"She's Been Doing Everything Right": Mothers of Color and Economic Violence

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Abstract

Racial capitalist, neoliberal ideologies restructure and privatize the very social ecologies that support Black and Brown life. Crossing temporal registers to excavate the story of Eula Mae Love (d. 1979) along with contemporary media case studies of Shanesha Taylor, Debra Lynn Harrell, and Eva Hernández, this paper suggests a framework of economic violence to critically encompass the systemic injuries that low-income mothers of color confront, and to create conditions and possibilities for countering this violence. I argue that this commonplace violence against low-income Black and Brown women is disregarded; as a product of a racial-capitalist system, economic violence is assuaged and proliferated by racialized narratives of meritocracy and other cultural discourses that naturalize these injuries. Indeed, as economic violence serves a purpose for the low-wage, cheap labor needs of capital, low-income mothers of color are recurrently criminalized for attempting to create the conditions of survival for themselves and their families. Critical feminist policy analysis must, I urge, address the material and social conditions that produce economic violence in the lives of low-income mothers of color to re-imagine and renew calls for intersectional, redistributive economic justice.

> Social problems [...] are, then, not aberrations but a necessary facet of the dominant social order [...]. The labeling of the targeted group as a social problem is critical to the maintenance of the social order.
>
> —(Scheurich 1997, 107)

> [T]raditional policy analysis assumptions and methods will not suffice for examining areas of silence, taboo topics, hidden injuries, non-events, and non-decisions.
>
> —(Marshall 1997, 3)

> I don't think they really know the reality of what's going on out here, okay.
>
> —(Barbara, mother activist, *Welfare Warriors*)

The death of Eula May Love in Los Angeles, California in 1979 was the first to shine a public spotlight on the patterns of police brutality against poor and working-class communities of color by the Los Angeles Police

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Department under Chief Daryl Gates's reign. Though Love's name is not often mentioned along with his, a decade later, the ruthless beating of Rodney King by police would generate the conditions to finally force Gates's resignation. Love's killing was a touchpoint moment for a community that grieved her and knew far too well that her murder likely never would have happened if she were a white mother standing on the manicured lawn of her home in a suburban neighborhood. Love was a thirty-nine-year-old Black woman, recently widowed, and a mother who was struggling to make ends meet for herself and her three daughters. She was refusing to allow the gas company to shut off her utilities when she was shot by two police officers in front of her home with her children inside. Claiming they "feared for the safety of her children," the police proceeded to leave her daughters parentless. The conditions surrounding the death of Love illuminate an intricate network of injuries that occur with a callous regularity for low-income mothers of color.

Revisiting the circumstances surrounding Love's killing, this paper seeks to reveal the deadly logics here as *economic violence*, the exposure to great damage, harm, and injury produced by differential suffering under a racial-capitalist order. As a racialized form of violence with discursive, material, and physical components, economic violence is life-denying; it is tangible, and material. And it is often justified because of its rhetorical, ideological, and representational functions. Economic violence, as I argue, indexes the effects of racial capitalism, which inflict economic and material dispossession, displacement, deprivation, terror, suffering, pain, and often death on those who are largely powerless to have recourse against it—those with great vulnerability as differentiated by race and gender, as well as class and sexuality, as marginal subjects. Though distinct from physical violence, economic violence can and does act upon bodies. Research shows the ways in which poverty creates toxic stress with physiological results, and economic violence can expose bodies to an increased threat of physical violence. Violence is usually assumed to be an act of brute force, but that narrow focus obscures the lethality of economic violence and its life-denying composition akin to social death. In "restrictive views of violence" that emphasize "the 'blow' as its defining physical moment," as Judith Butler (2020) writes,

> the figure of the blow has tacitly organized some of the major debates on violence, suggesting that violence is something that happens between two parties in a heated encounter. Without disputing the violence of the physical blow, we can nevertheless insist that social structures or systems, including systemic racism, are violent. (2)

The narrative cases that I present in this paper traverse temporal locations to uncover the ways in which low-income mothers of color experience economic violence, particularly in the sociopolitical contexts in which they occur, while connecting the ongoing past and present of economic violence. Eula Love's death explodes the frames of enduring police brutality in the United States against women of color. Here, I mean to suggest that her historical place stretches across temporal borders in a wide arc to recent cases where, decades later, mothers of color experience the cruelty of economic violence in both new and abiding forms under, what Grace Kyungwon Hong (2015) calls "contemporary neoliberalism's exacerbation of premature death" (7). While historical approaches can provide an understanding of the past to reflect on the present, I move across temporalities in this comparative case study to implicate the past and the present, which "provides insight into a broader range of phenomena" of economic violence (Pal 2005, 227). These temporal movements illuminate how economic violence persists, the forms it takes, and how to impede it.

Critical feminist policy analysis questions the very ways in which problems themselves are imagined by researchers and decision-makers. Rather than assume that low-income mothers of color present a social problem, which has often been the approach of policy scholars and social scientists, this approach reconceptualizes social "problems" through lenses that underscore the structural frameworks that are taken for granted. Placing women of color at the center of my analysis, I locate how the economic violence embedded in daily life and social policy in the U.S. causes harm that precludes socioeconomic and greater well-being for low-income Black women and Latinas. Examining these case studies through an interdisciplinary critical feminist policy analysis approach reveals how these experiences are not unique to these particular women, pointing to many wrongs. Therefore, I propose a counter-discourse to the rationalization of the injuries levied against vulnerable bodies and call for radical correctives to end economic violence in the lives of low-income mothers of color.

Economic violence names a socially constituted power arrangement as well as an embodied material violence that has effects that result in injury, death, trauma, psychological harm, maldevelopment, deprivation, and, as the cases in this study show, criminalization. This paper proposes a framework of economic violence with three dimensions: the interpersonal/individual, the epistemic/ideological, and the state/official, which, as with all violence, are intertwined with asymmetries of social power. Through this framework, I

seek to understand how injuries are inflicted by failures of neoliberal workfare policy in its encounters with the motherwork[1] of low-income women of color in these narrative cases. Because economic violence is entwined with racial capitalism, this hermeneutic, as Jodi Melamed (2015) writes, reveals and recognizes that capitalism is racialized, and as capital requires severe inequality to accumulate, "race" provides the justification through which inequality flourishes. Race is used to naturalize the "state-capital orders" that "value and devalue forms of humanity differentially to fit [its] needs" (Melamed 2015, 77). In this paper, I mean to reveal the ways that racial capitalism also depends upon gender and sexuality and exploits the inequities of racialized gender to enact economic violence. As my analysis will show, women of color—particularly poor and low-income Black and Brown mothers—are subjected to profound economic violence in the United States along these lines in their motherwork efforts.

Indeed, Love had contended with violence that began on the morning of the day she was killed. At 11:15 am, a gas company employee arrived at her home to turn off her gas. Only six months earlier, she had suffered the death of her husband; as a widow, Eula Love supported herself and her three daughters on his social security checks. Her income totaled $680 a month, or approximately $2,000 today. Her mortgage payment was roughly one-third of her income, leaving $482.87 to make ends meet for a family of four. Shortly after chasing away the gas company employee, whom she fought off with a shovel to keep him from disconnecting her utility, Love walked down to the store to pay her gas bill. She told her daughter that she was turned away with her cash and not allowed to pay her bill. Love then went to purchase a money order in the smallest amount she could pay to keep the gas on; the minimum payment was $22.09. Later that afternoon, she was upset when, once again, she had to defend her household from the gas company employee who came to collect payment; this time, she wielded a kitchen knife. When

1. Patricia Hill Collins's (1994) conceptualization of "motherwork," the reproductive labor and care work that mothers of color do to sustain life particularly for those whose futures are not ensured, emphasizes the labor of mothering and motherhood's social construction within interlocking structures of oppression. Hill Collins also foregrounds the racial and class considerations of mothering in the care work of women of color, such as the sustenance of life within the social conditions of white supremacist heteropatriarchy and classism. Cathy Cohen (1997) also reminds us of the sexual marginalization and surveillance that falls over the bodies of women of color, particularly low-income mothers, rendering them queer in relation to dominant white middle-class norms of domesticity and the attendant power structures.

the two LAPD officers arrived at the behest of the gas company and saw the woman was in distress, rather than determining how to help her, they drew their guns. As Love shouted at them with "obscene remarks," (Los Angeles Police Commission, 6),[2] the officers quickly escalated the situation, and within two and a half minutes after arriving at her property, they shot Love multiple times. The *New York Times* reported that she still had the $22 money order in her purse (Hill 1979). It was the third day of the new year, and two of her daughters—Sheila, 15, and Tammy, 12—waited inside for her and watched as their mother was killed in the front yard.

Reading economic violence is to grasp the multiple symbolic meanings that subtend the gas company turning off her service that Love fought against that day—the cold showers, class shame, late fees, the additional charges that must be scraped together to re-secure a disconnected account, and the time depleted. Acquiring a money order, an additional charge, in the amount of $22 to keep the gas from being turned off, as Love did, is a common occurrence for the working class and the working poor. As Melamed (2015) explains, "[t]he financial asset owning class" requires "violence toward others and seeks to expropriate for capital the entire field of social provision (land, work, education, health)" (76). Love's labor and time to trudge to the store to pay her bill, then to be told she could not pay there, emphasize the contradictions of a system that punishes low-income people. However, it would be not much more than an inconvenience to the class-privileged, if they even have to experience it at all. Without having to pause to adjudicate whether they can afford to pay the bill (gas or food? Rent or gas? Water or electricity?), bill-paying is a simple act. Finding a pen and a stamp, scrawling a check, and placing it in the mail, or logging onto a creditor's website, is a nuisance that occupies a few minutes, or seconds, of the day at most. Tasks that create stress and utter dread for a low-income person might even be considered pleasant for the class-privileged, as it is incentivized with rewards of frequent flyer points, cash back from credit cards, tax write-offs, and the satisfaction of asset accumulation. For low-income mothers of color, as in Love's case, the commodification of life

2. The officers used many stereotypes of Black working-class women to justify their actions and support their claims that Love was dangerous. A critical feminist reading of what she said is to (1) bring her voice back into her own story; (2) understand her state of mind as she was defending herself and her home; and (3) illuminate the ways in which working-class iterations of womanhood are themselves considered threatening, as mere words and her rejection of the proprieties of femininity were construed as deviant.

extracts surplus labor, time, and affect from gendered and racialized bodies in order to pay a bill that is compulsory to sustain life.

While the gas company can no longer legally employ the police as their muscle to collect a debt, the racial logic of privatization that protected the gas company's financial interests, rather than Love's life, endures. According to Moreton-Robinson (2015), white possession is reaffirmed and reproduced in "the nation-state's ownership, control, and domination," such that corporate privatization is the logic of the racialized settler-colonial state (xii). Love struggled against a system of privatization that monetizes and takes possession of basic human necessities; one which weaponizes hot water to bathe, a furnace to keep warm, and a burner to prepare a meal. She would not be denied these necessities, nor would she allow her children to be denied. Then and now, low-income mothers of color must act in self-defense against economic violence. The logics that normalize the privatization of natural resources—such as gas, water, land, and energy—conceal economic violence and view Love's resistance to the injury of going without gas and heat as rebellious, criminal, mad, or worthy of death.

Economic Violence: A Framework

> "All violence is life-denying"
> —(bell hooks, 2014).

Forms of economic violence are normalized and considered natural outgrowths of the human condition, sometimes referred to as hunger, homelessness, and the "culture of poverty." One outcome of economic violence is exposing the multiply marginalized to other forms of injury, such as state and police violence, health disparities, stress, and shortened lifespans. This is not to suggest that economic violence *subsumes* other violences, such as racial violence, but rather to highlight that the economic does not fall solely along the axis of class. Economic violence is racialized, as racial capitalism operates through the workings and hierarchies of racial inequality. As Melamed (2015) tells us, "[c]apital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups" (77). As an effect of racial capitalism, economic violence is produced by the racial, gender, and sexual systems within neoliberal U.S. society and public policy. As Grace Kyungwon Hong (2015) describes, "[n]eoliberalism foremost is an epistemological structure of disavowal, [. . .which operates] by affirming certain modes of racialized,

gendered, and sexualized life, particularly through invitation to reproductive respectability, so as to disavow its exacerbated production of premature death" (7). Economic violence, then, is the product of a system of governmentality that "promises protection from premature death in exchange for complicity" with the system and the injuries it causes (Hong 2015, 7). Economic violence denies the life possibilities of subjects whose material realities do not adhere to the capitalist logics of the market. Economic violence is particularly pronounced in the lives of poverty-class and low-income mothers who upend the myth of meritocracy by not acquiescing to reproductive respectability, white domesticity, and normative motherhood ideologies.

Rather than separating violence from structures of racial capitalism and neoliberalism, in this framework of economic violence, I depart from individualized and privatized definitions of "economic abuse," which render violence as (only) direct, interpersonal acts or emphasize human action with deliberate intent. I propose a paradigm of economic violence through an intersectional critique that draws from the interventions of U.S. women of color and transnational feminisms, critical ethnic studies, and queer of color critiques—scholarship that has incisively parsed out capitalism's workings in relation to gender, race, sexuality, coloniality, and nation.[3]

Domains of Economic Violence

Economic violence is a quotidian aspect of social life that shapes the precarious realities of day-to-day existence and possibilities for survival for women from poor and working-class communities of color. Moreover, the severe and persistent violence that Black and Latina low-income mothers experience is diluted by the calculated and subdued lexicon of the state and policy, which then functions to diminish the recognition, and critique, of economic violence. The dominant rhetoric and language of policymaking and finance (the markers of poverty, debt, credit, work, welfare, hunger, and labor force participation) often obscure the marginalization that excludes women of color from social and economic well-being. Indeed, it is easier to ignore the violence that remains unnamed and unaccounted for, excusing the harm as

3. These bodies of knowledge have been deeply influential in my understanding of how economic violence is caught up with racial capitalism in ways particular to gendered, racialized, and (hetero)sexualized life. Transnational feminist work—particularly that of Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2006), which explicitly seeks a racialized anti-capitalist feminist theory—has also been instructive to this essay.

natural, and for policymakers to focus their interventions on symptoms of the harm rather than its causes.

The three major domains of systemic economic violence I discuss in this framework—*interpersonal/individual*, *epistemic/ideological*, and *state/official*—are the realms where this violence is enacted, the mechanisms through which it is legitimated, and the modes through which it is endorsed.[4]

Interpersonal/Individual: the ways in which one actor (such as a member of a relationship) may keep another from economic well-being, usually based on their already marginal social status.

Economic violence can be an organizing element of abusive interpersonal relationships, sometimes referred to as economic or financial abuse, wherein abusers use economic means to preclude their victims from possible means of escaping the relationship. The World Health Organization (WHO) demarcates economic abuse as an aspect of intimate partner violence,[5] and it includes "deprivation" among the effects of violence "with corresponding implications for [the] calculation of the economic effects of violence" (Waters et al. 2004, 2). In this domain, it is a deliberate action "when the abuser has complete control over the victim's money and other economic resources or activities" (Fawole 2008, 168). This form of economic violence is enacted person to person, as the party wielding more power in a relationship exerts that power on another with the intention of isolating and controlling the victim by economically disadvantaging them. Examples of this include barring partners from employment, their own sources of income, or their own bank accounts, as well as controlling their access to health care and education, and excluding them from financial decision-making. Foreclosing, disallowing, or interrupting a victim's income—all of which are "controlling behaviors"—is a common theme (Waters et al. 2004, 3). For migrant and undocumented women, abusers may threaten to withhold funds for permanent immigration paperwork or for defending themselves from deportation, for instance. Interpersonal economic violence keeps a victim dependent on the abuser for her livelihood, exposing the victim to more violence if she cannot materially provide for herself and her children.

4. This framework endeavors to comprehend how racialized economic power and marginalization operate alongside the social and political power that Foucault terms the biopolitical to maintain control over life and necropolitics, which Achille Mbembe (2019) theorizes exposes marginals to premature death.

5. Economic abuse is typically defined to include harm between family members and intimate partners, as well as acquaintances and strangers, that is not intended to further the aims of any formally defined group or cause.

Abusers can interfere with the survivor's ability to work via harassment, such as frequent phone calls, unannounced visits, or other threatening behaviors. Because of the harmful but persistent stigma that survivors still experience, the abuser's behavior often impacts how the survivor is viewed professionally and can lead to disciplinary action at work and even job loss. This can be particularly damaging for LGBTQ people who sometimes face the risk of having an abuser threaten to "out" them at work if their employer is unaware of their identity (Halstead 2014). According to WHO, the "lack of alternative means of economic support" is a main obstacle to leaving violent partners.

As economic barriers are among the strongest constraints to fleeing a violent relationship, the interpersonal/individual domain of economic violence is the most recognized and acknowledged. Yet even in contexts in which violence is largely perceived to be interpersonal and enacted between intimate partners, it exists within, or is allowed by, a larger context of power. Olufunmilayo Fawole (2008) points to this systemic context of economic abuse and interpersonal economic violence, writing that "particularly in countries with high levels of poverty, where economic exploitation may be rife [...] its effects [are] lethal" (168). Feminists have theorized violence as existing beyond the realm of physical force, considering such definitions "too narrow," and they have "reject[ed] traditional legalistic definitions that focus almost exclusively on forms of physical assault" (Renzetti 2008, 271). This broader definition of violence has been instructive for understanding how power functions and controls marginalized subjects even when not engaging in physical force. However, the feminist literature on economic violence has held economic abuse mainly as a broader form of intimate partner or domestic violence, which includes sexual, emotional, and psychological violence in addition to physical abuse.[6]

While this domain of economic violence is most understood and accepted *as* violence because it fits within the person-to-person model commonly thought of regarding violence, "economic abuse" as a totalizing theory of economic violence diminishes the role that institutions, the state, and ideologies and discourses play in committing economic violence, inflicting injury,

6. A notable exception is Patricia Allard's (2006) article. Allard does not theorize economic violence beyond the term's self-evident usage but provides an insightful example of how economic violence is directed at women of color in a structural sense, particularly against formerly incarcerated women. I am grateful for her work, which is published in a classic collection that expands the definition of violence against women of color beyond the interpersonal.

and authorizing oppression. Access to and control over material resources, the exploitation of women's work, discriminatory laws and legal systems, and a lack of economic power are all structural issues that extend beyond the interpersonal realm, yet are the very conditions that permit interpersonal/individual economic violence.[7] Women still do not have the economic power in society to prevent these forms of violence, and they are forced to depend upon male partners and kin. Therefore, the interpersonal/individual realm of economic violence is buttressed by gender systems and based on heteronormative, middle-class commitments to the family wage.[8] While the economic violence that occurs between individuals is relegated to the private sphere, this relation is authorized by heteropatriarchy and racial capitalism, and replicates the patterns of the state.

Epistemological/Ideological: the ways knowledge and perceived truth about economic power and injustice are constructed, circulated, and naturalized; and the workings of who gets to decide these truths.

A great deal of economic violence is produced ideologically, condoned by the philosophies and socio-cultural constructs that dictate who is deemed worthy of economic power and well-being. Ideological economic violence

7. Olufunmilayo Fawole (2008) writes that the "[e]conomic violence experienced included limited access to funds and credit; controlling access to health care, employment, education, including agricultural resources; excluding from financial decision making; and discriminatory traditional laws on inheritance, property rights, and use of communal land. At work women experienced receiving unequal remuneration for work done equal in value to the men's, were overworked and underpaid, and used for unpaid work outside the contractual agreement. Some experienced fraud and theft from some men, illegal confiscation of goods for sale, and unlawful closing down of worksites. At home, some were barred from working by partners, while other men totally abandoned family maintenance to the women. Unfortunately, economic violence results in deepening poverty and compromises educational attainment and developmental opportunities for women" (167).

8. The family-wage system's legacy remains with us today in numerous ways, one of which is the discrepancy between the wages men and women are paid for the same work. The family wage is considered a wage that allows a (male) breadwinner to earn enough to sufficiently support the household, assuming a gendered division of labor in the home. This ideology maintains the roles of men as wage earners and women as caretakers within a heteropatriarchal and reproductively respectable nuclear family unit. As men assume the role of head of the family as breadwinners, women respectably orient their sexual activity toward one man in exchange for financial support. The family-wage system was also a racialized and classed arrangement because only middle-class white men were deemed deserving of that type of waged occupation.

aligns with master narratives about class, race, gender, sexuality, capitalism, and poverty, indexing which populations are scrutinized and denigrated for each economic and social decision. The "welfare queen" imagery is an example of this dimension of economic violence, as gendered and racialized ideologies and tropes of poor mothers of color influence policy and public perception, eventually perpetuating state-level economic violence that is meted out over the bodies of poverty-class women. While a representational fiction created by politicians and industry elites,[9] the image of the welfare queen has political influence and a perceptual life that shapes the behaviors of both recipients of assistance and the bureaucracies with which they must contend. The welfare queen trope has consequently resulted in shaping arbitrary and punitive actions and performances that poor women must enact to receive public assistance. An example of this is the perception that poverty-class mothers are drug users, resulting in the promotion of policies for "drug-testing" recipient women, though there remains insufficient data to support such policies. Ideological economic violence has a direct bearing on policy decisions as well as on public opinion. As it is co-constructed with the white supremacist imagination, this ideological dimension acts as a predominant pedagogy for social reality and solidifies the pretense that poverty is natural—and perhaps even inherent among the differentiated, racialized masses—in the minds of the U.S. public. While the welfare queen trope impacts the material realities of white poverty-class single mothers, the stereotype was effectively written over the bodies of poverty-class women of color and serves as a rationalization for withholding resources and inflicting violence on all low-income mothers.

The ideological domain of economic violence is an organizing characteristic of middle-class membership and identity. This form of economic violence vastly overlooks the class privilege that is embedded in all aspects of daily life. It obligates working- and poverty-class women to perform middle-class propriety in speech, appearance, and dress, while also criticizing a poor woman who seeks to obtain access to middle-class resources as *her* materialism. This economic violence questions the moral character of poor women for buying almost anything—phones, purses, hair, and shoes—as lacking judgment; these purchases are also racialized. This demonization makes clear that poor mothers are not considered "deserving" of luxuries, and certainly not the types of frivolities that the middle class regularly enjoys.

9. For a longer discussion of the political and capitalist creation of the "welfare queen" to serve powerful U.S. interests, see Reese (2005).

Entertainment media plays an important role in ideological economic violence, particularly in how poor people are represented and reported about, when acknowledged at all. Though poverty is a large constitutive factor of inherent Otherness in how the middle class imagines and speaks about "the poor," class is categorically ignored as a vehicle of oppression when the public scrutinizes the behavior or "choices" of poor women. Debates on social media that casually ask if welfare recipients should be drug tested exemplify the economic violence that the middle class performs.[10] The ways in which the poor are discussed as a monolithic Other, often undeserving and infantilized; how lone mothers are regarded as responsible for the ills of society; who is rendered undeserving of sexual autonomy and the ability to reproduce by the barometer of middle-class standards of family life; who is discussed as inherently unworthy and subjected to drug testing and other indignities because their wages do not cover their economic needs for basic entitlements; and the myth of meritocracy all pathologize the poor and reinscribe the cultural construction of poverty.

Recent debates regarding obesity, food consumption, and health among Black and Brown families demonstrate how deeply ideological economic violence is embedded in both U.S. society and in policy research. A 2009 study ignited debate over how to encourage "healthier eating habits" among women recipients of SNAP when the study linked the U.S. food stamp plan to obesity, particularly for women (Zagorksy and Smith 2009). The researchers at Ohio State University's Center for Human Resource Research and the University of Michigan-Dearborn suggested that food stamps "contribute[d] directly to weight gain" and noted that "[we] can't prove that the Food Stamp Program causes weight gain, but this study suggests a strong linkage. . . . While food stamps may help fight hunger, they may have the unintended consequence of encouraging weight gain among women" (Reuters Health 2009).

The aid recipients' painstaking efforts to stretch the very limited food stamp dollars allotted to feed a family, which often means buying a larger quantity of cheaper foods, and the labor of cooking and food preparation—which is assumed to be a mother's task—were not part of the conversation, which was reduced to the researchers questioning the ways food stamps lead to "unhealthy eating practices." Ideologies about SNAP recipients also ignore other possibilities, such as the interpretation that weight gain might be regarded as a positive sign in a program designed to combat basic hunger.

10. I refer to popular "polls" circulated widely on Facebook before they were eventually eliminated; at present, memes operate to circulate these narratives on social media platforms.

Rather than holding the government accountable for nourishing all families, ideological economic violence typically falls on recipient mothers, blaming them for not "providing" quality food for their children.

When the researcher learned that the average food stamp user receives less than $100 a month in benefits, rather than urging policy changes to allow for purchasing more nutritious foods, he suggested that "those on food stamps could be required to take a course on nutrition" (Reuters Health 2009). In doing so, he immediately engages the mechanisms of control over poor women's behaviors through which poverty governance exerts economic violence.

This epistemic economic violence is demonstrated not only in research on poor families, but also in traditional economic theory when poverty is situated as simply another debate within free-market capitalism rather than a life-denying violence that should be prevented. Classic economic theory avoids a critique of the inequality that is embedded in capitalism, ignoring that its basic economic foundations require the exploitation of surplus labor. At various times, this racialized and gendered labor has been taken from enslaved Black and Indigenous people, women and mothers, and groups marked as surplus by white capitalist heteropatriarchy.

This domain traverses state/official violence, as the laws carried out by the state are crafted by legislators and by citizens who vote on the issues or elect politicians who punish the poor. When legislators propose outlandish and draconian laws, such as requiring a recipient to be drug tested for public aid, they legitimize the suffering of poverty-class mothers. Similarly, a great deal of political rhetoric was required to demonize public assistance so that "welfare reform" would be perceived as common sense, resulting in the passage of laws such as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) which all but destroyed the social safety net. In a society that holds great wealth, poverty is not a given, it is created. It is produced to benefit the owning class and is consistently enacted and solidified within a system that requires vast resources to live, yet metes out meager resources according to social hierarchies. Economic violence is prevalent when economic resources are deemed scarce despite the abundance of wealth at the top of the socioeconomic hierarchy.

State/Official: the formal and institutional ways that economic marginalization and oppression are built into the fabric of daily life.

The state's faithfulness to the demands of racial capital and its justification and enforcement of capital's exploitation and inequities form the foundation of this dimension. While the domains of systemic economic violence are all underpinned by the state's alignment with racial capitalism, the domain

of state/official economic violence is where formal, sanctioned aggression toward the economically marginalized occurs. State/official economic violence is the province of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 and workfare policy; degrading welfare bureaucracies; the privatization of housing, water, and energy; longstanding racialized and gendered wealth gaps; and the protection of white property rights. Though the forms of violence may or may not be considered "legal" at any given point, they are legitimized by the authority and backing of the nation-state.[11] These forms of violence may in fact be perceived as rightful in some contexts and immoral in others, but a system of government and rule that serves the imperatives of racial capital, neoliberalism, and property rights provides the scaffolding for the powerful to dominate and influence the lives of those marginal to power.

United States-led globalization, trade, and economic policies also inflict a complex web of economic violence on low-income racialized women with dire impacts on the women of the Global South and North. As women and LGBTQ people migrate, these policies subject migrant gender and sexual minorities to increased vulnerability to other forms of violence both within the home and from state actors. Women with "dependent" immigration status are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence; thus, they must rely on male partners and kin to sponsor their residency through U.S. immigration rules, which renders women legally dependent upon their husbands (Narayan 2013, 144). Driven to migrate because of the conditions created by U.S. empire, women and LGBTQ people are subjected to violence after trying to escape economic vulnerability in their countries of origin. With heightened state scrutiny of immigration from the Global South, racialized migrants from poor countries have been cruelly and systematically separated from their children by the U.S. Department of Justice.

As the policies of the state establish and valorize the Western nuclear family unit as the ideal, other family formations that deviate from that norm are stigmatized, regulated, controlled, and subjected to violence. U.S. government policies are based on accepting the white middle-class family as natural; they inflict violence upon women who are on the margins of society in numerous

11. Indeed, what is considered legal—as well as the law itself—is socially constructed and changes over time, space, and place. Thus, economic violence enacted in the official domain has great implicit and actual power. Furthermore, critical race theorists who focus on legal theory point out how the law has been designed largely in the service of those in power.

ways, increasingly through detention and incarceration. Poor women of color are incarcerated at disproportionate and alarmingly high rates, and "following a criminal conviction, through post-conviction penalties, the state further strips women of access to the very antipoverty tools—housing, financial assistance, food stamps, and educational supports—they need to survive" (Allard 2006, 157). The increased criminalization and incarceration of poor women of color then further marginalizes them, as previous incarceration disqualifies them from the mechanisms of social support that are necessary to pursue less precarious lives.

Government policies and policing in the United States are entangled with economic violence. When the Obama administration's Department of Justice (DOJ) conducted an investigation into the actions of the police department and court system of Ferguson, Missouri, in St. Louis County, it revealed endemic economic violence against the town's largely Black and poor residents.[12] The resulting report noted that it was not public safety but rather "maximizing revenue" that "City officials [. . .] consistently set [. . .] as the priority for Ferguson's law enforcement activity" (USDOJ 2015, 9), and it describes in detail the ways that the city government's focus on revenue shapes practices "leading to procedures that raise due process concerns and inflict unnecessary harm on members of the Ferguson community" (2).[13] As economic violence compounded overlapping injuries, the multiply marginalized were particularly vulnerable to this harm. When a low-income woman, especially from an underserved community targeted by the racist local government, receives a ticket she cannot afford, that is a violence. One that punishes the person who cannot withstand the economic burden far greater than the one who can afford to pay. For example, the Court Clerk refused to take a partial payment toward a $600 debt from a Ferguson woman

12. Ferguson, Missouri, received heightened attention due to the killing of Mike Brown at the hands of the police. The DOJ investigation, however, revealed it is only one of several municipalities in St. Louis County where state/official economic violence serves as a weapon of the principally white power structure against a largely Black and poor populace. In nearby Flourissant's night court, for example, if defendants (who are often charged with the "poverty crimes" previously mentioned) must miss court, a warrant is issued for their arrest. Because the courts meet irregularly, they could spend weeks in jail if they cannot afford bond (Hellerstein 2015).

13. Multiple media reports that referred to the resulting Department of Justice report as shocking indicate the various ways in which officially sanctioned violence deeply structures the governance of poor and racialized communities while remaining largely undiscussed.

who explained that she was a single mother and "could not afford to pay more that month" (USDOJ 2015, 42). The ticket itself can be terrifying for a low-income person given the impact that debt will have, and then, when further accumulating debt that is often impossible to fight, she is re-victimized by the system when she seeks to repay.

State/official economic violence can wreak further havoc on the lives of low-income mothers of color, as one woman describes in a desperate letter to the mayor of her town:

> Although I feel I have been harassed, wronged and unjustly done . . . [w]hat I am upset and concerned about is my driver's license being suspended. I was told that I may not be able to [be] reinstate[d] until the tickets are taken care of. I am a hard[-]working mother of two children and I cannot by any means take care of my family or work with my license being suspended and being unable to drive. I have to have [a] valid license to keep my job because I transport clients that I work with […] not to mention I drive my children back and forth to school, practices and rehearsals on a daily basis. I am writing this letter because no one has been able to help me and I am really hoping that I can get some help. (USDOJ 2015, 51)

State/official economic violence is embedded in the citation itself, in a system of demerits that extracts labor and capital from those who cannot pay. It traps the debtor in a situation that compounds her inability to not only pay the debt, but to also pursue the conditions of life that would sustain her, such as to be able to get to work.

In this case, because the state law mandated license suspension for failure to appear or pay a citation, the suspension cycled into a pending arrest warrant that could only be resolved by paying a $200 bond. Debts that amass when they cannot be repaid are another way that economic violence inflicts additional pain, turmoil, and injury:

> One woman [. . .] received two parking tickets for a single violation in 2007 that then totaled $151 plus fees. Over seven years later, she still owed Ferguson $541—after already paying $550 in fines and fees, having multiple arrest warrants issued against her, and being arrested and jailed on several occasions. (USDOJ 2015, 42)

In this municipality, one in four residents lives below the federal poverty line of approximately $23,000 a year (Kneebone 2014), and 67 percent of the residents are Black, who represent the 90 percent or more of those charged with "poverty crimes," examples of which include "driving with a suspended

license, failure to register a vehicle, and no proof of insurance" (Hellerstein 2015). The fines effectively redistribute resources from the poor and working-class to the local elite through force, as they comprise a large portion of the budget and fund more local police and officials.[14] As economic violence is racialized and enforced through state and official means, it is a method of control that further extracts resources from low-income people, creating more violence and enriching the hierarchical power structure.

Doing Everything Right: Motherwork and Economic Violence

> Women of color have been violently punished and stigmatized for mothering. [. . .] There is a vast store of experience, knowledge, and resilience in the lives of oppressed women who have made continuing possible for their communities even as white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal capitalism has intensified its efforts to deprive us from the means of mothering ourselves and our communities.
>
> —Cynthia Dewi Oka (2016, 52)

In the lives of low-income women of color, economic violence takes many forms—whether material, discursive, physical, affective, or psychological—often rendered invisible by dominant narratives and sets of meanings, and it exposes Black and Brown mothers to other forms of violence. In this section, I examine media accounts of three low-income mothers of color, Shanesha Taylor, Debra Lynn Harrell, and Eva Hernández. Taylor and Harrell's stories received significant public scrutiny, as Black women and men are often made hyper-visible in mass media. Latinas/os are largely absent from mainstream news reports unless, as Leo Chavez (2008) notes, they address (im)migration or the "threat" that Latinos represent to the American way of life. Hernández's case, therefore, appeared as a special report in *Colorlines* (Wessler 2010), a periodical that pays particular attention to issues of race, representation, and social justice. All three of these accounts reveal how economic violence is ongoing and unrelenting, and often results in criminalizing mothers of color. In each of these accounts, criminalization happened when these women attempted to conform to the socioeconomic constraints placed upon them, and when they tried to shield themselves and their families from public policies that exposed them to economic violence.

14. Failure to Appear violations totaled $442,901, or 24 percent of the total revenue the court collected in 2013.

Work Imperatives and Racialized Motherwork

In March of 2014, Shanesha Taylor, a thirty-five-year-old Black mother of three from Arizona was arrested when she left her two youngest children waiting in her car as she attended a job interview. Taylor was housing insecure and had obtained an interview for a position at an insurance agency that promised a living wage. She had been excited about the possibilities of this opportunity and what a salary like $39,000 a year would do for her family. When her childcare fell through in the hours directly beforehand, she knew she could not miss the interview. Taylor recounted the panic she felt in the moment when the babysitter did not answer the door:

> I felt like this was my opportunity to basically improve life for all of us, and the one key part of it is now not available, so what do I do now? That was my only thought: "What do I do now? What do I do now?" That was kind of what started the whole chain of events that day. (Dewan 2014a)

With few options,[15] and the prospect of an income that offered an end to the housing insecurity she was experiencing, Taylor took her two youngest children with her. In Arizona's desert climate, a car can quickly become intensely hot, but it was a day with pleasant temperatures, and she did not see a viable alternative. As she explains:

> […] it was literally panic. I'm driving to the interview, my hands are shaking, my eyes are tearing. I really had to make a decision. I need something to happen [in under 11 days] or the entire bottom would fall out. (Taylor 2014)

Returning to her car after the interview about a half hour later, Taylor found police swarming her car. She informed them that she was jobless, had been homeless, and was without childcare that day though she had attempted to arrange it. Nonetheless, Taylor was arrested and charged with two Class 3 counts of felony child abuse. Her children were removed from her care and placed in foster homes while she was put through a series of legal and public tribulations to regain custody of her six-month-old, two-year-old, and nine-year-old (who had been in school at the time).

When the policies and material conditions that underpin the complex workings of economic violence in the lives of low-income mothers of color are unconsidered, the structural failures that led to that day for Shanesha Taylor

15. U.S. workfare policy both relies upon and ignores the fact that low-income women must depend on the unpaid or low-waged labor of other women, such as their women kin, for childcare.

are elided and privatized onto the individual. Prior to the Personal Responsibility Act (PRWORA), anti-poverty policy at least "minimally sought to reduce poverty and improve the living conditions of recipients" (Roberts 1997, 209). However, the welfare reform bill ushered in an era now marked by "improving the behavior of poor families" (Roberts 1997, 209). Rather than offering Taylor the means to provide childcare and support her family, the economic violence embedded in public assistance forces mothers to find work *at any cost*. Racialized motherwork itself becomes a threat that must be controlled, often through criminalization. It did not matter that Taylor was performing her part under the conditions that the state made manifest.

Rather, the racialized motherwork of low-income women of color struggles against economic violence, the injuries of the state's investments in racial capitalism, and the ways that communities of color are exposed to premature death. This resistance is often not interpolable as mothering in accordance with the hegemonic ideologies of motherhood, in which representations of white middle-class mothering are dominant (DiQuinzio and Meagher 2005). Taylor's reality as a mother challenged that frame. Public discourse marked her as either criminal—the unscrupulous homeless mother—or disturbed—a woman with mental issues in need of therapy and, as some suggested, "parenting classes." The judge and prosecutor engaged in similar rhetoric. While the prosecutor argued that Taylor's actions were clearly endangerment, or perhaps negligence, the injuries of ongoing economic violence and the desperation that influenced Taylor's decision were wholly absent from the discussion. As Taylor described her ethical dilemma as a mother,

> [T]he economy is suffering, but in the grand scheme I can't explain to my daughter that "The economy's bad, baby; that's why we don't have a home." She's going to look at me and say, "O.K., why don't you have a job?" (Dewan 2014a)

The imagined exchange Taylor narrates between herself and her daughter demonstrates the clashing negotiations of parenting her child under conditions that collide with the internalized pressures of social control from U.S. policy and ideological economic violence. The dominant white middle-class narratives that have shaped policy and law insist that Taylor's act of racialized motherwork was child abuse, and that she is a criminal, rather than discerning how she submitted to the workings of the system as it exists. These circumstances are not those that normative white, middle-class mothers often find themselves in, as the structural conditions of life support the goals of childrearing and future-making for the privileged.

Within the confines of today's workfare policy and welfare narratives, Taylor's calculations were as reasonable as possible and, more importantly, realistic in the face of economic violence. The things that she has been told by the state that she must do to secure a job before the guarantee of any public care are factors that expose her to additional economic violence; that violence remains invisible until it is seen as a social problem by the mainstream public and the state.[16] Economic violence is further replicated through the indignities, injuries, and violations she endured over the five-month span during which she attempted to reunite with her children. The state and legal system in Arizona inflicted additional trauma by making an example of Taylor, sentencing her to ten days in jail until her bail was posted. The prosecutor and courts dominated the discourse about the case in the news media, framing the purportedly "just" sentencing she received. *The New York Times* reported that the prosecutor in Taylor's case would "spare her the charge" of felony child abuse (Dewan 2014b, A14). The white male prosecutor was quoted as saying that she was given a deal that would be in the "best interests of her family" while still holding Taylor "accountable." Yet Taylor was rendered voiceless. Glossing over the demeaning conditions of the deal (a parenting program, substance abuse treatment, and a mandated trust fund in her children's names to hold the money raised for her by sympathetic donors),[17] the emphasis on her "fair" treatment disguised that she was never treated fairly. Taylor's every move was scrutinized, and when she declined to place $60,000 in a "college trust fund" for her children as the judge in her case had ordered her to do, patronizing overtones turned more acerbic. Whether and how she should spend her own money began to shape the coverage of Taylor's case, particularly vilifying her for spending $4,000 a month on "rent, entertainment and other expenses" (Erickson 2014). Though that budget—which approximated a yearly salary of around $48,000—falls well below the average U.S. household income of $53,657, many were inflamed by seeing Taylor's otherwise ordinary and

16. The available options are often circumscribed by economic violence, even for the simplest things. To do everything that social ideology told her to do, and that workfare policy mandated her to do, Taylor agonized over whether to attend a job interview or potentially throw away the opportunity to be able to support, clothe, and feed her children.

17. The court sought to control the money that Taylor's supporters had crowdfunded. The judge mandated how she was to use the donations, which illustrates that it is not only public funds that are scrutinized and punitively meted out, but also that mothers of color are also depicted as exploiting private funding.

unremarkable spending for a middle-class family. One person, who claimed to be a supporter of Taylor's, quipped, "[t]hat sounds like a normal family budget, but not for someone who doesn't work" (Erickson 2014). The prosecutor's conclusion of what was "best" for her family, the judge's insistence on trust funds for a college future without accounting for the present, and the belittling financial standards she was held to by the public indicate how low-income mothers of color are bound to a subordinate role within the existing social order.

Income Support Time Limits and Criminalizing Survival

A little more than a decade after the welfare reform bill instituted consecutive-year and lifetime limits on income assistance,[18] significantly impacting women from communities of color, the United States experienced a collapsing economy, housing foreclosures, and record job losses. As those with respiratory illness are acutely aware of the effects of pollution and air quality, low-income mothers of color subjected to economic violence are among the first to feel the effects of economic downturns. In the Northeast of the United States, Eva Hernández[19] was a twenty-eight-year-old Puerto Rican mother of two children; her main income was $526 a month in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, or food stamps. When the low-wage food service jobs started to evaporate in her town, Hernández walked miles, and as far as 45 minutes from home, to search for employment. Hernández also lived with and cared for her mother, relying on her housing voucher and Social Security check to keep a roof over their heads. However, her mother's terminal cancer diagnosis cruelly forced them to wonder how Hernández would be able to afford the rent after her mother's death.

When her last income assistance check from the state of Connecticut arrived in March 2009, Hernández and her family were among the 90 percent of woman-headed households who no longer qualified for cash assistance

18. Now called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the federal cash assistance program is delivered as block grants to states, which then choose how to distribute funds according to the "four purposes" of the TANF program. Described by the Office of Family Assistance as "designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency," TANF's purposes are promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; preventing and reducing nonmarital pregnancies; encouraging two-parent families; and providing aid so that children can be cared for by their families (US Department of HHS 2022).

19. The subject's name was changed in this news article to protect her from potential criminalization and loss of food assistance if she were found to be committing fraud (Wessler 2010).

because of the lifetime limit policy. An analysis of 2008 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services data shows that "Blacks, Latinas and Asians nationwide are about two times more likely than whites to have been pushed off cash assistance as a result of time limits, rather than for another reason" (Wessler 2010). Connecticut is the second wealthiest state in the country, but Hernández resides in a 70 percent Latina/o and Black municipality with high poverty rates. A legacy of the welfare backlash in Northern states that were shaped by "racist resentment over blacks' civil rights gains and in-migration of blacks, Puerto Ricans, or Mexicans" to the North (Reese 2005, 86), the state of Connecticut has one of the most stringent time limits on cash assistance.[20]

After her third request for an extension of income assistance was denied by the Department of Social Services, Hernández interpreted the state's withholding of resources as an act of economic violence. As she put it: "I know that they could help me out, but they're just acting like they can't. They look at us like we are stupid, like we are dumb, like we are lazy, like we don't want to do nothing for our living" (Wessler 2010). Because SNAP benefits are allotted only to purchase "eligible" food items in authorized retail food stores, Hernández bartered her $527.00 food stamp allotment to be able to afford supplies such as medicine, shoes for her children, and other necessities. At the local bodega, she would exchange benefits at a rate of 70 cents on the dollar, reducing her overall spending to approximately $368.00 and leaving her in debt at the end of the month. Yet this meager subsistence is also criminalized by the U.S. government. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the practice of "trafficking" food stamps, such as "the direct exchange of SNAP benefits (formerly known as food stamps) for cash," is illegal. Though selling food stamps is a resourceful and necessary measure to which low-income women sometimes resort in order to provide for their families in the face of economic violence, bartering or selling $100 or more in food stamps prompts a felony charge. While the exchange of food stamps is very rare and does not increase costs to the federal government, trafficking these benefits is considered "one of the most serious forms of SNAP fraud, [. . .as] it does divert federal funds from their intended purpose" (Aussenberg 2018, 3). If discovered or exposed, Hernández would most surely lose her food assistance entirely. If she were brought up on charges or incarcerated, her ability to access any social supports would be practically eliminated, further trapping her within the cycle of economic violence.

20. The state may decide its own arbitrary timelines for benefits. Connecticut's timeline is one of the shortest at 21 months. Extensions of cash payments are rare, but there are exceptions for married couples.

Childcare and Low-Wage Work

Reforms to social services have made cuts to income assistance while needs such as childcare subsidies and access to affordable day care remain unaddressed, leaving many families unable to cover the cost. This issue can particularly impact low-income Black and Brown women, who are largely segregated into part-time, unbenefited service jobs with low hourly wages that do not cover childcare needs. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2010) notes that because poor mothers "place a high priority on their children's needs, having high-quality childcare while working is an important and difficult issue," particularly when they work low-wage jobs "characterized by irregular hours and lack of benefits" (170). Even when subsidies are available, many who are eligible don't receive them, leaving "single mothers to patch together child care," which often means relying on kin, especially the unpaid care work of women family members, to fill the gap (Glenn 2010, 170).

Reports also show that childcare subsidies are at their lowest levels in decades. South Carolina—where Debra Lynn Harrell was arrested for allowing her daughter to play outside while she was at work—is one of three states that have "decreased their spending by more than 30 percent [. . .] compared to the year before," serving 2,500 fewer children (Covert 2014a). In lieu of childcare during summer break, Harrell—a Black woman and single mother—would bring her nine-year-old daughter to the McDonald's where she worked so her child could play on her computer in the restaurant throughout her mother's shift (Skenazy 2014). For many low-income mothers, there is often "negative spillover between family care and work," highlighting the "contingent nature of their ability to care for their children while employed" (Glenn 2010, 173). Childcare costs would offset Harrell's paycheck.

On a late June day, when her daughter begged to play outside instead of following the usual plan, Harrell gave her a cellphone and dropped her off at the park near their home:

> It was Summerfield Park, to be exact, a well-used oasis of North Augusta [. . .]. The park has a spray ground, a basketball court, a kid play area, restrooms, a jogging path and a free breakfast and lunch program on summer weekdays. Not to mention fresh air, other children and a smattering of adults—parents, babysitters, child-care workers—keeping an unofficial watch. (Hochman 2014)

During the summer, the community park provided a healthy and safe solution for Harrell and her daughter. A passing observer who noticed the child both in the morning and the afternoon that day called the police to report an "abandoned" child. Harrell was charged, given jail time with $5,000 bail,

and spent 18 days apart from her daughter, who was placed in the custody of social services.

Feminist policy analysts Patrice DiQuinzio and Sharon Meagher (2005) have noted the prevalence of the "predator/protector" mindset embedded within gendered public policy. The policies that inflict economic violence are devised to paternalistically protect a poor woman from her presumed indiscretion and irresponsibility. Prosecutors punish a "neglectful" mother in Taylor's case while the courts step in to protect her children from their mother squandering hypothetical college funds and their chance to "escape" the cycle of poverty or, essentially, their familial origins. Hernández must sell her SNAP benefits, fearing those who would remove her children from her care in the sites of surveillance designed to help her. Harrell's child is protected by the "well-meaning" stranger who sees an "abandoned" child rather than a devoted mother deserving of childcare options. The police "defended" Love's children from her own protection, making Love's motherly self-sacrifice the ultimate one. Refusing to interpolate their motherwork as protection at all, these policies regard low-income mothers of color as a menace and their children as in need of protection by the white power structure. Yet this logic is intrinsically violent. The U.S. social welfare policy that reflects those ideologies then directs violence toward families of color, continuing to portray low-income mothers of color as the danger within. Critical feminist policy analysis reveals how these mothers were "doing everything right" to sustain themselves and their children and communities within a system in which economic violence is deeply embedded.

Conclusion

The vulnerability and precarity with which women of color in the U.S. contend is a complex web of interlocking systems of power, the products of material dispossession, discriminatory policies, and the history of racial capitalism, slavery, and colonialism. As the motherwork of women of color upends the institution of motherhood that operates in the service of racial capital and white heteropatriarchy,[21] bodies that do not conform to dominant notions of middle-class white femininity, domesticity, and reproductive respectability are marked as deviant and sexually marginal.[22] These prevailing systems have dire consequences for women of color. Vast wealth disparities

21. This article considers racialized motherwork to be a site of oppression as well as an anti-violent radical practice and corrective to economic violence.

22. For a discussion of reproductive respectability, see Hong (2015).

for women from Black and Brown communities have deepened at the nexus of race, gender, class, and motherhood.

I have traced the impact of economic violence against low-income mothers of color, introducing a framework of economic violence to recognize these systemic injustices and to create the conditions and possibilities for countering economic violence. When policy does not serve intersectional economic justice, and when economic violence is inflicted upon women and families of color, it must be identified as harm. Remembering the case of Eula Mae Love along with the stories of those more recently in the public eye, such as Shanesha Taylor and Debra Lynn Harrell, or completely erased from view, like Eva Hernández, conveys a great deal about the slippery space between economic and other forms of violence, including how they spill over and into each other. Their stories characterize how many low-income Black and Brown women confront a commonplace violence that is disregarded or, worse yet, accepted. Love lived during the advent of social and economic restructuring, prior to Ronald Reagan's attack on welfare and the subsequent reform that generated workfare policy and the conditions that further expose contemporary low-income women of color to economic violence. Yet the trajectory of economic violence falls over the bodies of mothers of color from earlier forms of neoliberalism, registering at different temporal moments and bound by ideologies that seek to privatize the social ecologies that support Black and Brown life.

Economic violence will proliferate as long as it serves its purpose for the low-wage, cheap labor needs of capital, where the bodies of women of color function in a racial capitalist system to fill that requirement. Though feminist scholars have emphasized how "welfare programs have been stigmatized as 'tax giveaways'—while millions of dollars in government subsidies to corporations and massive tax deductions for the rich are widely approved" (Eisler 2007, 133)—policy reforms continue to target poor mothers in raced, (hetero) sexualized, and gendered ways.[23] Public concern for those most affected by

23. Social welfare and income support are plainly good economic policy. Yet time and again, women of color are the scapegoats for the ills of a white supremacist heteropatriarchal social order and punished accordingly, regardless of whether it is "good for the economy" or not. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities asserts that "direct funding to individuals represents some of the most effective job-creation and job-protection measures available. One of the best ways to boost demand and hence employment is to target financial relief on low- and moderate-income individuals and unemployed workers who need a replacement for lost income" (Stone 2009, 1). Support for income assistance is relatively strong among the U.S. population unless it is termed welfare, which is gendered, racialized, and classed. Renewed interest in income support is spreading across the country, especially since 2018, but under the banner of "universal basic income."

economic violence is too often assuaged through deceptive narratives of U.S. meritocracy. Workfare policy insists that hard work will reap rewards while coercing poor women into low-wage work and ignoring the routine economic violence inflicted on low-income mothers of color. Now, 25 years after the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), as governments seek to redistribute economic resources upward and concentrate wealth in the asset-owning class, this has prompted critiques of persistent and ever-growing economic inequality. There are energized movements for labor-organizing rights and living wages, yet "there are very few public calls for a reinvigorated politics focused on wealth redistribution" in the United States (Gibson-Graham 2006, 177). Feminists must examine these silences and stigmas, and renew their demands for welfare rights to counter economic violence against low-income women and gender minorities from communities of color.

The networks of sociality, communal support, and abundance that form the vibrant social fabric of our lives can and must be revived. Robust networks of care for low-income women, gender minorities, and trans and queer people from communities of color must be buttressed. Recognizing and valuing social reproduction, and all forms of care labor and motherwork, can help counter economic violence that relies on this unpaid work, especially that of women of color. Critical feminist scholarship must demand policy correctives to address economic violence in the lives of low-income mothers of color and renew calls for welfare rights and distributive justice that refuse the stigmatization of poor women. Let us also create intersectional economic justice beyond entrepreneurial subjectivities and gig economies, beyond protest, within and against the state apparatus, and with postwork, anticolonial imaginaries to rebuild our collective present and future. [24]

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24. The postwork imaginaries, antiwork politics, and other creative theorizations of labor, gender, and sexuality in the writings of L.H. Stallings (2015) and Kathi Weeks (2011) come to mind.

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