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### Branded Bodies, Rhetoric, and the Neoliberal Nation-State, by Jennifer Wingard

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*Rhetorics of Motherhood* is a powerful and compelling resource for any rhetorical scholar interested in the rhetorics of motherhood, for those of us who are doing the work of including motherhood as a serious and important intellectual topic in rhetorical studies, and for anyone interested in the next step: finding ways to appropriate motherhood to advance gender equity, while simultaneously avoiding the pitfalls of doing so.

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*Branded Bodies, Rhetoric, and the Neoliberal Nation-State*, by Jennifer Wingard. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013. xiv + 147 pp. \$80.00 (cloth).

On 26 June 2013, the Supreme Court struck down Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, which had defined marriage for the federal government as only between a man and a woman. Earlier, in 2011, the military ended its long-standing ban on openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals serving in the military by finally ending its policy of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” During this same time frame, immigration law has become a nationwide conversation, with different states enacting increasingly strict laws. In 2010, Arizona passed the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, which was then considered to be the toughest anti-immigration law in the United States. Not to be outdone, Alabama signed into law the Beason-Hammon Alabama Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act in 2011, which surpassed even Arizona’s enforcement efforts. Although these two groups may seem to have little in common, Jennifer Wingard brings them together to illustrate how those defined as “other” are “branded” and how this process promotes the project of neoliberalism.

Wingard opens with a discussion of neoliberalism and othering, explaining that “the state is no longer economically invested in the support of its citizens” (xi) and that the shift has been toward support of the private sector. She explains that this allows for a kind of dissonance in othering between those who are safely other, such as landscapers and domestic workers, and those described by Sara Ahmed as “other-other,” such as deviants and criminals. For Wingard, the key in branding is the affective dimension it entails. In other words, branding is an emotional appeal rather than logical. This helps account for how legislators can pass convoluted anti-immigration laws, such as the one she examines in Texas, which explicitly exempts those hiring undocumented maids, landscapers, and other domestic servants.

In chapter 2, Wingard examines how linking the idea of family to citizenship helps to solidify brands at the expense of others such as those in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) community and immigrants. She provides extended discussion of key legislation, such as the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 and the Defense of Marriage Act, to illustrate how these

laws privilege a particular kind of family and define who is safely other (heterosexual women, children, and those in need of protection). She concludes, “there is only one particular kind of family that will create citizens—one that is white and heterosexual” (48).

In chapter 3, we see a move away from defining specific individual brands and toward assemblage of brands with an extended analysis of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) wing of the Department of Homeland Security. Wingard does an excellent job in examining how several disparate groups of law-breakers are lumped together under one umbrella, as immigrants are connected to terrorists, gang members, and sexual predators, with all of these branded as un-American. She argues that this assemblage of brands helps to fuel a culture of fear because “American-ness, much like what is dangerous, is not visible. . . . Americans must be vigilant not only to protect themselves from these invisible threats, but also to prove that they themselves are not threats” (60–61).

In chapter 4, Wingard takes on an extended discussion of José Padilla and Osama bin Laden by drawing on Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life,” or one who “must be killed in order to keep the appearance of civil order” (81). It was here that Wingard really hit her stride as she walked through the intricacies of defining individuals synecdochally. She argues convincingly that the power of brands resides in their ability to dehumanize the individual. In doing so, the contradictions between the brand and the lived experience of the actual person are swallowed up in the affective dimensions of the branding. Branding Padilla as a terrorist allows others to forget that he is not fully an outsider, but rather an American citizen who was tortured and stripped of his rights. In the case of bin Laden, the brand disallowed the ability to even show his body, which was dumped at sea after Navy Seals stormed his compound. The often contradictory narratives surrounding these men demonstrate how brands can begin to break down in the face of material conditions. I found this chapter quite engaging, and important reading for those concerned with citizenship and civil liberties.

In the final chapter, Wingard explains how both the GLBT community and immigrants have rallied around the brand of “worker” as a way to humanize their respective plights. Although there are some gestures in that direction throughout the book, this chapter explicitly juxtaposes the two groups. In some ways the book reads like a set of case studies exploring the plight of each group individually, so I was somewhat relieved to see more discussion of what unites these two seemingly disparate groups. Here Wingard demonstrates the difficulty of rebranding groups once the brand has solidified. She does, however, see some potential in the Occupy movement, suggesting that “it is the assembling of many constituencies together, not the branding of them all as ‘the 99 percent’ that is critical to the subversive nature of the Occupy movement” (127).

The main criticism that I have of this book is that the body itself, for all of the discussion of bodies, does not really seem to be present here. I found this surprising, especially considering the title of the book, but Wingard writes in several places that

these bodies “are made into brands and are evacuated of any human characteristics” (57). As such, the body is reduced to an abstract rhetorical construction. Yet other rhetorical scholars have observed how it is precisely what these bodies do and are that allows them to be branded as other, and I was surprised to see some of this literature missing. For example, Kevin DeLuca’s work examining Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation describes how bodies “become not merely flags to attract attention for the argument but the site and substance of the argument itself” (10). John Sloop’s book, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture*, would also be useful for his descriptions of how the bodily practices of individuals branded as deviant elicit fear and hatred as he draws on such examples as Brandon Teena. It was not until her discussion of the sex tourism provisions of the PROTECT Act that there is any frank discussion of how bodies are used sexually (in this case heterosexual anal sex among sex workers in Asia), and it is not until the very end of the book that GLBT sex practices are discussed. I would have liked to see these issues explored in more depth much earlier in the book.

I also found myself wondering about the utility of the term “brand,” especially in light of more established rhetorical concepts such as Michael McGee’s notion of the ideograph. Indeed, some of the secondary literature exploring ideographs could have been useful, such as Dana Cloud’s work examining images of Afghan women that were used to build support for the war in Afghanistan. Cloud’s analysis of how the rhetoric of “family values” relates to race and class while privatizing social responsibility also seems right in line with Wingard’s discussion of neoliberalism.

Even with these limitations, however, this book is useful for explaining the processes through which individuals and groups are dehumanized. At times I found this book infuriating, which illustrates the power with which Wingard demonstrates the injustice of many of these brands. Those interested in social movements, political communication, and GLBT and immigrant issues will find this book useful.

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