

## Lives of In-Famous Women: Gender, Political Economy, Nation-State Power, and Persuasion in a Transnational Age

Rachel C. Riedner

Reading and writing, as I am in Washington, D.C.—a place that Jamie Peck and Adam Tickwell call in their description of neoliberalism a “structurally privileged center of persuasion” (48), the capital of global capital (I work literally several blocks away from the World Bank and IMF headquarters)—texts and images about women are disseminated from numerous media, scholarly, and activist sources.<sup>1</sup> In D.C., as in other persuasive centers of neoliberalism, the rhetoric of globalization has a particular focus on representations of women’s agency, women’s autonomy, and women’s freedom (from cultural patriarchy). That focus on women’s agency, autonomy, and freedom takes the form of texts that position women as victims of cultural patriarchy and negligent nation-states.

In global and local contexts such as D.C. that are overdetermined by neoliberal intentions, desires, and affects, news stories about women have a particular gendered rhetorical function.<sup>2</sup> News stories tell us about efforts to improve women’s lives through aid and help from Western agencies, political institutions, businesses, and benevolent individuals. These stories are circulated as accounts by *New York Times* columnists, reports by the World Bank (right across the street from my current classroom), UN conferences, through university freshman reading programs, and through other powerfully authorized venues. These narratives claim that agents, organizations, and governmental policies generated in the West have benefited women by intervening into cultural patriarchies

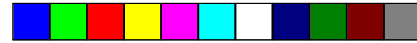
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and giving women opportunities to participate in market economies. In this rhetoric, the “free market” offers women opportunities from which they have been excluded. Alternatively, it suggests that individuals from the first world (both men and women) empower or save third-world women (from both violent individual men or from patriarchal system) and persuade inattentive governments to pay more attention to women. Specifically, neoliberal rhetorics in which “Third-World women” are featured stress the importance of freeing women from gendered violence in both the private sphere and public sphere, and they stress the work of first-world agents who give women the opportunity to become “active global citizens” (Dingo).<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere, Kevin Mahoney and I have discussed neoliberalism as a “strong” rhetoric, a discourse of public persuasion that creates identifications with neoliberal policies and political economic arrangements and operates *as a pedagogy* that teaches people how to be good neoliberal subjects. As Rebecca Dingo’s work in this cluster of articles emphasizes, and as many transnational feminists have observed, in these circuits of transnational exchange, representations of women “are exchanged, marketed and *given value* within multiple global, imperial, and colonial circuits” (Desai et al. 50; emphasis added).

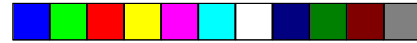
For feminists, the proliferation and wide circulation of texts that tell heroic stories about first-world agents and third-world women victims (either we saved her or we gave her the opportunity to help herself) raise concerns about what “third-world women” stand in for and whose interests they are used to represent. As Gayatri Spivak argued two decades ago in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” women are caught in the conjuncture of cultural patriarchy, globalizing economy, nation-state power, and benevolent modernization offered by first-world institutions and agencies.<sup>4</sup> In a 1990 *JAC* interview, Spivak notes that narratives about women that circulate through complex network of powerful relationships are part of a global system of value, a rhetorical system which extends deeply gendered social and labor relations further into cultural and social life through paths and processes of their circulation (Sipiora and Atwill). In this framework, news stories that position women as recipients of first-world benevolence shore up neoliberal economic processes and sovereign power as they circulate.



What is to be done? How do feminist rhetoricians respond to closed systems of circulation that both elide and reinforce powerful processes, complex conjunctions of power, and economic interests at work? How can feminist analysis counter a neoliberal system of value in which news stories of women are used to shore up economic arrangements, nation-state power, and to produce cultural consent? How do feminists re-deploy texts that promote the alignment of neoliberal values with nation-state authority and extend the reach of neoliberal values further into social life? How can we turn writing and signifying practices, as John Trimbur says, into “socially useful knowledge” (212)? How can feminists attend to voices from afar that are already (thanks to transnational networks) in our midst but that do not announce themselves as subjects of discourse sanctioned by institutions, nations, or regimes?<sup>5</sup>

My strategy here is to return to news stories themselves that are mediated by powerful neoliberal interests. News stories are produced and read and circulated in neoliberal contexts where powerful economic and national interests and desires shape representations of women. As Kate Bedford argues, policy documents, public discourse, and internal communication by the World Bank tell a similar story. Poor women are rhetorically central to World Bank arguments that its lending policies create inclusive development (7). Indeed, Bedford notes that “heightened” rhetoric about women and marriage in World Bank discussions and documents is characteristic of the World Bank’s claims that including previously invisible population increases growth and reduces poverty. The news stories may be saturated with neoliberal interests, but they can also be read to uncover complex and contradictory operations of power and to read the economics at work. Like a historian (or, more accurately, a genealogist) who works with archives that have been separated from their time and context, I read contemporary news stories to generate a robust analysis of nation-state and neoliberal power that operates in a seemingly ordinary, everyday context. This reading strategy keeps the focus on rhetorical processes that extend deeply gendered social and labor relations further into cultural and social life (Spivak, *Critique* 358).

The method of reading I lay out here takes a second look at news stories that circulate the values of neoliberal capital and that bolster neoliberal governmentality. Most simply, I argue that a neoliberal frame-

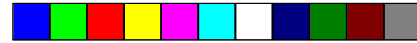


work does not account for all possible ways to read and interact with news stories. Building on a reading of the news stories, my purpose is to shift bits and pieces of text circulated by news stories away from the neoliberal values in which they are embedded. Ordinary, unspectacular bits and pieces of everyday life are brought to the surface from the news stories. As I read them, news stories can tell us about how nation-state economies are defined and managed through particular kinds of women's labor as well as reveal the intersection of cultural patriarchy with gendered political economy. News stories can be unpacked in order to attend to how identities (race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and economic status) and social practices are shaped through powerful local cultures and nation-state political and economic interests. Not only does this reading and analysis suggest that economic structures are at work and that women's lived experiences are more complex than streamlined narratives of news stories suggest, but it keeps focus on traces of heterogeneous textuality as a means of shifting the narrative (Spivak, "Harlem" 314).

### **Transnational Feminism**

Before I move into an analysis of the news story, I first fill out the context in which my transnational feminist analysis of gendered power, nation-state power, and political economy is located. Transnational feminists argue that neoliberal contexts are shaped by dense (and contradictory) conjunctures of multiple forms of power that operate simultaneously and reinforce each other. In these contexts, the ideas and practices that organize the way a society defines truths for itself are fraught and contested as are the ideologies that organize social institutions and practices (Stevens and Paterson). As several scholars have argued, in neoliberal contexts the authority of the nation-state, inequality, oppression, exploitation, and violence is overdetermined by race, gender, sexuality, citizenship, ability, class, and other categories (Duggan 15).

In these fraught and contradictory contexts, transnational feminist scholars respond by analyzing how gendered power operates across and within local, regional, state, and global contexts. This project makes visible how events are overdetermined by gendered intentions and



ideologies and reveals how economic and political projects and nation-state interests shape intentions and ideologies. In other words, transnational feminism looks at how multiple forces—among them economic agendas, social practices, historical legacies, and nation-state power—work together and reinforce each other in complex situations.

Analyzing dense conjunctures (what Inderpal Grewal and Rebecca Dingo call networks) between gendered economies, political systems, sovereign power, and cultures in order to identify terrains of negotiation and contestation has been taken up recently by rhetoric and composition scholars who are interested in creating a more complex understanding of the global operations of neoliberal power and its relationship to nation-state power. Scholars track relationships among labor, economic structures, institutional arrangements, national and transnational ideologies, and gender that operate across and among different scales (Dingo, *Networking*). As a method of analysis, and as a politics, transnationalism looks at unexplored linkages between all of these areas.

In examples such as the news stories, these linkages are implicit in the text themselves. They are present in the rhetoric of the text but not addressed or explored within the narrative framework. The work of transnational analysis is to draw attention to the imbrication of different scales that are visible on the surface of the texts, showing how these operate in conjunction with each other and drawing attention to the ideological frameworks that shape their obfuscation. In other words, the news stories I explore present evidence that nation-state authority, political economy, and gender are imbricated with each other even though the narrative itself does not draw attention to these imbrications.

### **Analysis of Neoliberal News Story**

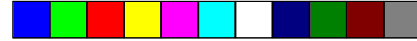
On March 2, 2010, I received an article entitled, “Kenya: Evelyn Masha Koya, ‘My Parents and Neighbors are Still Not Convinced I Am no Longer a Prostitute.’” I received this article because I’m on a listserv distributed by the Women In and Beyond the Global project at the George Washington University. The listserv provides “critical aggregations” of reports, news articles, commentary, and statements by NGOs, news



organizations, feminist media, and feminist organizations that circulate via transnational networks. The listserv gives a wide snapshot of women's lives in different local places, regions, and countries. Its implicit and explicit feminist purpose is to give a range examples and case studies of women's struggles and activities from all over the world. In so doing, the listserv makes visible gendered local and global power at work—economic, political, cultural, biopolitical, disciplinary, rhetorical, all forms and mixes of it—as well as global and local efforts by women to change the conditions of their lives. There is a specific emphasis on institutions and organizations through which gendered power operates, particularly the prison. The listserv's purpose is make power visible and, at the same time, extend the visibility of a range of actions and activities of women—cultural, governmental, social, performative, to name a few—to change, and negotiate, the gendered local and global situations in which they live.

In the news story, Everlyn Masha Koya, a twenty-two year-old sex worker turned peer educator from Isiolo, Kenya is quoted extensively in a short news article from PlusNews service, an online HIV and AIDS news service of the United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks. Ms. Koya's testimony is used to tell the story of the limited work choices that impoverished women face, which lead them to become sex workers and the daily violence they experience from police, clients, families, and communities. It tells the story about the struggle for survival of a female sex worker, her efforts to leave sex work, and her (failed) effort to convince other women to leave sex work. It also briefly mentions government grants and the expansion of the sex industry that coincides with the growth of military bases, but not much information is provided about either of these events.

This bit of text is best described as a news story because of its brief, rapid circulation, because it references events and interactions that are current, and because it relies upon a familiar narrative structure of its genre: a human story that is used to dramatize a social problem. The presentation of this story is an affective drama of everyday life, an everyday event that forms what Foucault calls "the dramaturgy of the real" (160): "real" local stories about marginal social figures, individuals whose lives are immersed in the present, that briefly rise to the surface of public attention.



As the article reports, Ms. Koya became a sex worker because her family was unable to afford education fees and her home situation became unbearable after she finished school. She left sex work when she was offered training by government officials to start a small business. Well aware of the physical dangers of sex work, she says she has tried to convince other young women to quit the trade. As Ms. Koya's testimony suggests, efforts to persuade women to leave sex work are difficult despite daily violence from clients, the constant threat of incarceration, and the social stigma attached to sex work. She says, "I have tried to get many girls off the streets but it's really hard. So far I have managed eight, but I am told two have already gone back. Girls with children are the most difficult to convince." This is as far as the "plot" of the news story goes.

This text's gendered intensity resonates for me as historical archives of legal cases did for Foucault. Gender (not to mention gendered violence) does not register for Foucault as an aspect of power, whether disciplinary, symbolic, governmental, or biopolitical (as many feminists have pointed out), yet I find his descriptive language of the rhetorical force and intensity of archives useful for this reading of gendered structural violence in the news story. Ms. Koya's testimony registers for me what Foucault describes "flash existence" (159): a brief textual moment where we see gendered power operating through the interactions and experiences of everyday life. This is a moment when one individual's life embodies the gendered intensity of the current conjuncture through which economic systems and patriarchal relationships are structured and managed. Ms Koya's interactions with the police, her family, and clients as well as the physical violence that she is subjected to tell a story in which individual women and women as a class are targeted when they transgress powerful gendered boundaries. Her work tells us how economy is organized and its particular relationship to the nation-state.

The details of Ms. Koya's life as a sex worker, including her descriptions of dangers that sex workers face, her negotiation with the state, her invocation of military power, and her discussion of how cultural patriarchy restricts her economic options, provides both a rich, evocative text that speaks to the particular contingencies of sex workers in Kenya as well as a broad context in which to understand gendered oppression and exploitation. These details are present in Ms. Koya's testimony, active



and pressing in her words rather than fully articulated or explicit in the narrative structure of the news story (Williams 126–28). Ms. Koya's words gives details about gendered violence, struggles that women with children face, and the growth of sex industry around military bases. The critical potential of the story lies in words, the capacity of Ms. Koya's words to generate a complex and thick description of gendered power at work and their capacity to tell us how women negotiate their lives in complex situations. My focus on Ms. Koya's speech acts is an effort to track systems and uncover local, everyday struggle. This rhetorical analysis is a means of naming and addressing structural conditions in which women live, work, and struggle (Munoz 11–12), a means of looking for women's negotiation of their everyday lives by focusing on cultural activities, social experiences, and situated knowledge that Raymond Williams calls pre-emergent in hegemonic narratives.

### **Gendered Structural Violence**

The fully articulated narrative framework of this news report has a teleological pattern similar to that of other news stories. A social crisis (sex work) is reported, which is followed by a renegotiation of the parameters of social participation through government intervention, and is resolved so that society remains whole. Ms. Koya leaves sex work and is no longer a threat to the social and national order. Yet, this narrative does not fully resolve the problem of gendered violence. As Ms. Koya says, despite her new employment status, her family still does not accept her because she has been a sex worker. Her words suggest a deeply traditional society where women are not forgiven; a family structure where women cannot redeem themselves; a deeply entrenched cultural patriarchy where women who are outside the family are vulnerable. The problem of violence against women persists because sex work marks women as outside the social.

This gendered cultural violence contained within the family structure is compounded by other gendered social violences. As Ms. Koya suggests, sex workers are vulnerable to violence by clients and by the police. They are exposed to harsh physical conditions. They are at risk for





contracting HIV/AIDS. Women with children do not leave sex work presumably because sex work, despite its real physical dangers, better enables them to support their families. The terrain on which women such as Ms. Koya negotiate their lives is circumscribed by these conditions, what feminist anthropologist Patty Kelly calls gendered structural violence. For Kelly, “this form of violence is produced or ‘structured’ by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire—whether through routine, ritual, or, as is more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life—to constrain agency” (5).

While the details of Ms. Koya’s testimony suggest gendered structural violence, the narrative itself does not provide an analysis of these fraught contexts. The news story presents us speech acts; it creates a scene in which drama takes place, but it does not lead to an analysis of how and why Ms. Koya speaks and acts. When I read the news story, I was struck by questions the text itself does not answer. First, why is the state interested in helping women leave the sex trade? How might the presence of the trade routes and military bases that Ms. Koya mentions conflict with state efforts to give women alternative employment? These questions about the material contexts of gendered employment suggest a need to investigate the nation-state’s dependence upon women as symbols, wives, and dutiful daughters as well as a need to investigate the role women play in the national economy and ideologies of masculinity and femininity that resound with concepts of national security.<sup>6</sup>

To explore and extend these questions, I reread the news story via Foucault’s notion of governmentality, the art of governing that claims that social coherence (that is, following rules of gender) is a requirement for a stable, successful nation and in which the nation-state is best equipped to achieve social and cultural coherence (Scott 12). National coherence and social stability are claimed as the state’s governmental role.<sup>7</sup> As Foucault suggests but does not pursue, the nation-state is particularly concerned with the proper role and behavior of women because women symbolize the coherence of the nation (as well as the household).

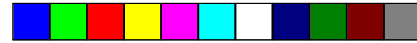
For Foucault, the model of governmentality is the patriarchal household: a good government manages the nation-state in the same way that a good father governs a household. Although Foucault doesn’t use the



term “patriarchal household,” it’s clear from his description that the well-managed household is patriarchal (in its traditional meaning as dominated by socially powerful men). The household is led by a father who is particularly concerned with the deportment and behavior of family members, significantly women, who are under his care and management. This management of women is essential to the stability of the family because choices members of the family make (for example, whom to marry) secure the economic well-being and coherence (and, ostensibly, the happiness) of the family. Read through Foucault, we see patriarchal governmentality at work. Ms. Koya notes that her family and community still ostracize her because she hasn’t conformed to norms of gendered behavior.

Governmentality is a totalizing project that unifies “people” as a national community (as the patriarchal household produces members of society). Like the household, governmentality is an individualizing project that produces citizens (read: women who can represent the sanctity and goodness of the nation) in specific ways and in specific roles. Good governments are concerned with Foucault calls “men and their relations” in the same way that a “good” father would be interested in the relations of his wife, children, and servants. Good relations (orderly behavior, following social rules) are what ensure the prosperity and wealth of the household and, likewise, good relations are what ensure the prosperity and wealth of the nation.<sup>8</sup> The patriarchal household produces socialized and well-behaved individuals, particularly well-behaved women, who uphold the respectability and thus the economic stability of the family. Similarly, the patriarchal nation-state produces a “national people” with shared language and values, where every citizen knows her place and proper role. This social coherence helps ensure a strong economy (read: it justifies political economic decisions in terms of social stability). Police monitor the fringes and keep the peace. Nations recognize citizens as the “national people,” those who fit into the normalized vision of the coherent nation-state. Sex workers like Ms. Koya are outside the norms of the family and the nation-state and are therefore subject to surveillance and police harassment.

The well managed and economically productive *patriarchal* household as a model for governmentality is borne out in the nation-state’s emphasis and reliance on women as national symbols. As Rajeswari



Sunder Rajan argues, the nation-state constructs gendered identities, roles, and symbols that produce governmental effects (24). As women symbolize the coherence and respectability and as they secure the economic stability of the nation-state, governments pay attention to women. They are the object of concern by government agencies, the subject of concern in public debates, and the object of disciplinary monitoring by the police. Thus, women become subjects when they are objects of concern. As Sunder Rajan argues, nation-states must pay attention to women.

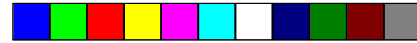
In the framework of the news article, the patriarchal state treats prostitution in two contradictory but well-established ways. First, according to Sunder Rajan, prostitution serves as an instance of deviant or criminal female sexuality, an activity the state monitors and controls. The state is deeply invested in controlling individuals and populations, especially those who exceed norms of gendered behavior. To demonstrate its capacity to secure a coherent population, the state wants to remove any sign of unsanctioned behavior from the public sphere. The state monitors sex workers through institutions, including the police, the courts, and social welfare bodies. Sex workers are vulnerable to the violence of incarceration and the violence of the police. As Ms. Koya says, “Sex work is risky work. I was a frequent visitor to the police station; last year, I spent two months in prison.”

Second, prostitution as female sex work is an aspect of the economy. In a situation where nation-state wants to produce and secure livelihoods through active trade routes, sex workers are seen as “necessary” for men to be good workers. In this mode, views of men’s sexuality (in service of the nation) creates an economy for sex workers (with the presumption, but probably not the exclusive practice, that these sex workers will be biological women). For example, the state builds military bases to protect the physical borders of the nation-state, and sex workers are seen as “necessary” for the well-being of soldiers. Thus, the nation-state relies upon women to enter the sex trade to preserve national economic security and military security. Ms. Koya’s statement captures the structural situation in which women enter sex work: “Girls are all flocking to Isiolo because there is a ready market for sex work: it has four military camps and a transit route to northern Kenya.”



Yet, to go back to the news story, there is a conjunction of several events that are noteworthy. Ms. Koya reports her family is unable to support her education and there are few economic opportunities for her after she leaves school. She enters sex work because there's a market for it. At the same, the state, her family, and the community stigmatize women who violate sexual norms by participating in sex work. Stigmatization means that women are outside the protection of the family and community as well as outside the protections citizenship. Outside these protections the violence that sex workers face are multiple. As Ms. Koya reports, women are vulnerable to violent clients and at risk of developing addictions to drugs they use to cope with their difficult and dangerous lives. They face danger from clients and the police and are vulnerable to exposure to the weather. As Ms. Koya says, "It is very cold at night, most of the time you go home without getting a client, sometimes you take the risk and allow a customer with good money—KSh500 [\$6.60] or so—to sleep with you without a condom." An expanded discussion of governmentality where women are central to understanding how nations manage populations emerges from the specific and contingent gendered contradictions that Ms. Koya describes.<sup>9</sup>

By rereading Ms. Koya's testimony with attention to gendered structural violence and gendered governmentality, we see that such violence is part of everyday life for women, *not extraordinary or exceptional*, mundane rather than dramatic. Violence appears in the narrative of the news story as part of normal operations of everyday life, events that are part of the normalized routine for sex workers. The violence of the police, violence of clients, violence of culture, and violence of abandonment by the state appears normal in as much as it does not appear as violence as such. As Kelly explains, "The violence here is diffuse and quiet, and not very dramatic" (5). It does not appear as violence as such because it is part of the normal way in which society, culture, the state, and the economy work in tandem. Thus, a reading of Ms. Koya's testimony challenges the opaqueness of the news story; this reading tells us about the gendered material and structural conditions and contradictions. These conditions and contradictions can be made visible through analyzing gendered governmentality at work that has not been visible on the surface of texts.



### Persuasion

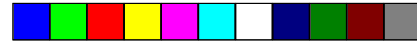
The second group of questions that the text leaves unanswered emerges from Ms. Koya's failure to convince young women who have children to leave sex work. Why do young women reject offers of training and employment that would turn them into legitimized workers? Why is it difficult to persuade young women who have children to leave sex work? Ms. Koya says that there are few economic opportunities for women because of the belief that women should be supported by their families. From Ms. Koya's statement, gendered economic opportunities are the context in which the "available means" of women's persuasion takes place. Cultural constraints about gender and women's role and behavior circumscribe her capacity for persuasion. And persuasion is complicated by the real and immanent dangers of sex work that Ms. Koya describes (violence of police, violence of clients, exposure to HIV/AIDS, exposure to weather, and social ostracism). How might we understand the failure of persuasion in the context of structural violence that sex workers face as well as the specific forms of disciplinary power and governmental power that Ms. Koya's testimony suggests? What do we make of efforts to include gendered others who are outside of the protections of the nation-state and their refusal of these efforts?

The news story tells us that Ms. Koya is given a small government grant and training to open a second-hand clothing store that enables her to leave sex work. From this position, she tries to convince other women to leave sex work. However, as Ms. Koya says, "I have tried to get many girls off the streets but it's really hard. So far I have managed eight, but I am told two have already gone back. Girls with children are the most difficult to convince." We learn that for women who are responsible for children, the state's economic modifications and adjustments are insufficient. Ms. Koya's failure to *persuade* women who have children to leave the sex trade is produced by women's economic responsibilities to their children, their limited economic choices, and their vulnerability and exploitability. And this insufficiency becomes particularly vivid in the context of normalized violence of police, threat of HIV/AIDS, violence from clients, and dangers of substance abuse. Where vulnerability to the violence of the state and civil society is not enough material incentive for

women to leave sex work, we understand both the limited economic and social options that women have.

Recast through Foucault's excavation of power in everyday life and Kelly's emphasis of gendered structural violence, Ms. Koya's story makes visible the gendered poverty and limited social and economic options for women that produce women as unexceptional subjects. Caught between the desire of the nation-state to symbolically secure stability through its management of women's lives, bodies, and sexuality, the nation-state's interest in a secure national economy (which depends on ideologies of masculinity and femininity) and family and community's ideological investments, sex workers like Ms. Koya are outside the protections of the nation-state (the institution that claims that it is best able to prevent violence and achieve coherence). Persuasion is situated within the state's governmental role, its disciplinary treatment of women as upholders of national pride, and within the production of unexceptional subjects: structural violence. These conjoined modes of nation-state power are the conjuncture in which women negotiate the specific situations they have inherited and the rhetorical situations in which women act, communicate, persuade, and are persuaded. Moreover, the rejection of sex workers by families adds another layer of vulnerability and violence. As Ms. Koya's testimony dramatically demonstrates, persuasion—a communicative situation that occurs between sex workers—must be understood within gendered structural violence. John Trimbur argues that we fail to understand persuasion if we do not account for the forces that allow for its production. In this instance, we fail to understand persuasion if we don't understand the structural, symbolic, and economic role of women within the nation-state.

From the news story, we don't know much about the specific communicative practices that Ms. Koya deployed in her discussion with sex workers who have children and sex workers who do not have children. Ms. Koya's failure to persuade women who have children to leave sex work can be understood through constraints that I outlined in the previous section. The article suggests that Ms. Koya's efforts, with the backing of the state, to convince women who have children to leave sex work fails because sex workers are responsible for children and perhaps other dependents. Sex work becomes one of the few areas of employment



where women can adequately provide for their own, and their family's, well-being.

Ms. Koya is given a small grant and training to open a second-hand clothing store that enables her to leave sex work. But for women who have children the state's economic modifications are insufficient. Persuasion is constrained because of internally competing and contradictory aspects of national stability. This insufficiency becomes particularly vivid in the context of structural violence Ms. Koya describes, including police violence, threat of HIV/AIDS, violence from clients, and dangers of substance abuse.

To recap, in the context of the withdrawal of state protections for women, limited economic choices, social stigmas around sex work, and the nation-state's contradictory position on sex work (on the one hand, an aspect of economy, on the other, a site of gendered surveillance), the study of persuasion must consider the powerful symbolic and economic relationships between women and the nation-state as well as the cultural ideologies of gender that influence the terms and conditions of women's work. Communicative practices are both fraught and contradictory, caught up with women's symbolic role as members of the national community and, at the same time, caught up with women's specific roles in bolstering national economy. Persuasion must account for women as objects of exchange in every kind of transaction: social, economic, familial, national, and sexual. It is too innocuous if it doesn't provide an explanation for women's reproductive role in securing the health and well-being of dependents and the contradictory interests of the nation-state.

### **Mapping Negotiation**

In the previous sections, I brought to the surface the operations of gendered governmentality that are centered on sex worker's economic contributions to nation-state and gendered structural violence. Persuasion is both shaped by and takes place within this context. Ms. Koya's grant from the state suggests that it, or its agents, have an interest in expanding women's economic opportunities and giving them an entrance



into hegemony. Ms. Koya's testimony suggests that the state might participate in symbolic and disciplinary control of women as a means of showing how it establishes a secure society and how this secure society enables a national economy to flourish (of course, who benefits from this national economy and whose lives are safe and secure is another question). If we look at different branches of the state, and different individuals who work for it, agents or institutions of state also can be used to improve individual women's lives and the situation of women as a group/class. As Ms. Koya reports, "Then in July [2009], officials from the [government's] Arid Lands Office held a meeting for sex workers at the Isiolo stadium. We were asked to quit. They asked us to identify what kind of business we wanted to start, trained us in how to conduct business, budgeting, keep a record of our sales, savings and also asked us to go for HIV testing. I was lucky to test negative." From this testimony, it seems as if there's a state-sponsored effort to provide sex workers with viable economic alternatives. We don't know who was behind this effort or why it was undertaken or what kinds of resources women were offered. The absence of these specificities suggests that the news story's purpose is not to understand how material changes in women's lives take place. Rather, the news story wants to tell—without attention to such important details—rewarding stories about women's agency.

As Sunder Rajan points out, the state isn't a monolithic structure. It is made up of different institutions and individuals who do different, sometimes competing, things. While one arm of the state might be securing its national economy by enabling sex workers to have access to military bases, another arm of the state might be securing grants to give women training so they have a wider range of economic opportunities. As Sunder Rajan argues, "Any understanding of state-citizen relations requires . . . attention to the microlevel workings of state regimes" (6).

Ms. Koya's efforts to transform her own life and the lives of other women, to work for freedom from violence and a better life for herself and for others, tells us about what women are negotiating. In some locations, because of their economic contributions and their perceived social role of servicing male sexual needs, sex workers have been able to emerge as a collective and make demands on the state.<sup>10</sup>

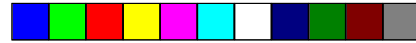




A transnational feminist approach that pays attention to gendered structural violence as well as contradictory and competing aims that work through the family, the community, the nation-state and its institutions, social imaginaries, and economic structures and arrangements, is important work. So is paying attention to women's individual and collective efforts "transform the conditions of their lives" (Kabeer 54), efforts that might not be articulated within a narrative framework or that might be promoted through neoliberal interests. Women are not just recipients or victims of material forces, state power, and social imaginaries that are aligned with cultural patriarchy. Women are caught in impossible situations where they must choose between dangerous work and feeding their children and negotiate within choices that they make. Within these situations, women actively seek to work for the health and well-being of their families, their children, other women, and their communities. In the context of structural constraints, we see women like Ms. Koya struggling, negotiating, working, and, even, organizing.<sup>11</sup>

Here, the failure of persuasion in the context of contradictory forces—social stigma against sex work, limited economic opportunities for women, and an expanding market for sex work—warrants analysis and reading practices that consider contradictions, structural violence, and struggle and look for the capacity of women to negotiate these fraught circumstances: a reading practice that looks for what women say and do. Ms. Koya does speak and act; she does call on the state to provide more grants to women.<sup>12</sup> Ms. Koya's says, "I am sure that the problem of prostitution is going to get worse and HIV/AIDS is going to get worse unless the government and NGOs assist girls to earn a living."

At the same time as Ms. Koya's story can be read to reveal and record a nation-state's focus and reliance on women and the gendered work of exception, it tells about women's efforts to work for the well-being of families, communities, and individuals. Ms. Koya's testimony tells us about women's efforts at communication and persuasion, and women's efforts to imagine and enact different social relationships. Ms. Koya's efforts to convince other young women to leave sex work open up a discussion of persuasion as individual event, a relationship between rhetor and audience, an effort to explain, convince, or move to action that is structurally and materially situated. This is a local story that, as Kelly

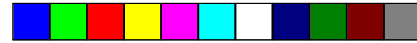


emphasizes, is “culturally specific,” where women negotiate gendered violence within a nation-state and where women negotiate an economic system in which sexuality, agency, health, and well-being are linked to expanding markets.

### **Transnational Feminist Reading**

As I’ve discussed, transnational analysis provides analysis of imbrications of governmentality, political economy, and gender. It excavates and draws to the surface ideologies, operations of power, and workings of political economy that shape normal, everyday life. For feminist scholars, the purpose of such work is to generate responses to neoliberal rhetorics and nation-state power where gendered violence is invisible. As Chandra Mohanty argues, “feminists have some profound challenges ahead, not just in terms of mapping the relations of rule . . . but also in terms of *generating adequate responses* that disrupt business as usual and transform the hypermasculine, militarist cultures women now inhabit in many corners of the globe” (17; emphasis added). So, beyond analyzing gendered power, making contradictory aims of the nation-state visible, and finding economic agendas at work, how can news stories generate responses?

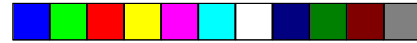
My point of departure has been a very short news story. Despite its brevity, textual traces that the reports include have a resonance that their brief presentation of information and the compositional structure of the news story belie. I’m drawing from Spivak’s feminist rhetorical approach that she calls “social textuality,” reading historical archives and contemporary archives for the “the neglected details of everyday life” to see how fragments of text and visual images could work as meaning (*Critique* 238). Like Spivak, I looked for fragments of testimony, asking what context this testimony might refer to (“Harlem” 114). My interest in fragments is that they suggest events and contexts that are on the edge of narrative. They tell us about economic relationships and relations with the state that are present, on the surface of the narrative, but not analyzed by the news story. News stories include fragments of texts and bits of discourse that reveal contingent situations that belie the hegemonic



narratives in which they are contained. These bits of text and fragments of discourse can be used *rhetorically* to expand the scope and framework in which news stories are understood. The *rhetorical* work is to recast the content and compositional structure of news stories, bringing to the surface a range of women's responses to power, negotiation with agents of the state, and efforts at persuasion; and to see the economic bubbling beneath the surface of narrative. This reading is an attempt at what Spivak calls *teleopoiesis*, a reaching for the lived contexts of neoliberal globalization through a reading of textual fragments, by filling in analysis of the operations of political economy and state power ("Harlem" 116).

My attention to bits of speech acts and fragments of text is informed by a cultural studies reading practice that looks to textual details to recuperate cultural activity in excess of dominant meaning (Trimbur; Johnson). In this feminist mode of reading, news stories, despite their hegemonic function, do not quite contain their given meaning or narrative coherence. Women's speech acts can gesture to different intentions, desires, and critical moments and can be used to map gendered value at work or to map sovereign power. As such, textual traces from a closed rhetorical system—even at the level of the sentence—can be drawn through different feminist intentions, desires, and critical literacies (Butler 10).

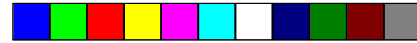
In addition to attending to economics/power, transnational feminist reading practices are an effort to keep our focus on traces of heterogeneous cultural activity that are already in our midst thanks to transnational networks, drawing hegemonic narratives through different intentions and critical moments, keeping a close eye on bits of discourse that exceed the hegemonic. Such a transnational feminist reading practice maps gendered power, the authority and contradictions of the nation-state, and the operations of political economy with an eye toward the heterogeneous and excessive. Transnational feminist reading emerges from a fragmented, ordinary discourse that is already in our midst thanks to transnational networks. Such reading is a refusal to allow news stories to be read through neoliberal interests. It puts them in contact with analyses of nation-state power in order to show cultural activity that might not appear or present itself as political but might be read that way.



This effort at reading the heterogeneous—or, what Raymond Williams calls the pre-emergent—that is within the hegemonic is a political and pedagogical gesture, an effort to expand the scope of what Mrinalini Sinha calls in her gloss on Kenneth Burke the rhetorically sayable, the scope of available language for action.<sup>13</sup> By attending to the specific material conditions in which women are situated and through texts that include their testimony and readings of texts through which to create feminist responses (1080–081), such readings *map and analyze* how women’s lives are immersed in globalized power, and they tell us about the specific possibilities and limitations of gendered sovereignty. At the same time, speech acts are not fully immersed in hegemonic narrative. As such, they can be deployed to *construct* new meanings as they record women’s quotidian activities and draw attention to the contingent, fully gendered situations that women are faced with (Sinha, *Specters* 26).

In other words, reading political economy and nation-state power enables feminists to produce transnational rhetorical work. We can find in even short, ordinary news stories textualities that suggest how social ideas *could* arise, how arguments could be made, and how collectivities could be formed. Transnational feminist reading suggests how feminist praxis *could* arise as every articulation of power, and rearticulation of power, generates pedagogical narratives, strategies, and motifs. This work suggests a new pedagogy for transnational feminism, what Jean-Luc Nancy calls “world forming.” A new transnational feminist pedagogy emerges from traces of cultural activity that are a launching point for rearticulating material contexts, nation-state power, and global power relations and for filling in the blanks of transnational feminism with a more complex discussion of their material context and political potential.

Thus, news stories can be read to “stage[s] [the] rhetoricity” of a text (Spivak, *Death* 22): from them, feminists look for what could be there, the communicative relationships that could be possible, cultural work that could be visible, labor that could be recognized, the political economic activity that could lead to communicative relationships, and the future writing that the texts invoke rather than just what the texts say. News stories can become the pre-text for exercises in “responsibility at a distance,” an effort by feminist scholars and students to expand the scope of available analysis and language by revealing how multiple forms of



power are already entrenched, must be first unmasked in order to be changed, and can be recast. This transnational feminist reading practice focuses on textual moments that put us in touch with others to create “responsive political and pedagogical strategies” (Puar 4).

*George Washington University  
Washington, DC*

### Notes

1. Neoliberalism, as many scholars have argued, is an economic and political system which is written into the social fabric and extends market relations even more deeply into the social realm (Riedner and Mahoney 19). For further discussion, see the work of David Harvey, Lisa Duggan, Aiwah Ong, Robert Mrcruer, and David Eng. Most broadly, neoliberalism concerns the upward redistribution of wealth which, in the US, was a response to downward redistribution of wealth in the 1960s and 1970s. Globally, neoliberal policies extend capitalist interests, extending both the reach of markets and policies into untapped “resources” and the influence of neoliberal ideologies and rhetorics. To accomplish this upward of redistribution of wealth, both in the US and globally, neoliberal economic policies are supported and adopted by nation-states which—whether through policy or through social influence—supported these economic policies. Nation-states offer not just political support but help create cultural conditions in which people and populations identify with neoliberal policies.

2. I use the term “overdetermined” in its cultural Marxist sense to capture the multiple forces that work together rather than isolate forces and events. Overdetermination, as Raymond Williams explains, is a way of “understanding historically lived situations and the authentic complexities of practice” (88).

3. I’m referring here to Nicolas Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn’s book, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, which was excerpted in the *New York Times* magazine in the summer of 2009.

4. Gayatri Spivak famously observes in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that women are absent in the rhetoric of modernity and in cultural patriarchy: “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of woman disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman,’ caught between tradition and modernity, culturalism, and development” (*Critique* 304).

5. Thanks to Dolsy Smith for suggesting this phrasing.

6. Cynthia Enloe’s *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases* and *Maneuvers* remain the



seminal texts for discussions of the intersection of ideologies of masculinity and femininity with nationality and national security.

7. The centrality of women to the art of governing is implicit in Foucault's text. This discussion is explicit in the work of feminist anthropologists such as Aiwaha Ong and Patty Kelly, feminist philosophers such as Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser, and many other works in cultural studies, feminism, and queer theory.

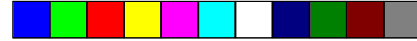
8. As Foucault notes, "Governing a household, a family, does not essentially mean safeguarding the family property; what it concerns is the individuals who compose the family, their wealth and prosperity. It means reckoning with all the possible events that may intervene, such as births and deaths, and with all the things that can be done, such as possible alliances with other families; it is this general form of management that is characteristic of government" (208–09).

9. Spivak makes a similar claim about her reading of Jamaica Kincaid's novel, *Lucy* ("Thinking" 336).

10. As Cynthia Enloe points out, there have been efforts by women in Kenya and in the Philippines to create networks of women in countries that host American military bases. This is a step towards addressing and dismantling the global gender structures on which military bases depend. There are other transnational and local efforts, including surviving by daily growing gardens and recycling waste; organizing gender forums; occupying leftist organizations that don't address gender and gendered labor; fighting back through state institutions and on the streets; organizing unions; reporting issues as women's issues; reporting issues as more than just women's issues; telling stories; saying "enough"; and engaging many other activities for dignity and well being.

11. As Laura Agustin points out in her research on women who migrate in search of work in the sex industry, there are discursive histories and relations of power that shape how women are represented and positioned in policy, in public documents, by agencies, and in the social sector. The discourse of social help, Agustin argues, often "den[ies] the agency of large numbers of working class migrants, in a range of theoretical and practical moves whose object is management and control: the exercise of governmentality" (8). Yet power is not just location of constraint; it can also be enabling. As Agustin explains in a discussion of a woman who had purchased fake papers, "she was a victim, but she had made choices and felt responsible, and I would not want to take this ethical capacity away from her. She was caught in global forces, but she also wanted to be" (41).

12. If we look closely, we see women actively participating in public life. Women are at the forefront of resistance movements in places such as Honduras and South Africa; women protest the failure of the state to investigate the systematic murder of women in Vancouver and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico; women challenge the meaning of public space and public mourning in Argentina and Iran, women organize feminist media in Costa Rica. And there is the more quiet,



everyday work of women to improve the daily conditions and enable themselves and their families to survive in the face of everyday poverty or ‘natural’ disasters (this, we could say, happens just about everywhere and has different contexts, but let’s point to Port-a-Prince, Haiti as one place where women struggle to survive).

13. Doreen Massey talks about an ethics of place which acknowledges responsibility for reading words, stories, and images that arrive via culturally authorized networks.

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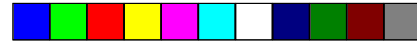
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