

“You Rise Up ... They Burn You Again”: Market fires and the urban intimacies of disaster colonialism

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In this paper we develop a feminist political ecology of disaster colonialism. To do so, we focus on a series of fires that devastated Park Yard Market in Kampala, Uganda, one of the largest retail spaces in East Africa. Officially accidental, rumours suggest the fires were deliberately set to displace traders and make way for the lucrative (re)development of the city-centre land. Concerned less with the veracity of these rumours and more with their political ecologies, we show how narratives of Park Yard forwarded by the state and private interests indeed readied it for disaster. Here, we trace how colonial narratives of urban planning in the city, driven by technocratic imperatives of improvement, modernisation, and safety echo in the contemporary devaluation of Park Yard and its women traders. Against this, we show how the caring labour and investment by those traders was central to the formation and maintenance of the market. Over time they created an economically viable space, even as their work was devalued and legally unrecognised. Our analysis interrogates the colonial past-presents and the gendered-racialised logics of neoliberal urban development. This framing understands spectacular disaster, a series of highly destructive fires, as inextricably connected to historically produced systems of precarious urban marginality. It demonstrates the uneven impacts, and in particular the deeply deleterious impacts for low-income Ugandan women; the relationship between fire disaster, vulnerability, and the labour of social reproduction; and the varied ways female traders resisted, adapted, and struggled to defend their economic space in the city. Specifically, a feminist political ecology also helps us understand the embodied nature of this relationship. That is, it is always produced through emotion-laden, material, and corporeal gendered, racialised and classed power and both relies on and violates particular kinds of idealised or disposable urban subjectivities.

KEYWORDS

Africa, disaster capitalism, disaster colonialism, feminist political ecology, fire, urban geography

1 | STELLA AND JANE: FIERY DISASTER COLONIALISMS, FEMINIST INTRODUCTIONS

Selling imported, second-hand shirts along the Nakivubo channel, Stella is on guard for signs of city authorities. She trades illegally just steps from the once-busy Park Yard Market. A series of fires occurred there between 2009 and 2017, displacing 10,000 vendors like her (Ngwomoya, 2017b). Harassed hourly by Kampala Authority law enforcement, Stella refuses to leave the area. But she knows that the time will have to come. Large signs loom over her head showcasing its future: a shopping complex to accompany the renovated international football stadium.

Prior to the fires, Park Yard and its neighbouring Owino market were among the largest retail spaces in East Africa, attracting more than 200,000 people daily (Kinyanjui, 2014; Mugisa et al., 2009). Park Yard alone had over 3,000 stalls and 25,000 registered traders. Seventy percent of traders were women (Larsson & Svensson, 2018; Mugisa et al., 2009). Government officials blamed the fires on shoddy materials and the market's informal planning, a narrative directed at the primarily female stall owners. For their safety and the sanitation, modernisation, and development of the city, so the argument went, urban space must be remade (Bagala, 2011; Businge & Ssempeggo, 2009; Kasozi, 2011). But rumours also spread. Traders suspected the fires were deliberately set on this prime downtown real estate (Okiror, 2009). For many traders, this was simply part of a far longer history of violent displacement. Trying not to cry, Jane remembered the fires: "However much you want to develop yourself; they burn your property. You rise up again, they burn you again, and in such a manner it is an indirect order for you to vacate the space" (personal communication CK, 3/2018).

Stella and Jane offer us a complex story of urban development, displacement, disaster, and resistance. Their accounts tell us of urban planning's colonial residues, neoliberalism's global capital flows; the embodiments of disaster, and of rights to the city in the global south. Low-income women like them made up the majority of Park Yard vendors displaced by, yet innovating through, these shifting urban, political, and economic landscapes.

To understand these complexities, in what follows we bring the insights of feminist, postcolonial analyses of urban displacement to bear on theories of disaster capitalism, developing a feminist political ecology of disaster colonialism. First, we situate the fires within longer anti-Black colonial and neoliberal legacies of land- and power-grabbing, linking these urban histories to contemporary state neglect. We then demonstrate how these legacies are bound with embodied gendered-racial power. We argue that state devaluation and neglect is facilitated by colonially rooted depictions of the market as unruly, dangerous, and in need of improvement. The market is instead, and in the face of such neglect, maintained and made valuable by the caring labour of the women who worked there. Turning to accounts of four fires between 2009 and 2017, we describe how the historical neglect and devaluation of the market heightened the vulnerability of the market and its community to disaster. A feminist imperative means that we recognise and value the rumours among traders that link the fires to the eventual demolition of Park Yard, their dispossession, and the wider projects of urban (re)development in Kampala. In turn, it demands we attend to the incredible tenacity of these women in the face of these political, economic, and ecological moves. We close with accounts of women's efforts to get by in Kampala, echoing colonial-era resistances as they respond to, and negotiate with, that city's disastrous capitalism.

2 | DISASTER COLONIALISM AND FEMINIST URBAN GEOGRAPHIC INTERVENTIONS

In her 2019 AAG Political Geography plenary, Bonilla articulates the concept of the "coloniality of disaster" (2019; 2020). Focusing on Puerto Rico and the impact of Hurricane Maria, she argues that "disasters should not be understood as sudden events, but rather the outcome of long histories of slow, structural violence. That 'vulnerability,' both social and environmental, is thus not a natural state but the product of racio-colonial governance" (2019, p. 1). Her work builds on and complicates analyses of "disaster capitalism" (Klein, 2007) and wider studies of hazards that recognise their social production (Sun & Faas, 2018; Tierney, 2007; Wisner et al., 2004). A disaster capitalism framework explicates how spectacular moments of catastrophe are co-opted as catalysts for rapid neoliberal policy implementation (e.g., Gunewardena, 2008). Under "Shock Doctrine," neoliberal reforms are ushered in via extraordinary incidents of ecological and/or state-directed violence (Bonilla & Klein, 2019). Scholars of disaster capitalism argue that natural disasters, while seemingly agentless, are tightly bound up with capitalist imperatives. These target certain communities, livelihoods, and spaces for capital accumulation. They do so both by heightening their precarity through years of disinvestment and deliberate neglect, and by taking advantage of their devastation following disaster events. Commonly this occurs via the linked discourses of blame and protection, for example by fostering resilience or "building back better" (Imperiale & Vanclay, 2020; Rhiney, 2020).

This framing of disaster dovetails with critical scholarship on hazards. Since the early 1980s, a small body of hazards research has become more politicised, recognisant of their political-economic drivers and their differential vulnerabilities and impacts (Wescoat, 2015; Wisner et al., 2004). This shift responds to criticism from political ecologists in the 1970s, who argued that conventional hazards work overemphasised biophysical factors to the neglect of structural power relations and drew too faithfully on an apolitical understanding of science (O'Keefe et al., 1976). Critical hazards work took on these concerns, understanding “natural” disasters as socially produced, primarily by examining the role of capitalist economic processes in shaping disasters, and in creating uneven impacts across socio-economic classes (Watts, 1983; Wisner et al., 2004). In recent years, efforts to understand and mitigate these uneven impacts, and perhaps afford agency to victims of hazards, are employed in scholarly and policy-based work on social vulnerability and resilience (Rhiney, 2020; Wescoat, 2015).

Thus, political ecologies of hazards critically integrate analyses of power, and particularly capitalism. This is also evident in hazards work on fire and fire management. This work has utilised political ecology frameworks to examine how “incendiary landscapes” (Collins, 2008, p. 26) are produced through the historical capitalist exploitation of nature. Much of this work focuses on wild and forest fires and their increasing impacts on neighbouring rural and urban residential areas. This research valuably links rising fire outbreaks and devastation to, for example: timber and construction industry-related deforestation; neoliberal cuts to public fire management services; no-burn policies to satisfy residential tourists and economies; and the encroachment of sub-, ex-, and urban development (Collins, 2008; González-Hidalgo et al., 2014; Simon, 2014; Tsing, 2005). Some of this work also uses disaster capitalism frameworks to critically identify exploitative processes of capital accumulation in the aftermath of fire events (Simon, 2014). Important to our project is the subset of work here on the urban political ecologies of fire. An instructive example is Murray's (2009) research on recurring fires in Johannesburg's informal settlements. Focusing on the township of Alexandra, he demonstrates that fire is an everyday hazard for low-income residents there. Despite its political positioning as a “world class city” (p. 167), Murray argues that these quotidian fires are a direct result of Johannesburg's unregulated planning codes, inadequate crisis preparation and management, and preference for elite “edge” urban developments. His urban political ecology of fire makes clear the “social nature of artificial hazards, that is, the underlying structural conditions that make such social catastrophes inevitable in the first place” (2009, p. 168).

Complicating this work further, Bonilla pushes for an explicitly antiracist and postcolonial approach. While work on hazards and disaster, including that on disaster capitalism, may integrate analyses of racism, “layering ... white supremacy on top” of violent capitalist displacement (Klein in Bonilla & Klein, 2019, p. 22), theories of disaster colonialism understand capitalism as always and already racialised and racist, rooted in histories of colonialism and anti-Black nationalism. Through this lens of “racial capitalism,” it becomes clear that racialised dehumanisation, disposability, violence, and histories of enslavement are central to capitalist formation and its continuation (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019; Robinson, 2000). Antiracist and decolonial work push for an analysis of disaster capitalism that differentiates how, through racial, colonial, and neoliberal regimes of power, Black, Brown, and indigenous bodies are rendered precarious, and are thus more easily exploitable. But crucially, it roots that precarity in centuries-long and enduring colonial, global-hemispheric projects. It shows that not only is disaster “socially” produced, but specifically, that it is produced through past-present racio-imperial governance, that colonialism itself is a disaster (Bonilla, 2020). For example, then contemporary capitalisms, such as those elite “edge” developments Murray (2009) examines, must always be rooted in longer and racialised histories of colonial and state disinvestment, devaluation, neglect, and appropriation. We cannot explicate class-based capitalist accumulation in South Africa without a sustained engagement with its roots in the anti-Black violence of Apartheid and British colonialism. Looking forward, antiracist and postcolonial approaches also offer a valuable critique of the turn to “resilience” in hazards work. Bonilla and others (Rhiney, 2020) assert that resilience theory and practice can too easily be co-opted for individualised, apolitical, and neoliberal recovery arguments. A disaster colonialism framing offers new ways to understand the futurities of disaster that reimagine resiliency politically, as “gestating new forms of sovereignty and new visions of postcolonial recovery” (2020, p. 1).

Bonilla's work is incredibly exciting and generative. In turn, it is complicated via feminist political ecology (fpe). Fpe insists we examine how the colonial-capitalist drivers of disaster are infused with the work of patriarchy (Rocheleau et al., 1996; Sundberg, 2004). Specifically, fpe brings an interrogation of the gendered political-economy, gendered impacts, and gendered modes of survival, management, and resistance around a disastrous event. More complexly, it brings a relational understanding of patriarchal and capitalist formations, it recognises the importance of social reproduction and caring labour, and it attends to ordinary, intimate, and affective experiences of the environment. A postcolonial and intersectional fpe (Mollett & Faria, 2013, and in line with Bonilla), in particular, asserts that these gendered-classed power geometries are *always* shaped by racialised power and embedded in colonial past-presents (Collins, 2019; Faria & Mollett, 2016;

Jacobs, 2019; Mollett, 2019; Mollett & Faria, 2019; Pulido, 2017; Vasudevan, 2019; Yusoff, 2018). These analytics must also be integral to the framework of disaster colonialism.

The insights of fpe for disaster colonialism are usefully articulated by Sapana Doshi in her five propositions for an “embodied urban political ecology” (2017). Drawing on feminist and antiracist arguments (Federici, 1975; Gilmore, 2002; Longhurst, 1997), proposition one asserts that we must undertake “a more rigorous treatment of the body as a material and political site” (Doshi, 2017, p. 125), not simply, and as is typical in non-feminist Marxist work, as a “metabolic metaphor” (2017, p. 125). This entails thinking through the corporeal – of consumption, circulation, defecation, for example, and the everyday ways these are managed, regulated, and fostered in the city (e.g., Arefin, 2019; Truelove, 2011). Second, we must attend to social reproduction. We must take seriously the gendered labour of (re)producing life and space through informal, everyday, caring and household work. This helps us understand how women's labour, in particular, is invisibilised, naturalised, and thus devalued despite being essential to urban formation (e.g., Datta, 2016; Sultana, 2011; Vasudevan & Smith, 2020). Doshi's third proposition argues for an explicitly intersectional feminist political ecology, one that understands “racial power as mutually constitutive of gendered subjectivity” (Mollett & Faria, 2013, p. 217) and as grounded in racist colonial pasts. Fourth, building on Datta's (2016) “urban intimate” framing, Doshi prompts us to attend to the affective experiences and processes of urban life. Fifth and last, Doshi calls for more focus on resistance and the political subjectivity and agency of marginalised and ignored groups. Most notably this approach centres low-income women of colour (e.g., Adeniyi Ogunyankin, 2019; Khan-Perry, 2013).

We find many ties between Bonilla's disaster colonialism framing and an intersectional and postcolonial fpe, as well as important new insights afforded by connecting these bodies of work. In particular, fpe deepens our understanding of the relationship between fire and capitalism, risk and vulnerability, via an embodied analysis. This demands we attend to typically elided subjects and spaces, corporeal, affective, and everyday processes, the visceralities of disaster's violence, the caring labours that protect against and emerge in response to disaster, and the structural neglect that heightens vulnerability and precarity of some over, and perhaps to the benefit of, others.

3 | METHODS

Methodologically, these antiracist feminist foundations privilege the experience and knowledge of women of colour. This forms the heart of our research, part of a four-year study (2014–2018) of neoliberal globalisation, trade, and Ugandan women's entrepreneurialism. This integrates over 50 interviews with female traders, annual surveys at major trade fairs, archival research in two major national newspapers, retail surveys in major mall developments, and secondary analysis of theses, dissertations, working reports, and policy documents related to trade and urban development in the city. For this paper, we draw specifically on archival primary and secondary data on colonial and neoliberal urban development in Kampala, including planning documents, dissertations, policy reports, and media coverage of Park Yard market since 2001, semi-structured interviews with female market traders, participant observation and photography in the markets we discuss (conducted July–August 2017), and in-depth working histories of six female market traders displaced by the Park Yard fires (conducted February–March 2018). These women worked in Park Yard for between six and 15 years and were identified in their sites of displacement: Usafi market and the area directly around the former Park Yard site. These working histories were conducted in Luganda (authors Katushabe and Kyotowadde, cited below as “personal communication”) and translated into English. We use pseudonyms or real names, as requested by participants. Engagement and trust were fostered in part because two co-authors are Ugandan women, fluent in Luganda and with a grounded understanding of the challenges low-income women face amid neoliberal austerity. We transcribed our ethnographic notes and interviews and formally coded the textual and visual datasets. Our explanatory argumentation, namely the underlying gendered-racialised and historically rooted political-economic processes, emerged via this coding process and sustained, iterative conversations among the authors during the fieldwork period and in the years following.

4 | GROUNDING PARK YARD: COLONIAL AND NEOLIBERAL CITY PLANS

At 4:30 a.m. on 26 February 2009, a massive fire engulfed Park Yard market in the heart of downtown Kampala. Efforts to put it out were unsuccessful until 1:00 p.m., when an adequately equipped fire brigade finally arrived (Vision Reporter, 2009a). The fire damaged hundreds of stalls, left five people seriously injured, and destroyed around 50 billion shillings worth of goods (US\$25.5 million in 2009) (Mugisa et al., 2009). Officials blamed the fire and the delayed response on the market's poor construction materials (Vision Reporter, 2009b) and its lack of formal planning in a city overwhelmed by an “unrelenting demographic tsunami” (Kampala Capital City Authority [KCCA], 2011, p. 21). In one such statement,

Minister Adolf Mwesigye called for the state to ban these “congested and dangerous spaces” (Businge & Ssempogo, 2009). Mwesigye and other officials viewed Park Yard through a lens of illegality and hazard, positioning traders and markets as threats to Kampala's development (Byerley, 2013). As Bonilla argues, we must focus not just on the impacts of disaster, “but what it has revealed: centuries of colonialism, decades of economic crisis, and deep forms of structural and infrastructural neglect” (Bonilla & Klein, 2019, p. 26). Indeed, the debates around Park Yard have deep colonial roots. The narratives take form, in part, as an imperial debris (Stoler, 2008) of anti-Black British colonial policies that made danger, congestion, overpopulation, unplanned development, and blame inherent to African indigeneity. We begin by embedding Park Yard within Kampala's wider colonial histories of urban development, displacement, and devaluation, tracing how these narratives resurface in the 1980s amid neoliberal imperatives to remake urban space.

Originating with the dispossession of the Baganda, Kampala's early development was predicated on the construction of exclusionary, racialised landscapes of power (Omolo-Okalebo et al., 2010). In 1906, British forces constructed Nakasero Fort as Kampala's first planning scheme. Part of the Township Ordinance of 1903, the fort established Kampala as Uganda's capital and a key site for East Africa's British colonial administration. Located near Mengo, the indigenous capital of the Buganda kingdom, Kampala was constructed through and against pre-existing African settlement (Monteith, 2017). As argued by Omolo-Okalebo et al. (2010), Nakasero Fort's design as an “exclusive, endogamous, and defensible enclave” (p. 157) exemplified early colonial planning in Uganda. Narratives of disease and safety rationalised racial violence and dispossession in this period (Byerley, 2013; Omolo-Okalebo et al., 2010). Shaped by anxieties around purity and hygiene, Kampala's planning schemes in the 1910s–1920s created large and secluded estates for British colonial administrators that separated them from native Ugandans. The fort strictly regulated racial segregation to produce “safer” urban landscapes (Omolo-Okalebo et al., 2010, p. 165) and white residential areas were “buffered” from African residences by 300-yard green boundaries (Omolo-Okalebo et al., 2010, p. 166). Planned racial segregation was used to assert colonial control and secure colonial urban development. Yet, while native Ugandans were forcibly excluded from city space in these planning schemes, their labour built and maintained it.

Between the 1930s and 1950s, amid growing anti-colonial sentiment, British planning schemes shifted towards alternative modes of governance. Rather than removing Ugandans from the city, planning efforts sought to formalise and heighten control over Ugandan life within its bounds. In an effort to manage Ugandans through surveillance, while still exploiting their labour, housing for “good African laborers” was formally proposed in the 1930s (Byerley, 2013, p. 550). This approach was later expanded via the 1951 Kampala City Plan with the formal planning and construction of the “African residential zones”: Nakawa and Naguru. These were meticulously planned and harshly regulated. They were explicitly designed to discipline and “civilise” urban Ugandans to produce a manageable labour force for newly introduced large-scale modernisation projects (Byerley, 2013).

As elsewhere in the global south (Lloyd-Evans, 2008; N'guessan, 2011) contemporary neoliberal development directives are embedded in these colonial efforts to control urban space. Today Kampala is a site of rapid urban growth (Cities Alliance, 2010). The 600% growth in urban population (Pietrus, 2015) is tightly linked to massive neoliberal reforms implemented since the 1980s. Privatisation and trade liberalisation policies were widely adopted under President Yoweri Museveni as part of economic structural adjustment (Christian & Namaganda, 2018). This included reduced state-funded urban services and the privatisation of infrastructure projects and public space (Wiegatz, 2010). The 5.4% average annual GDP growth positions Uganda as a darling of multinational neoliberal institutions. However, this belies deep tensions in the country driven by the rapidly widening socio-economic inequality, uneven national development, and high rates of informal economic activity and housing. In Kampala, nearly 60% of residents live in “slums,” as defined by the UN Human Settlement Programme (2010). This has prompted debates around overcrowding and sustainable urban growth (e.g., KCCA, 2011). Before widespread eviction in 2011, the British planned estates of Nakawa and Naguru were exemplary of these low-income slum settlements.

Resonating with colonial urban planning narratives, markets and market traders have been central to debates around urban economic growth and neoliberal intervention (Abesiga, 2014). Funded by the World Bank, the Kampala Physical Development Plan was released in 2011. It aimed to regulate rapid population growth, overcrowding, and informality, promising to transform Kampala from “a sea of tin roofs” into a “modern” and “attractive” city (KCCA, 2011, pp. 25–88). Of particular emphasis was the (re)development of the “western frame” of the central business district (CBD), known colloquially as Kampala's “downtown.” The location of several key markets and taxi parks, including Park Yard, this area was described as “the domain of the informal sector and generally of high intensity, low added-value trade” (KCCA, 2011, p. 99). “Given its significance to the national economy,” the plan's authors assert, “the CBD urgently requires a ‘makeover,’ i.e., the overhaul and upgrading of public space” (KCCA, 2011, p. 98). Integrating geospatial models, the proposed (re)development imagines downtown as a meticulous balance of skyscrapers and open green spaces.

These aspirational city futures deemed the downtown markets, including Park Yard, as threat to safety and an obstruction to development, necessitating their move outside the city centre (KCCA, 2011, p. 103). Echoing colonial sanitisation narratives, the KPDP reads: “markets in Kampala are inefficiently distributed and, in many cases, very rundown and unhygienic, constituting a health hazard to the public” (KCCA, 2011, p. 342). As part of the KPDP, a “Markets Master Plan” was proposed. This plan urged the immediate reduction and strict regulation of market space in the CBD along with the construction of modern shopping malls. Speaking publicly about this proposal, government representative Kabakumba Masiko said “the city is undergoing transformation and markets are no longer compatible with the trend of development” (Bagala, 2011). In this way, markets and their clearing would “improve its [the CBD’s] functionality as well as its image” (KCCA, 2011, p. 386).

Urban political ecologies (e.g., Murray, 2009) make clear the links between these narratives of modernity, safety, and hygiene, the neoliberal moves both to cut back on code enforcement and regulation efforts, and efforts to privatise Kampala’s downtown markets to attract foreign and local-elite investment. A feminist and postcolonial approach extends this analysis further, demonstrating how these localised forms of redevelopment and displacement are rooted colonial histories of anti-Black narratives of urban space and anti-Black policy. As we shall show, it also directs us to the wider, hemispheric, and globalised, colonial relationships that drive these local shifts. From these colonial grounds, we turn now to the early formation of Park Yard. Here we examine its growth, its devaluation, and its precarity. We interweave these past-present legacies of the market with the vital, but also devalued, labour of female Ugandan traders who made a living there.

5 | STALLING DEVELOPMENT: GENDERING CARE AND PRECARIETY

As we argue above, the precarity of Park Yard, and markets like it across the city, had deep roots in colonial pasts. An fpe analysis of the fires insists we link these historical, racially potent colonial past-presents to the work of gendered power, gendered care, and gendered precarity. Market trader Margaret tells us:

I worked in Park Yard for 15 years. The stall that I constructed myself was right near the water sewage channel ... Sometimes it smelled. People would release their sewage into the channel, and it would really stink. When the men came to destroy the market, they called the place dirty and inappropriate for selling. (personal communication JK, 3/2018)

Commonly referred to as Katale Kabalema, “the market for the lame,” Park Yard was makeshift in origin (Eva, personal communication JK, 3/2018). Its grounds were a carpark for the national Nakivubo Football Stadium (Figure 1). During the 1980s, vendors spilled out of the adjacent Owino market and began to occupy, care for, and develop the space (Mugisa et al., 2009). Seventy percent of the vendors were women (Larsson & Svensson, 2018; Mugisa et al., 2009). They constructed and maintained their stalls, selling imported used-clothing and foodstuffs (personal communication CF, CK, DW, and JK, 7/2017, 3/2018). The government often framed the growing market as illegal, disorganised, and unsafe but was quick to tax traders as the market formalised. Seventy percent of these “market fees” went to the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and 30% to the owners of the stadium (Ngwomoya, 2017a).

While the government criticised Park Yard, it was a space where low-income women in Uganda could earn a living. Neoliberal austerity measures disproportionately impact women in the global south (Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), 2002; Adeniyi Ogunyankin, 2019). They are more likely to be affected by state withdrawal from the public sector, including most notably from cuts to their children’s schooling, health and nutritional services, and access to public water sources. In turn, large-scale government layoffs also tend to prioritise and discriminate against women. As structural adjustment impacted low-income women in Uganda, Park Yard offered refuge. Formerly unemployed and widowed, Robinah described how start-up was cheap, and often encouraged by other women. She recalled: “even if I had like fifty thousand shillings (approximately thirteen US dollars) [my friend said] I could go and start off” (personal communication CK, 3/2018). Women found they could support themselves and their children there. Jane argued: “The area was very strategic, we used to get a lot of customers ... and therefore we could obtain a lot of money from the sales ... In Park Yard we could pay children’s school fees in time because customers could buy in numbers” (personal communication CK, 3/2018). Margaret noted: “In Park Yard, even if you came without food, by 10:00 a.m. you would be having money as a parent to feed your children. That place was so busy” (personal communication JK, 3/2018). She lamented that for her and her fellow female traders, “Park Yard was a ‘parent.’ We got everything we had from there” (personal communication JK, 3/2018). As part of national neoliberalisation, cheap second-hand clothing from the global north flooded local markets (Brooks, 2015). Women in Park Yard moved into this industry (Whitesell, 2018; Whitesell & Faria, 2019). Robinah noted: “mostly women worked in that market. It was helpful to



FIGURE 1 Top image: Sara sits in front of her stall in downtown Kampala. Bottom image: Plans for Nakivubo Stadium.
 Source: Author's own [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/tra.12404)]

many people, especially the women, the widows, we could sell dresses, blouses, and men's trousers, bed sheets, curtains, bags, everything but mostly clothes" (personal communication CK, 3/2018).

Bonilla tells us that, in Puerto Rico, "years of abandonment by local and federal governments ... forced communities to take care of themselves" (Bonilla & Klein, 2019, p. 27), demonstrating their "resilience" long before disaster struck. So too in Kampala. Kampala's markets had little city-planned infrastructure like electricity lines, sewage channels, portable water, or paved roads (Mugisa et al., 2009). Eva described the repeated promises made by the government to improve market conditions, noting "whenever it would rain, you would sell in the muddy environment ... They had promised us money to put up constructions in the market." These promises were usually made in election cycles but assistance rarely, if ever, came (personal communication JK, 3/2018). Instead, traders were left to build and maintain the market themselves. Without ownership of the land and thus lines of bank credit, they first built their stalls incrementally. They used cheap, easily available materials such as wood, canvas, and polyethylene (Mugisa et al., 2009; personal communication CK and JK, 3/2018), which would later be blamed for exacerbating the spread of fire. Eva said: "you would buy timber and gradually put up the stall in your space. You would hang two clothes and you sell as you survive" (personal communication JK, 3/2018). They cared for their stall space to create high foot-traffic, working collectively in lieu of city or national government infrastructure investment and maintenance. Margaret remembered: "the market wasn't cemented, it was soil, but the traders would clean it up because the City Council never used to do that. We would collect money amongst ourselves. It was around 700 shillings every week to do the cleaning [of] the market" (personal communication JK, 3/2018). Women described dividing up daily tasks like sweeping the dirt pathways and repairing stalls. They spoke fondly about the convivial community they nurtured. Margaret and Jane recalled respectively: "We had a good relationship and [were] united as traders" and "The place was peaceful; everyone was at peace with the neighbours. There was togetherness" (personal communication CK and JK, 3/2018).

As Doshi argues, "subjects who toil in social reproduction are marked by gender, race, caste or ethnicity in ways that naturalise labour devaluation and uneven resource distributions" (2017, p. 126). For us, this makes clear how the urban political ecologies of Park Yard are deeply embodied. This enables the lack of investment in the market that Jane and Margaret describe and the persistent failure by the city to recognise women as valued economic actors (e.g., KCCA, 2011).

Women were consistently denied legal recognition, despite those election-season promises and their sustained taxation. Politicians, investors, and the Stadium Board of Trustees often described the activity of traders there as “illegal” (Mugisa et al., 2009; Njoroge, 2011). Where legality was acknowledged, it was done so begrudgingly or quickly dismissed. For example, after winning Park Yard's redevelopment contract, Hamis Kiggundu blamed the Stadium's Board of Trustees for failing to inform him of the traders' legal claims (Ngwomoya, 2017a). The board disputed his version, arguing that the presence of the traders was, if informally, sanctioned by the city. Whether Kiggundu knew or the board did indeed mislead him is less important here. In either scenario, the rights of female traders working there are trivialised. During interviews, traders reasserted their legal right to operate in the market. Madinah noted,

All the receipts I kept. And if someone comes about claiming that we were illegally selling in that place, I kept all my receipts showing different payments in that area. So I don't even know why all of a sudden they decided to chase us out of that place without any notice. (personal communication CK, 3/ 2018)

Given the use of temporary and flammable construction materials, and the lack of state investment and regulation to ensure safe construction, it was no surprise that Park Yard was a fire risk. Yet, as an fpe lens on disaster colonialism makes clear, this precarity was a product of long-standing colonially rooted and racial-gendered state neglect. It alerts us to how Kampala's rapid urban and national neoliberal restructuring disproportionately impacted low-income Ugandan women, who bore the burdens of state cuts to health and state unemployment. In concert, it shows us how women's caring labour sustained and grew the market, enabling them to “get by” and care for their families. An fpe lens reveals the centrality of such caring social reproductive labour in creating spaces like Park Yard. It also shows how this enables and responds to neoliberal imperatives of individual responsibility that justify the evisceration of state investment.

Lastly, this framing shows us that, despite its socio-economic importance, this gendered labour is unrecognised, taken-for-granted, or deemed worthless. Park Yard's feminisation, i.e., the dismissal, devaluation, and erasure of women's labour over the life course of the market, laid the foundations both for disaster and for its deeply differentiated gendered and racialised impacts. The lack of state support and infrastructure left the burden of market maintenance and care on the backs of women traders. They laboured to build prosperous and meaningful socio-economic spaces in the face of growing neoliberal disinvestment. As Bonilla argues, and as we have shown, such precarity has far longer colonial histories and geographies of state regulation, investment, and neglect. Yet it is a gendered precarity that made the space “inevitable” for disaster.

6 | PARK YARD'S “INCENDIARY LANDSCAPE”: BLAME, RUMOUR, AND FIRE MANAGEMENT

An fpe lens reveals the centrality of varied gendered-racial logics in the urban political ecologies of Park Yard. Via the caring labour of social reproduction, these create and sustain the market while, in connection, the differentiated impacts of neoliberal policy and the devaluation of the market and its women traders heightens its vulnerability to disaster. As Bonilla (2020) asserts, disaster then, and resilience to disaster, begins long before a fire ignites. In turn, the outbreak and response to the fires was also deeply shaped by gendered and racialised political ecologies. Reporting on the 2013 fire, *Daily Monitor* photographer Abubaker Lubowa released striking images of the police and fire brigade (Bagala et al., 2013). In one, a fire official stands over a crouching man. Rather than a hose, he holds a rifle, directing it to the man's chest. Hands held high, the man looks terrified, his eyes pleading for leniency. The caption tells us he threw rocks at officials. Rocks to protest the state's slow response, thrown as the market burns.

Lubowa's photographs resonate with written accounts of the state's militarised response to each fire, including the use of tear gas and live bullets to disperse traders. In 2011, two were shot at the scene of the fire by police, leaving one trader dead (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Amid criticism, the Police General claimed that traders revolted against police and fire forces (Nalugo & Kiyaga, 2011). He denied any intentional delay, instead redirecting blame on the traders. City officials stated that the cause was a cooking fire, escalated by shoddy construction materials, and the poor fire precautions (Mukisa & Ssenkibirwa, 2013). In 2013, fire chief Joseph Mugisha argued: “The traders have failed to learn from their past mistakes ... We had advised them to create reasonable space within the market for easy accessibility in case of fire but all that was ignored” (Mukisa & Ssenkibirwa, 2013, n.p.). Not only, then, were traders blamed for the state's violent (re)actions, they were implicated in both the cause of the fire and its rapid spread.

But rumours among the vendors also spread. These suggested the fires were deliberately set as a strategy of eviction to enable new development. Jane echoed these sentiments: “There must have been someone behind the fires. It could not have been a mere accident ... Even if it was a charcoal stove fire outbreak, it could not gut the whole market. I think it was a

planned mission” (personal communication CK, 3/2018). After the 2009 fire, traders recalled that owners of a nearby bus company were trying to gain ownership to build a new terminal (Okiror, 2009). Just prior to the 2011 fire, traders were also facing threats to vacate the market (Nalugo & Kiyaga, 2011). President Museveni requested a special investigation of the 2009 fire, but the report was never released to the public, further fuelling rumours (Businge & Ssempogo, 2009; Mukisa & Ssenkabirwa, 2013).

Indeed, some argued that the government was complicit with these private parties. Traders described the limited and problematic practices of fire management, such as delayed responses and the decision to cordon off the burning market without extinguishing it. Eva noted,

They didn't come in time even though their station is very close ... We knew that they were conspiring because when your neighbour catches fire, you can't say you are not aware ... It is the government because Park Yard is in the middle of the city, there was even police. You can't come from nowhere and enclose the place. The one who did it was well known to the government. That means the government was aware of what was going on. (personal communication JK, 3/2018)

Following the fires, the government also used tactics to keep traders out of the area. For example, after the 2013 fire, military police barricaded the market, restricting the vendors' return. They claimed to be protecting the vendors' goods from theft, but vendors felt a different kind of theft at work (personal communication CK and JK, 3/2018). Police also tried to prevent informal market reconstruction, but the traders were persistent, returning to build stalls and sell goods, again reclaiming their rights to Kampala's downtown (Bagala, 2011; Bagala et al., 2013). Some stopped short of accusing the government directly but argued the extent of the devastation was caused by years of state neglect in developing and maintaining the market's infrastructure and Kampala's fire management system. Sara noted: “We called the fire brigade and yet they failed to come and rescue the market. Keep in mind that we are very close near Nakivubo channel ... Yet, they excused themselves for not responding quickly because of lack of water” (personal communication JK, 3/2018).

Though unproven, these rumours made visible important shifts underway in the city. In the period after the 2011 fire, the government unveiled the Kampala Physical Development Plan introduced above (KCCA, 2011). Once announced, the land value of Park Yard multiplied for the city, for major private investors, and for global retail capital seeking spaces for accumulation. President Museveni and other state and city officials quickly described the fires as tragic, with some offering immediate, personal financial assistance. Yet in the same moment, the fires were also frequently positioned as a fateful opportunity for future urban prosperity.

I am ready to support them [the traders] fully but they should sit with us for guidance because the land belongs to Nakivubo Stadium for parking. Now the stadium is still there, and we may need to renovate it for the parking to be used fully. (Museveni, cited in Kasozi, 2011)

Union representatives for the traders agreed that renovation was crucial, with their own vision of urban development, prosperity, and future fire-mitigation. After the 2011 fire, they requested property titles so they could fund safer, more permanent market structures (Kasozi, 2011). If these were not granted, they asserted, traders would be forced to rebuild the space in the same way and with the same poorer quality materials. The titles were refused.

Narratives of blame articulated by the state and the vendors diverge dramatically. For the state, the fires are rooted in informal, overpopulated, poorly planned, and chaotic trading practices. These practices are written into and resolved by formal development plans for the city. In contrast, the vendors recognised in the fire brigade and police's responses echoes of a far longer history of intentional neglect, devaluation, and hostility. These forms of denigration made possible the fate of Park Yard and its vendors, rationalising both those stalled and ineffective, and then excessively aggressive, state reactions depicted in Lubowa's photographs. Despite the grandiose condolences made by public figures, they represented thinly veiled attacks on vendors' very existence within downtown city spaces. They resisted these attacks in turn.

The response to, and rumours around, the fires resonate with established analyses of disaster capitalism that tell us how, in the wake of disaster, neoliberal regimes invoke extensive military force to instigate development-oriented capital accumulation (Bonilla & Klein, 2019; Klein, 2007). Connecting fpe with the theory of disaster colonialism deepens this finding. It prompts us to take seriously the rumours of female vendors, those women who knew Park Yard intimately. Through their accounts, we see in the Ugandan government's use of such aggression: its firemen wielding guns not hoses, their failure to respond effectively, their efforts to empty the market, and perhaps the very act of arson itself, a sustained effort to dispossess. Through

varied means, we also see these women as political subjects, negotiating and resisting the moves of the state and private capital, engaging in a kind of critical post-disaster resiliency (Bonilla, 2020) to reclaim and reoccupy the market after each fire.

7 | “WHERE CAN I BEGIN FROM?” EMBODYING DISPOSSESSION AND ITS TRAUMAS

At the start of 2017, the Park Yard market site was sold. The plot will be a 900-car multi-storey garage and high-end mall to accompany the 2020 renovation of the Nakivubo Football Stadium. Developers declared that the stadium will exceed even FIFA's standards, boosting the country's tourism and its international standing (Mugalu, 2017). On 20 February, Kampala Affairs Minister Beti Kamya gave vendors 30 days to vacate the property (Ngwomoya, 2017a). But just a week later, in the early hours of 27 February, Park Yard traders woke again to devastation. Military police had used fire, explosives, and bulldozers to destroy all traces of the market. There was little doubt that this time their displacement was permanent. In a public statement, Minister Kamya, once sympathetic to the traders, described the eviction as a “resounding success,” ending “a 20-year-old dispute and relocat[ing] more than 5,000 people in a few days without a gunshot, teargas, serious injury or mayhem” (Ngwomoya, 2017a, n.p.).

Complicating this narrative, in this section we detail the fires' impact on low-income women. While Minister Kamya and other city officials deemed the demolition of Park Yard a “success,” a postcolonial feminist political ecology pushes us in two connected and productive directions. First, it offers an embodied analysis that listens for the affective, visceral, and quotidian impacts on female traders, whose bodies and labour were so devalued. Further, it pushes us to link this embodied devaluation with colonial past-presents that dismiss indigenous rights to the city and valorise foreign capital over local small-scale entrepreneurialism. In these ways a feminist political ecology of the fires takes seriously not only the spectacular acts and effects of disaster colonialism, but also the intimate, embodied, quietly held violence experienced by women and the everyday ways state brutality manifests itself on the body.

The trauma of the fires and the final displacement of women traders lingered for months and years. Margaret lamented: “when Park Yard market was demolished people suffered so much; some stayed home, and some died” (personal communication JK, 3/2018). Traders grieved the convivialities of their market community and the financial security it had provided. Sara cried:

I lost everything in the fires. You can't save anything when the fire has broken in the market, you just see from a distance when the fires have passed your stall and it is so painful seeing your capital all gone ... And the question you are asking is, where can I begin from? (personal communication JK, 3/2018)

Traders spoke not only of the financial losses but the impacts on their, and their children's, physical, mental, and emotional health. Women often articulated the fires' devastation in the stress and heartache around supporting their children, a challenge exacerbated by the fact that most were single mums. The trauma made Madinah hesitant to remember:

You know what, I sometimes don't want to remember such because I end up crying. Do you know how hard your children not being able to go to school is? They have spent two years without going to school and are now out of school due to lack of school fees. (personal communication CK, 3/2018)

Gravely describing her current situation, Jane asserted: “It has really affected me. My children no longer go to school. If they go to school I will always be in debt. Even getting what to eat is difficult” (personal communication CK, 3/2018). For these traders, Park Yard's fiery destruction and ultimate demolition was a visceral attack on their ability to feed and educate their families. Its impacts were deeply differentiated by gender and class, with low-income women so often responsible for the care of others.

In February 2017, most of the vendors relocated from Park Yard to Usafi market, about half a mile south-east. Space in the new Ham shopping mall, developed on the former site, is too expensive for most traders to lease. To quell trader and wider public condemnation, the proprietor of the company tasked with clearing out the Park Yard site, Hamis Kiggundu, offered to pay six months' rent for 700 stalls (Ngwomoya, 2017b). Most vendors saw their limited options and moved that month (personal communication CK and JK, 3/2018). Public officials such as Jennifer Musisi, KCCA executive director, reframed the issue as one of generous relocation (Ngwomoya, 2017b). These officials positioned Usafi as a viable, alternative market site (Ngwomoya, 2017b). But traders saw it as an intended death sentence for their businesses and provocation for them to leave the city.

We feel they have chased us away already. All the cars that come to the city stop very far away from this market. Do you see anybody passing there? We come here just to sit and end the day. You might sell one cloth and then spend a whole week without selling ... It is as if they (the government) brought us here to destroy us completely. (Sara, personal communication JK, 3/2018)

Indeed, foot traffic in Usafi is minimal compared with the former busy downtown market area. It is a complaint mirrored in criticisms of Uganda's market redevelopment plan across the country (KCCA, 2011; Jane, personal communication CK, 3/2018). Eva stressed: "Here, where we were relocated, no one passes by to buy. No one enters the market ... In Park Yard everybody passed, it was in the city centre" (personal communication JK, 3/2018). Their anxieties are deepened by rumours that Usafi too will be demolished in the near future, redeveloped again as plans for Kampala's global, modern city unfold. Robinah stressed this point: "I heard it said that it (Usafi) is also temporary, that they do not want such structures around the city. So, they want us out of the city" (personal communication CK, 3/2018). Jane reflected on the government's excitement over her removal and the site's new intended tenants:

Maybe they should just tell us that they want the well-to-do and foreigners to own the buildings. Because we see mostly Indians in those buildings, as they are the ones who can afford those prices. If you walk around, most shops are full of Asians, Somalis, Indians, mostly Europeans in Kampala. But we, the natives, the government has managed to push us aside in villages, like Masaka. And yet we were also fed up of villages, which have no customers. That is why we wanted to work in town centres. (personal communication CK, 3/2018)

These accounts call for analyses of urbanisation and disaster that integrate the embodied relations of geopolitical and geo-economic flows and histories, that is, their *infusion* with connected logics of gendered, racialised, and classed power. In turn, they call for an analysis of disaster colonialism that attends not only to hemispheric (Bonilla, 2020) but also globalised colonial-neoliberal relations and flows reshaping Kampala via foreign capital investment and accumulation. For Jane, Kampala's development was clearly a project to bring in this foreign capital, models of development, and wealthy consumers. It is one bound up with longer situated colonial and neoliberal systems of power that have continuously devalued and displaced low-income Ugandan women like her. Pushing us to a feminist and postcolonial sensitivity to these gendered and racialised geopolitical and geo-economic past-presents, Jane solemnly added: "now Europeans own the place (Park Yard) and yet when we go to their places we act as slaves, not the owners ... So we are both slaves in our country and abroad" (personal communication CK, 3/2018). Her words resonate with critiques of disaster colonialism that recognise, in the run-up to, moment, and aftermath of devastations like urban fire, centuries-old and persistent socio-economic relationships of exploitation. Bonilla argues that "what we see ... is not a shock doctrine but a trauma doctrine: this is not a case of economic and political interests taking advantage of a moment of shock, but rather of corporate and political interests taking advantage of deep-seated colonial traumas that have left the population vulnerable to exploitation, all too accustomed to abandonment and self-reliance" (Bonilla & Klein, 2019, p. 27). While Bonilla pushes us to a hemispheric analysis of these relations, Jane makes clear that in Uganda these extend further, connecting that country to China, Asia, the Gulf, Europe, and the USA via global capital investment, accumulation, and its dispossessions.

8 | CONCLUSION

Our findings ground the intimate politics of disaster vulnerability, recovery, and resistance in the colonial past-presents of racial and gendered capitalism. Putting together feminist political ecological attention to the political subjectivities of women (Doshi, 2017) and Bonilla's reimagining of resiliency as "transformation and redress" (2020, p. 2), we close with accounts of resistance that links these pasts with the present.

The archives of Kampala's colonial housing estates reveal repeated moments of rupture where tenants strategically fought against the colonial state and its increasing control of intimate life. Byerley traces how these records "attest to widespread resistance among tenants to conform to the colonial ideal of the 'Good Citizen'; tenants being repeatedly warned and evicted for transgressing housing clauses ... Tenants and subtenants bent, broke and side-stepped estate regulations in their efforts to socially construct their own everyday life-worlds" (2013, pp. 556–557).

Over the course of the Park Yard fires, and in the face of state and developer pressures, traders also "side-stepped" and struggled to get by. After their eviction, Jane and others like her could not just sit back and lament. They had school fees to pay, children to feed, lives to live. Within weeks, some traders who had relocated to Usafi began to frequent the old site of Park Yard market, seeking out customers on its fringes. One such woman is Stella, selling her second-hand clothing

from a large tarp laid on the ground. Where the market had been, construction on the stadium is now underway. She shakes her head: “We are here because we don't want to be here. We are here because we don't have anywhere else to go” (personal communication DW, 7/2017). Along with other displaced traders, she now peddles goods from the trenches of the polluted Nakivubo channel, yet another site slated for renovation in Kampala's new city plan. Stella, and those like her, are antithetical to that imagined future, to modernity. Renovation in the name of safety, hygiene, beauty, and progress brings raised rents, new taxes, and permit costs, enforcing the dramatic displacement of fiery disaster through new mundane, bureaucratic means. A longer history of colonial urban land development, and theft, resurfacing through contemporary geopolitical and geo-economic processes. Always imbricated with and produced through gendered, classed, and racial power.

In this paper we have pushed for a feminist political ecology of the Park Yard market fires but one that, centrally, explicates the embodied past-presents of colonial and urban development and dispossession. To do so, we bring together Bonilla's (2019, 2020) “coloniality of disaster” with Doshi's five propositions for an “embodied urban political ecology” (2017). Doing so demands, first, that we refuse disembodied analyses. Instead, we take seriously the bodies and experiences of female traders, how they and their market spaces are rendered unsanitary and disposable as development efforts intensify. This makes visible the differentiated impacts of fire and/as urban development, attending in particular to the impacts for low-income Ugandan women. Second, this framing makes legible the gendered social production of urban market spaces through caring reproductive labour. We described the contradictions between state depictions of the market as informal, illegal, and unsafe and the importance of Park Yard for women and the families they supported. We argued that this relied on women's caring labour and that this labour, along with women's legal rights to operate in the market, were consistently unrecognised and devalued by the city and landowners. Our work thus deepens disaster colonialism theory via feminist political ecology, by demonstrating how vulnerability is shaped by gendered norms, practices, and labour, and heightened by a sexist devaluation of women.

Third, this framing understands spectacular disaster, a series of highly destructive fires, as inextricably connected to wider systems of urban marginality that are always grounded in colonial, racial, capitalist, and gendered systems of power. Anti-Black residual narratives of dirt, safety, and overcrowding – infused in colonial planning efforts – underpin contemporary arguments to develop the city centre. These work powerfully to justify and to render the displacement of low-income female traders inevitable. Fourth, this framing centres the everyday emotional and affective experience of urban development and urban dispossession, which is a life lived amid everyday disaster, and how this is particularly felt, by particular subjects, low-income *women*. Life in the market was, at times and despite the challenges, rewarding, convivial, productive, meaningful. Their battles over this space and the resulting displacement were traumatic, devastating, and largely elided in political and urban planning discourse celebrating the new city. Finally, this framing makes visible the everyday resistance and negotiation of women traders as they claim space in urban Kampala. Through the accounts of Jane, Stella, Margaret, Eva, and other Park Yard traders, our feminist political ecology of disaster colonialism offers new ways to understand the market fires that devastated their lives: as historically grounded violence that enables and relies on sexist and racist modes of urban development. It also reveals how these women endure: resisting, negotiating, and claiming rights to this “modern” new Kampala, even as it holds no place for them. Their struggles demonstrate a different kind of resiliency, not simply to disaster but to *disaster colonialism*. To build from their experience, and Bonilla's words, we must “develop visions of recovery that do not simply re-establish a previous state of inequity or prepare populations to endure future forms of structural violence, but which instead offer substantive forms of transformation and redress” (2020, p. 2).

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Our data is currently embargoed. However, it will be made available publicly via the Texas Data Repository, the University of Makerere, and the Keturah Kamugasa Ugandan online fashion media archive when related publications have been completed.

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