2006, 135). Policy sometimes facilitates this; because FEMA distributes emergency funds to households and not to individuals, for example, abusive or estranged male partners are able to receive women's share of critical post-disaster life support. While we do not have measures of state violence, the militarization that follows major disasters like Katrina might well lead to increased violent encounters between law enforcement officials and women and gender non-conforming people. Almost every dimension of disaster experience is mediated by economic resources, which are also gendered and racialized: housing vulnerability, disaster preparedness, evacuation transportation, use of public or private shelter, access to quality medical care, employment benefits, and post-disaster employment.

As with other disasters, then, the way in which the wind and water of Hurricane Katrina became disastrous was a social process that was deeply gendered as well as raced and classed. The storm exacerbated already-existing gendered social structures, identities, social arrangements, and power dynamics, producing highly gendered effects in a heavily racialized, economically stratified context. Enarson notes that these conditions were understood before Katrina struck and the outcomes should not have been surprising: "These were critical things to know about community-wide and household vulnerabilities and capacities, and bear directly on preparedness and impact as well as recovery. It was there for the looking—and mostly, we didn't" (2010, 17).

*Intersectionality is contextual: New Orleans, August 2005*

The gendered dimensions of disaster interacted with the specific racialized and economic features of New Orleans to produce Hurricane Katrina. The racial and economic make-up of the city meant that a sizeable percentage of women residents were Black and low income: New Orleans was 67 percent Black before Katrina with a 24 percent poverty rate (compared to 13.3 percent nationally). Female-headed households had more than twice the poverty rate than the national average for similar families: 41 percent compared to 19 percent (Laska et al. 2008, 14). In a region partly under sea level, elevation is destiny. Overlaying maps of the city reveals the high correlation between Black female-headed households, flood-prone communities, and neighborhoods with low levels of vehicle ownership, meaning Black women and their families had a lower likelihood of self-evacuation pre-disaster and a higher likelihood of greater household damage (Greater New Orleans Community Data Center 2010).

High levels of extreme poverty in New Orleans are partly due to its gendered, racialized service and tourism economy. Before 2005 many women were employed in this sector, which was heavily impacted for years following the hurricane. Women were also overrepresented in the informal economy as domestic and childcare workers, other occupations that dwindled to almost nothing after the storm (Laska et al. 2008, 15). Conversely, after the hurricane, disaster-related paid labor was overwhelmingly gendered male: relief and recovery, security, and

construction. Between 2005 and 2007, women's incomes on average increased by just 3.7 percent, while men's incomes increased by 19 percent (Wilinger 2008, 7).

The convergence of post-disaster elements—heavily compromised basic infrastructure as well as whole sectors that were significantly damaged—meant there were more obstacles facing women's return than men's. Rates of return have been overwhelmingly described in racial and economic terms (Adams 2013; Rose and Tuggle 2010). But it was Black women in particular who returned to the city in smaller numbers than other groups; for many dozens of thousands, the displacement is ongoing (Helmuth and Henrici 2010).

### ***The Gendered (Intersectional) Construction of Recovery***

Disaster recovery refers to the collection of policies and practices that remake institutions and the social contract after crisis. As Klein and others have demonstrated, recovery is the stage of disaster in which disaster capitalism accomplishes most of its work, literally laying the foundation for long term social remaking (Gunewardena and Schuller 2008). At the center of the analysis is the way in which disaster becomes an opportunity for severe and accelerated social engineering. Important work in the last decade has demonstrated how disaster capitalism is deeply racialized (see especially Adams 2013). Disaster patriarchy builds on disaster capitalism by demonstrating how disaster capitalism is also gendered, not in additive but in interactive ways. The official recovery of New Orleans—by which I mean institutionally driven state, corporate, and non-profit efforts—had significant gendered, intersectional effects.

In this section I focus on the radical dismantling of the public sphere after Katrina as an exemplar of recovery processes. Though feminist scholars have long pointed to the public sector as a gendered domain, the gendered implications of Katrina's devolution have rarely been noted (for exceptions see Pardee 2014 and the Institute for Women's Policy Research [<http://www.iwpr.org/>]). What follows is a brief overview of the primary public sites of post-Katrina remaking: public housing, public health care, and public education. Within months of the hurricane the groundwork was laid, in each case, for their dissolution. The dismembering of these sectors had severe consequences for women's lives and for gendered, racialized arrangements.

#### *The big four housing developments*

The determination by local and national officials to demolish and redevelop four of New Orleans's ten public housing developments in 2007 was a remarkable choice in a region staggering from large-scale loss of viable housing. FEMA estimated that 72 percent of the housing stock in Orleans Parish was damaged by Katrina and the subsequent flooding, of which 42 percent was severely damaged (Rose and Tuggle 2010). HUD's 2006 decision to tear down 7,500 units of public low-income housing came as a shock to many in the reeling city. While the move triggered local and national resistance efforts by grassroots activists

and national politicians alike, in December 2007 the New Orleans City Council voted to support HUD's ruling. The decision meant that the developments would be out of commission for the duration of the renovation, would see a drop in net housing, and an even greater drop in housing at deep affordability.

The determination to turn a sizeable portion of New Orleans's public housing into mixed-income units was one part of a multi-pronged, decentralized housing recovery response driven by public-private partnerships that determined nothing less than who could (re)find shelter at home. The decisions are an example of the way in which disaster capitalism bypasses normal protocols—HOPE VI in this case—for policy change. Many researchers and grassroots activists have commented on their racial and economic implications (Rose and Tuggle 2010; Graham 2012). “Virtually 100%” of New Orleans public housing residents were Black (Quigley and Godchaux 2015); public investment in racialized, low-income housing had been tacit recognition of racial and economic inequality. As important social, cultural, social capital, and political centers of Black life, public housing was a meaningful presence in New Orleans (Quigley and Godchaux; Crawford and Russell 2009; Nelson 2005). The gendered dimension of public housing, however, and therefore of the gendered displacement that was recovery capitalism, was rarely addressed during the movement to resist it. But housing is always a “gendered phenomenon because women’s access to a safe home is mediated by men, children, a gendered labor market, and gendered housing and welfare policy” (Luft with Griffin 2008, 50–51).

Of the 5,146 leaseholders of units in the four developments in August 2005, the vast majority were women who served as the residential anchor for immediate and extended family members. The centrality of these homes for low-income people in the community was captured, ironically, in the local tradition of non-public housing New Orleanians heading to one of the developments for cover during a hurricane—as they did for Katrina—as the best option for sheltering in place for people who could not afford to evacuate. Public housing, in other words, was a magnetic center for networks of Black, low-income, female-headed households in New Orleans. Demolition of public housing meant that some of the city’s poorest women were unable to return to the city and that their extended families were disrupted. The decision to demolish signaled the end of a sixty-five-year public commitment to housing an increasingly Black, female, poor population. Since then, every single public housing development in New Orleans has been partially or entirely replaced with vouchers, constituting major steps on the path toward privatization of the public housing sector.

### *Charity Hospital*

The Reverend Avery C. Alexander Charity Hospital, lovingly referred to as “Charity” by New Orleanians, was established in 1736 and was one of the two oldest public hospitals in the country. At the time of Katrina, Charity was the primary trauma center in Southeast Louisiana. The hospital served people at

200 percent of the federal poverty level, functioning as the only source of care for many New Orleans residents. In 2005, before the storm, 75.6 percent of its patients were Black (Ott 2012, 106). Public healthcare was also gendered both in terms of its constituency, or patients served, and as a labor sector. A majority of inpatients and almost two thirds of outpatients were women, mostly Black (K. Brad Ott, pers. comm., September, 2011). Further, women disproportionately navigate health care for their families. Of the hospital's 4,000 employees, 2,300 were nurses, and because nursing and hospital administration is a heavily pink-collared sector, we should assume that well over two thirds of the hospital workforce was women (106).

When the levees failed, Charity Hospital flooded; its electrical switchgears were located in the basement, sinking the facility into desperate, fetid conditions. Soon after belated evacuations, nearly three quarters of the employees were fired. After years of negotiation between Louisiana State University officials, state officials, and FEMA, plans were made to close Charity permanently and build a new teaching hospital. Back in 2005 observers could read the writing on the wall: "Charity has from the beginning been a symbol of a social commitment to the poor, and its wards are empty at a moment when thousands of poor New Orleans residents are struggling to return home and fear that government has abandoned them. In many ways, the debate over its future parallels that of New Orleans itself, as it chooses whether to become a more middle-class city or return to earlier traditions" (Adam Nossiter, qtd. in Ott 2005, 106). The decision to shutter Charity "supplanted Charity's historic safety net mission with the attempted *medical neoliberal transformation* of its physical, financial, institutional and cultural assets" (Ott 2012, 136; emphasis in the original). K. Brad Ott, in his excellent Master's Thesis on the destruction of Charity Hospital, notes the significant race and class implications of this disaster capitalist decision. However, the profoundly gendered dimension of the impact in terms of both constituency and labor has hardly even been articulated as an issue.

### *Public education*

As with healthcare, education is gendered, both in terms of those who interact with the system on behalf of its constituency and in terms of employment. Within months of the storm, in Fall 2005, the Louisiana legislature and Governor Kathleen Blanco overhauled state education law through a series of Executive Orders and new legislation (Buras 2013). Designed to move from a centralized public school model to a choice, market-based approach based on charter schools, New Orleans's new school system soon became the most heavily chartered in the country. The transformation of New Orleans's public schools marginalized local, mostly Black women teachers; went a long way toward privatizing education, moving it from being a public good to a business venture; disabled an emphasis on place-based and local knowledge; and

disproportionately affected women as those who mediate children's education (Buras 2013). Camille Wilson Cooper demonstrates that "the notion of positioned school choice conceptualizes a highly subjective parental school choice process that is inextricably linked to choice makers' race, class, and gender backgrounds" (2005, 175).

The wholesale termination of 7,500 school district employees in December 2005 affected a labor pool that was overwhelmingly Black women. Despite union membership and contract protections, the employees were fired. In January 2014 the Louisiana Court of Appeals confirmed that the teachers were unlawfully terminated (Flaherty 2014).

Constituency and employment have to do with gender as identity, with the lives of women. More nuanced are questions regarding the gendered dimensions of contemporary education policy itself. Amy Stambach and Miriam David note how "few studies have considered the gender politics of parents' incorporation [in charter schools] or the fact that school-choice programs are formulated in ways that often reveal gendered and social-classed assumptions about families, employment, markets, and education" (2005, 1633). They argue that "[school choice] is symbolically and pragmatically gendered in significant ways. . . . The use of allegorical imagery in theoretical approaches to choice programming . . . forces us to think about how and when gender becomes a basis of new forms of inclusion and exclusion" (1650). Stambach and David respond to the neglect of gender analysis by identifying a range of feminist issues embedded in school choice policy and practices, such as the masculinization of the turn to market-based approaches, arguing that "gender pervasively underlies the history and present-day contours of parent-school relations and school-choice policies in the United States" (1636).

Gender-neutral analysis, even on the part of scholars and activists who bring otherwise excellent race- and class-conscious critiques of the transformation of New Orleans public schools, defines progressive research on post-Katrina education recovery. The terms and values they use to challenge market-driven charters, for example—"localism," "neighborhood," "local veteran teachers"—are all deeply gendered, intersectional phenomena but rarely explicitly so. The gender-neutral framing renders the gendered people and processes that constitute these alternatives invisible.

*Disaster capitalism: an intersectional process*

The recovery from Hurricane Katrina as represented by the rapid dismemberment of the public sector is a thoroughly gendered, racialized, intersectional process. It has disproportionate consequences for mostly Black women trying to accomplish their gendered responsibilities, access their gender-inflected citizenship rights, meet their gender-constructed needs, and maintain employment in a gendered, racialized labor market. Beyond gendered bodies, gendered disaster recovery has implications that threaten the social contract by undermining

core structures of daily life. This occurs for individuals and also for the symbolic meanings that run through them.

There are two orders of gendered practice here: post-disaster gendered policy and the occlusion of the gendered dimension. While the recovery has also been largely colorblind, critical scholarship and activism have sought to expose its racial and economic implications. The same has rarely been true of the gendered dimension; most scholars and activists have neglected it. Writing about Katrina, Alisa Bierria, Mayaba Liebenenthal, and INCITE! explain, “Invisibility can be used as a tool of oppression, because if a people can’t be seen, then their work can be discounted, their experience of violence and oppression can go without recourse, and their lives can be devalued” (2007, 32). The effort to “render visible the experience of women of color in the context of disaster—both the disaster of the storm itself and the disaster of oppression in the context of the storm” has thus been monumental work for the small number of activists seeking to include gender in their grievance articulation and movement practice (31). It is to both the gendered elements of the social movement response as well as to the repression of gender frames on the Left that we now turn.

### ***The Gendered (Intersectional) Construction of Resistance***

Disaster scholars have chronicled the emergence of post-disaster community-based groups that organize for relief and grassroots recovery as well as to right wrongs associated with disaster management (Couch and Kroll-Smith 1991). Most of these initiatives fall within the purview of mainstream civil society advocacy groups. In contrast, the social movement groups represented here diverge from this pattern in having their roots in radical social change networks. The groups consist primarily of small grassroots collectives that recognized each other during the years following Hurricane Katrina in a network I call the Movement for a Just Reconstruction.<sup>5</sup> Most of the groups were organized explicitly for racial and/or economic justice for the survivors of Katrina. They focused on the following seven grievances: grassroots relief and recovery, right of return, preservation of affordable housing, preservation of affordable health care, workers’ rights, immigrant justice, and criminal justice reform.<sup>6</sup>

In this section I explore the gendered, intersectional dimension of the Movement for a Just Reconstruction. I describe two kinds of gendered practice. The first is normative gendered organizational and movement stratification—the gendered division of labor and leadership—that was exacerbated by the crisis. While disaster can be an opportunity for gender transgression, most gender and disaster literature describes the post-disaster resurgence of a gender binary and deepening gender inequality (Pacholok 2013). This research usually highlights family or employment settings. I identify gender inequality in social-movement groups and describe the way in which disaster serves as a greenhouse for accelerated growth. The second kind of gendered practice is the symbolic

domain of movement strategy. It refers to the gendered meanings of movement actions: grievance articulation, tactics, organizing styles, and so forth. Usually presented as gender-neutral, these practices have gender significance. Gender analysis reveals the hidden gender accomplishments of ostensibly gender-free movement activity, where accomplishment means sexism, the absence of gender-conscious intersectionality, and the further entrenchment of racialized patriarchy in post-disaster formations.

I illustrate the gendered dimension of disaster resistance with examples from the movement. The examples themselves are not the endpoint of my analysis, nor is their purpose to demonstrate the personal sexism of the actors. I take interpersonal sexism to be the norm, not the exception, in social practice. Instead, I approach these examples as effects of two larger and converging intersectional matrices: the first two dimensions of the racialized patriarchal disaster industrial complex—construction of the disaster and construction of the recovery—which I have described above, and an ongoing crisis in national feminist, antiracist politics, which I describe elsewhere (Luft, 2012). As structural arrangements, these matrices came together during and after Hurricane Katrina to produce a collection of patriarchal outcomes. The examples of racialized sexism in the movement, therefore, should be read as symptoms of larger structural processes.

#### *Intersectional divisions of movement labor*

The social movement roles that emerged after Hurricane Katrina were quickly divided along lines of gender and race. This division reflected the demographics of New Orleans before the storm, the intersectional experience of the storm, and the gender and race politics of radical movement networks. In a majority Black city, in a disaster experienced by many to be blatantly racialized, most of the social justice leaders and participants were Black. Gendered obstacles to returning to the city made it more difficult for women, particularly low-income Black women, to return home. The bigger social movement groups were sustained by a steady stream of non-local activist volunteers, consisting mostly of Black men and a larger number of young, twenty-something white activists who came to support the work of these organizations.

Within this demographic context, hierarchical patterns of racialized, gendered labor emerged in the movement groups. Most of the leaders of the larger and better-resourced emergent movement groups were Black men, while most staff, lead organizers, and movement laborers were Black women, with non-local white women making up a disproportionate share of supporters. White men were few and far between, though disproportionately influential (Luft 2008). This demographic breakdown means Black men are overrepresented in descriptions of movement sexism, which should be understood as a circumstantial and not an essential outcome.

Ursula Price, a Black woman in her 30s, became the Executive Director of Safe Streets, Strong Communities, a grassroots criminal justice reform organization after the hurricane. She painted a picture of a standard gendered division of labor:

I noticed [that male leaders] were really good at big ideas . . . but they didn't want to do the work. [I]t was mad frustrating—it's like, turn out is not just you going and talking to your friends, it's actually phone banking and flyers and folding envelopes and that stuff you don't want to do. . . . You know it actually gets done by someone, right? . . . Because they would even be critical to the point of saying, "Ya'll are so bogged down in details that you don't actually want to do anything revolutionary," and I remember having a conversation with [someone] where I'm like, how the hell do you expect your revolution to happen without any work? . . . People need water at the revolution. Who's gonna go get the water?<sup>77</sup>

I asked her about one of the younger male leaders of one of the bigger radical organizations. She replied,

[He] has some interesting gender dynamics. [He] is real analytical about stuff, so he at least on the surface tries not to be all that. But I even noticed during all that public housing shit that was going on, it's like [he was] in the center calling the shots and a whole bunch of women around him doing the work. . . . I'm like, how is it that you're the only man in this room of twenty people and yet you're the only one not stapling something?<sup>78</sup>

Price's description characterizes a gender divide in a relatively racially homogenous movement. Additionally, however, there were more complex intersectional dynamics occurring behind the scenes. White activists—initially gender mixed during the emergency phase but increasingly female and occasionally genderqueer during the period that followed—contributed significant labor to early movement efforts. This infusion of support helped to determine which organizations were able to advance their agendas, which projects were completed, what political goals accomplished. The contributions had real consequences in influencing which neighborhoods got free house gutting and therefore were more likely to return or return quickly, or which movement organizations were able to endure while others could not sustain themselves. Pipelined to New Orleans by a national racial justice network, these white activists were channeled into the bigger social-movement organizations, that is, those led by men of color. Guided by a prevailing single-issue, gender-neutral, antiracist edict to "follow the leadership of people of color," white activists wound up overwhelmingly supporting the organizations and agendas of men, even after local Black women had left the groups because of the kind of sexist practices Price describes above. Some of the Black feminist organizers who departed then launched groups devoted to the intersectional challenges facing women of color,

which soon foundered for lack of resources. Traditional organizational sexism in the social movements following Katrina was exacerbated by an influx of white outsiders and a race-only analysis that benefited the leadership of men of color over women of color (Luft 2016).

*Symbolic practices and meanings*

The section above describes how intersectional forces, intensified by disaster, produced gendered, racialized outcomes in terms of the leadership, labor, and organizational agendas of women and men. Coursing through this register of the sex and gender of bodies are currents of symbolic gendered meanings. Social movement scholars have analyzed the way in which ostensibly gender-neutral movement practices often have gendered significance and therefore accomplish gendered work (Taylor 1999; Luft 2012). Grievance framing, leadership styles, organizing tactics, and strategy have gendered, intersectional dimensions even when gender is not explicit. In the remainder of this section I identify two kinds of symbolic gendered practice in the post-Katrina movement groups.

Despite the overwhelmingly gendered experience of disaster, and the disproportionately female activists and engaged members of the base, most Katrina movement leaders framed movement grievances in almost entirely gender-neutral terms, as the list of movement grievances above reveals. The first kind of symbolic gender work, therefore, was an almost ubiquitous gender-neutrality in grievance articulation, except by the small number of self-identified, mostly Black feminists whose political framework was feminist, intersectional analysis. Omission of gender analysis obscured the gendered causes and effects of disaster struggle and guaranteed a gender-neutral political response, where gender-neutral defaults to centering the experience of men and the norms of masculinities. The fight to save public housing is perhaps the best example. For more than two years after Katrina, the effort to defend public housing was a unifying campaign across the movement. The mobilization to reopen public housing and prevent replacement with mixed income units was framed by movement leaders as a matter of “race and class cleansing.” Despite the fact that 90 percent of the leaseholders were Black women, the gendered dimension of the disaster capitalist decision was almost never mentioned in the organizing except by a few local Black feminist organizers. One of them, Shana Griffin, explained the consequences of the gender-neutral framing. The approach

invisibiliz[es] women’s experiences. With public housing for example, despite the demographics . . . their identities are not centered. That’s a patriarchal outcome. . . . When communities are invisible, when they are not named, then they don’t exist, so it doesn’t matter what happens to them. It dehumanizes the people in those communities. . . . So it makes it much more difficult for people to even believe these events are occurring. By not naming [the gendered dimension], it makes *my* work harder.<sup>9</sup>

In this critical statement, griffin highlights the substantive effects of gender repression in organizing in terms of civil death, both the human and strategic effects of denying people's existence. In light of pervasive cultural images of Black welfare queens, a public housing defense strategy that sought to reframe Black motherhood—mothers trying to return home after the hurricane—rather than ignore the gender component of the demonization might have produced different outcomes. Ursula Price explained, “I think if we did our messaging better—like a conversation about mothers with children instead of you know, lazy black people—[it] might have been a more interesting conversation.”<sup>10</sup> She is suggesting a frame-bridging that proactively re-narrates dominant images instead of sidestepping them.

Gender-neutral grievance articulation was one manifestation of the repression of gendered analysis, and it created a vacuum in the Movement for a Just Reconstruction. What filled the space was the second kind of symbolic gendered work: an organizing culture and tactics that were heavily masculinized, though again cloaked in gender-neutral garb. Khalil Shahyd, a Black man who was born and raised in Louisiana gave an overview:

There was this emphasis on this sort of confrontational, this combative organizing strategy and not really on the process of actually building communities back up that have been devastated by a flood. . . . [B]y the time I got there in March [2006] all of the women of color had just left the office because they just couldn't take [some of the male leadership] because they were just being bullies.<sup>11</sup>

Shahyd and others separately produced similar typologies of post-Katrina movement practices to exemplify what they called patriarchal or masculine strategy and tactics: emphasis on large public demonstrations or protest, authoritarian organizing culture, minimization or degradation of emotion and basic human needs. Shahyd explained, the “gender dynamics play out in the way that . . . the leadership, the organizers, how their masculinity becomes articulated through the strategy: one, as it has to be confrontational, and two, it's always about this sort of growth of power in opposition to an oppressor as opposed to—using gendered terms—nurturing and developing an alternative livelihood, an alternative society.”<sup>12</sup> He continued,

[I]n the resistance against the demolition of public housing where it was just totally this oppositional strategy, protest, protest, protest, and they never at any point tried to just work with residents of public housing to actually develop different strategies of community development, of housing development. . . . [T]here are other ways that we can do this and it doesn't have to be this sort of zero sum game, public housing or demolition.<sup>13</sup>

When she similarly characterized certain practices as patriarchal, Black feminist Kai Barrow, staff member of Critical Resistance, made a point to

distinguish them from the gender identity or sex of the actor: “I’m not talking about patriarchy and gender specific to individuals and specific to body parts . . . but also particular to the strategies and the tactics that are used.”<sup>14</sup> When she described non-locals, including some women, as practicing patriarchal politics I asked her to clarify:

RL: What about that was patriarchal, why do you use the term patriarchy to describe women and northerners imposing an agenda that wasn’t about—

KB: Because the key word that you just used, imposing, is part of a patriarchal modality, right. Patriarchy is about imposing and controlling and pushing, it’s about force and it’s sometimes done in a very gentle way.<sup>15</sup>

Distinguishing gendered politics from gender identity makes it possible to read power and gender apart from the presence or absence of gendered bodies. There were senior Black women organizers who were well respected and had authority within the movement. They worked within male-led organizations or headed their own. While sympathetic to some of these gender concerns, they rarely led with them, rarely emphasized an anti-patriarchal or feminist agenda. Barrow put it this way: “Women and a non-masculinist approach [are] incorporated. . . . It’s not a threat, it’s not oppositional, it’s not working in alliance, it is just engulfed in it. . . . So the women who did participate in any leadership role were allowed to . . . because they were able to be engulfed by the patriarchal leaders.”<sup>16</sup> This statement refers not to complete absorption, for these women leaders were influential in the movement, but rather to the repression—engulfing—of anti-patriarchal concerns.

A consequence of the suppression of gender analysis and feminist practice was obstacles to intersectional organizing. There was direct and indirect resistance to gender-conscious intersectional movement mobilization. Among the feminists of color, several operationalized what intersectional organizing looks like in practical terms as putting the experience of people living at the intersection of multiple oppressions at the center. Said Barrow, “[H]ow are anti-patriarchal—well, how are women’s needs, how are non-masculine-bodied needs—getting met in this place post-disaster, during and post-disaster?”<sup>17</sup> Rosana Cruz, queer Latina feminist agreed:

Shana framed it . . . the way that we needed . . . to frame the recovery and frame the rebuilding and frame the response to everything that happened during and post-Katrina and before as: What are the needs of Black, young, low income women? . . . [I]ntersectionality in practice meant looking at who are people who are going to be left behind, and that was a huge part of what I was talking about. . . . [W]e’re leaving all of these important voices out of the conversation because we’re just trying to mirror this macho way of doing things. . . . [A]nd so framing a response to people’s needs as: In order for a low income Black woman who’s a mother, a young mother, or a person with

a disability, or a dyke, or somebody who's gender non-conforming, in order for them to be able to access what they need, what do we have to build?<sup>18</sup>

### *Feminist, intersectional organizing in disaster/patriarchy*

The tragedy of racialized patriarchy in the post-Katrina justice movement is not that some Black and white men were sexist and that some Black and white women and movement networks facilitated this. The tragedy is that the intersectional political vision and practice of local women of color was unsupported and derailed at an historical moment that deeply needed this work. I have sought here to identify some of the obstacles to that feminist, intersectional organizing. I end this section by noting that despite the structural odds against it, the Movement for a Just Reconstruction after Hurricane Katrina did produce extraordinary occasions of intersectional, feminist mobilization. A small number of feminists organizers, mostly Black women but also a few Latina and white women, genderqueer people, and Black men, made feminist interventions into the larger movement organizations, initiated feminist projects within them like the Women's Health and Justice Initiative, or started their own organizations, such as the Women's Health Clinic. While severely under-resourced, they accomplished important work and provided a model for disaster organizing outside of patriarchy. As Rosana Cruz noted,

Shana and Mayaba and people who were doing the work the whole time . . . were bringing up issues of gender and we were doing it . . . and we were calling out sexism within certain dynamics as much as we could. So I mean I think that that also is really important to acknowledge that that was happening. . . . [I]t can't be overstated. People do the work and it's not recognized.<sup>19</sup>

### *Challenges to movement intersectionality*

Social movement sexism is an historic problem that exceeds both New Orleans and disaster settings. Racialized disaster patriarchy is about the way in which the conditions of disaster exacerbate the problem and therefore stack the deck against intersectional feminist organizing—and in particular the intersectional leadership of women of color—in catastrophic times. Expediency in states of emergency is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. Reflecting on principles of intersectional feminist organizing, Barrow wondered, “But does that work in emergencies, does that work when there is crisis at work, crisis upon crisis upon crisis that we're constantly battling?”<sup>20</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In writing about disaster capitalism three months before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Klein described the new US Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, whose “mandate is to draw up elaborate

‘post-conflict’ plans for up to twenty-five countries that are not, as of yet, in conflict” (2005, 1). Carlos Pascual, the Coordinator, noted the efficiency of anticipating world crises so as to prepare “‘pre-completed’ contracts to rebuild countries that are not yet broken” (1). Disaster patriarchy is built out of similarly “pre-completed” contracts. There is, however, no centralized office of coordination. Rather, as Enarson observes, the groundwork for patriarchal reconsolidation exists in the “pre-disaster ‘normal’ state of affairs” (Enarson 2010, 16).

Racialized disaster patriarchy describes the intersectional production of gendered experiences during and after disaster that are rooted in pre-disaster patriarchal structures and cultures. Disaster animates the pre-existing formations and facilitates patriarchal responses, which become embedded in post-disaster organizations, actions, and recovery and resistance measures. As an intersectional formation, disaster patriarchy demonstrates the mutually constructive and symbiotic relationship between sexism and racism.

By schematizing the three dimensions of patriarchal relations before, during, and after disaster, and demonstrating their multiplicative effects, I aim to provide a map for intervention. Intervention must be multi-pronged, occur at all three stages, and target every sector of society, just as disaster does. Its strategy should include the explicit race-conscious gendering of analyses, programs, and processes; dismantling of sexist, racist social and movement structures; the revaluing of patriarchal and antiracist, feminist approaches; the distinction between feminist politics and gendered bodies, while still centering the experience of those whose identities are under attack; and the replacement of single-issue politics with intersectionality, including at each of these moments of gender intervention. Because we build post-disaster movements out of the remains of pre-disaster life, we cannot wait for crisis to mobilize feminist intersectional justice efforts. Instead, the groundwork must be laid before disaster strikes. For it is here, as the people of New Orleans know well, that the conditions of disaster are made.

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## Notes

1. See Adams 2013; Woods 2010; Flaherty 2010; Luft 2008; South End Press 2007; "Hurricane Katrina" 2006.

2. For example, see Erikson and Peek 2011.

3. I use the terms "disaster patriarchy" and "racialized disaster patriarchy" interchangeably. One of the objectives of my resurrection of the term patriarchy is to demonstrate the way in which it is always already racialized and thereby to encourage the reformation and reclamation of the term as an intersectional description of systemic racialized gender inequality. Because of patriarchy's historical [mis]representation as a colorblind, white-centric phenomenon, I periodically add the qualifier "racialized" to ensure that it is being read as a racialized structure. I take up this issue in the section, "Down with Patriarchy. Bring Back Patriarchy."

4. For an exception, see Enarson and Pease 2016.

5. I borrow this term from Sharon Martinas.

6. A more detailed version of these grievances was first articulated to me by Shana griffin.

7. Ursula Price, interview with the author, June 11, 2011, New Orleans, LA.

8. Price, interview.

9. Shana griffin, interview with the author, April 22, 2010, New Orleans, LA.

10. Price, interview.

11. Khalil Shahyd, interview with the author, December 17, 2012, by telephone.

12. Shahyd, interview.

13. Shahyd, interview.

14. Kai Barrow, interview with the author, June 12, 2011, New Orleans, LA.

15. Barrow, interview.

16. Barrow, interview.

17. Barrow, interview.

18. Rosana Cruz, interview with the author, June 15, 2011, New Orleans, LA.

19. Cruz, interview.

20. Barrow, interview.

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