

Disentangling Globalisation: Towards a feminist geography of hair and beauty

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Introduction

Each year in May, Dubai hosts Beautyworld Middle East, a trade fair bringing together 2000 exhibitors and 35000 producers, distributors and cosmetologists from over 60 countries. It is now the world's largest trade fair for the hair and beauty industry. The lucrative markets of Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) partly explain its dramatic growth and success. Yet also increasingly attractive to Beautyworld visitors are the markets of East, West and Southern Africa and their cosmopolitan centers of Lagos and Accra, Nairobi and Kampala, Johannesburg and Cape Town. This success signals a growing desire for cosmopolitan beauty in these places, but one rooted in a history of colonial and postcolonial international exchange. Africans are not only positioned as consumers in these commodity circuits. African entrepreneurs extend the beauty trade onto and within the continent, with African "saloonists" adapting imported styles for their clients, and innovative manufacturers produce hair weaves, skin lotions, fragrances, and beauty technologies. Indeed, beauty is big business in the region, powerfully shaping and shaped by people and places.

Beauty is also, necessarily then, deeply spatial. Its (im)material affects and objects, its ideologies, and its imagined and embodied forms are powerful in producing, connecting and transforming our world. And yet, curiously, very little *geographic* attention has been paid to beauty (but see Fluri 2009; Wrigley-Asante et al 2017). In this chapter, we demonstrate some of the

insights offered by a *feminist* and intersectional geographic approach to globalisation, one centering hair and beauty. We do so through an analysis of the synthetic and human hair trade between the Gulf and East Africa. In particular we demonstrate the methodological insights of studying hair and beauty via a *feminist commodity-chain analysis*. Building on the work of Priti Ramamurthy (2003, 2011) we center three insights of this approach here: its postcolonial disruption of narratives of people and places in the global south living with, affected by, and driving globalisation; its attention to the connected ideologies of gender, race, class and sexual power that reproduce and reinvent the industry; and its insistence on a ‘global-intimate’, relational understanding of scale. As we show, this approach reveals new insights into the embodied nature of globalisation, and the innovation, creative labor, trading ties and consumption politics that drive it.

Intimate Geographies of Globalisation: Feminist Interventions

There now exists an extensive, complex and often contradictory body of scholarship on ‘globalisation’ within the discipline of geography and across the social sciences. Scholars have argued that it should be understood both as a set of material processes of heightened spatial economic, political and socio-cultural integration (and in some cases, dislocation), and a powerfully dominant ideological discourse (Gibson-Graham 1996; Massey 2005; Yeoh 1999). Globalisation has produced new kinds of mobilities and fixities, inclusions and exclusions, reconfigured circuits of commodities, as well as the entrenchment, recomposition and decomposition of values, norms, and ideologies. Amidst proclamations of an inevitable flattening of difference and a borderless world (Friedman 2005), critical scholars have pushed for grounded theorisations that attend to the “entanglements” (Sheppard 2012) of global trade with a host of socio-cultural, economic and political spatialities that are, at once, material, discursive, emotional and power-laden (Domosh

2010; Gibson-Graham 1996; Katz 2001; Rankin 2003; Tsing 2005). One central area of interest is that of neoliberal globalisation, a far more narrowly defined phenomenon concerning the emergent dominance of liberal political-economic ideology and practice around the world in the last 30 years (Peck and Tickell 2002; Power 2005; Carmody 2013). Political geographers have interrogated the biopolitical governing practices (Agnew 2005; Dodds 1998; Sparke 2006) of this form of globalisation, how its logics are reinforced and reproduced (Gibson-Graham 1996), and how it has been resisted and reworked in multiple contexts (Hart 2002). Cultural engagements with economic geography, long concerned with uneven economic development and its place-based particularities, have in developing and/or complicating spatialized economic models also contributed to deeper understandings of contemporary neoliberal globalisation (Barnes 2001; Flew 2010; James, Martin and Sunley 2006; Warf 2012).

Feminist scholars have productively engaged with and extended political and economic studies of globalisation. Centrally, such work has critiqued the tendency in both sub-disciplines to focus (albeit often critically) on: formal and ‘public’ spheres of politics and economics, and their associated spaces, places (eg firms and institutions, ‘global cities’, advanced economies of the global north), scales (eg the supra-national and national); and, on particular subjects and actors (eg supra-national bodies, elite global managers) (Nagar et al 2002; Staeheli and Kofman 2004). Such attends to ‘peripheral’ subjects and spaces, arguing that these are in fact central to understanding global political and economic relations (Oberhauser and Hanson 2008 and see Mbembe 2001). Here, feminist and cultural geographers have extended the insights gained by attending to the cultural workings of globalisations, as they intersect with and co-produce those of the economic and political (Gökarıksel and McLarney 2010; Rankin 2003). Feminist scholars here have brought both historical archival and contemporary ethnographic methods to geography to interrogate power-laden

processes of meaning-making that underpin and are produced through global circuits of production, trade and consumption (Domosh 2006, 2010; Rankin 2003).

Global commodities through a feminist geographic lens

Commodity chain analyses were first developed by Hopkins and Wallerstein to document the respatialisation of capital accumulation in ‘core’ nations at the expense of the ‘periphery’ through the journey of a commodity (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986; Leslie and Reimer 1999; Wallerstein 2009). Studying processes of capital accumulation from production through to the point of sale has been the hallmark of realist commodity chain analyses undertaken by world systems scholars since the rise of the new international division of labor. Such analyses focused on the macro-economic - valuably tracing new geographies of commodities, the relations they formed between the global north and south, and the parallel shifting of sovereignty between nation-states and multi-national corporations. With heightened economic integration, the heuristic was taken up by Gereffi et al (1994 in Leslie and Reimer 1999) and reconceptualised as a “global commodity chain analysis”. A host of conceptual variants have been developed since, with shifts towards an understanding of commodity ‘networks’ that usefully moves beyond the linearity of the original chain conceptualisation (Blair and Werner 2011). Put simply, Leslie describes its most contemporary formulation as a way to, “trace the entire trajectory of a product across time and space, including the movement of material, resources, value, finance, and knowledge, as well as signs and symbols” (2012, 65).

In parallel with those broader feminist developments described above, studies of commodities in economic geography have also undergone productive critical interrogation. The

global commodity chain analysis has been criticized for its privileging of primary commodity production or extraction (and elision of distribution and consumption for example), its interest only on those ‘nodes’ where flows of commodities ‘touch down’ momentarily (Leslie and Reimer 1999), with little interrogation of the grounded spatialities of commodity chains, the agency of participants, or the varied place-based meanings, values, and norms attached to commodities and consumption practices (Bell and Valentine 1997; Cook and Crang 1996; Fine and Leopold 1993; Miller 1995; Slater 1997). This work is richly complemented by Appadurai’s call for an interrogation of the ‘social life’ of commodities (1986), one that traces their journey through space from production to consumption to better understand how seemingly abstract global circuits produce, shape, and remake embodied relations of power (Bassett 2002; Cook 2004; Gökarıksel and Secor 2010; Hollander 2008; Leslie 2012; Ramamurthy 2004). Of particular import for this project is the work of feminist scholars such as Bair (2005, 2009) and Leslie (2002, 2012) who have called attention to the interwoven classed and *gendered* relations bound up with commodity networks (Ansell et al 2014; Oberhauser 2010; Oberhauser and Yeboah 2011; Oberhauser and Johnston-Anumonwo 2011). Most recently these critical insights have been complicated with postcolonial interventions in economic geography, and in the study of commodities (Maclean 2013; Pollard et al 2009; Poon and Yeung 2009; Pollard et al 2011; Participants of the 2010 Economic Geography Workshop 2011). This work demands attention be paid to the colonial legacies of race and racism underpinning contemporary economic structures.

A *feminist* commodity chain analysis interweaves these feminist and postcolonial interventions. Ramamurthy is a leading scholar of this approach (eg 2004, 2011 and see Schmidt 2018). Although not a geographer, the theoretical reframing and methodological intervention posed by her approach is deeply spatial and thus incredibly instructive for geographic work on

globalisation. We put this approach into conversation with insights from feminist geography around the ‘global intimate’ (Pratt and Rosner 2006; Smith 2012), demonstrating new and innovative ways to understand globalisation and the social, political, economic, and geographical lives of global commodities. In doing so we center three connected interventions for work on globalisation: First, the *disruption of dominant and orientalist narratives of people and places viewed as peripheral to and marginalized by globalisation*; Second, a feminist commodity chain relies on a *performance-based theorization of power: racial, classed, gendered, and sexualised power*. And lastly the use of a *relational understanding of scale* that refuses to disconnect supranational, national and regional policy and practice from the household and the body. What emerges is an intersectional feminist geographic approach that attends to the embodied and emotional workings of commodity circuits and that reveals new stories of, and ways of engaging with and understanding, globalisation. We turn to each intervention below, demonstrating their insights by grounding them in moments from the global hair and beauty trade operating through and beyond the Gulf-East African region.

Putting a feminist commodity chain analysis to work: Snapshots from the Gulf-East African Hair Trade

Insight 1, Disruptive stories of globalisation: Uganda and Dubai as drivers of global beauty.

To begin, feminist analyses of commodities, and their lives, aim to disrupt orientalist narratives of people and places in the global south. A snapshot of the beauty industries in, and connecting, the Gulf and East Africa dramatically upturns the “Single Stories” (Adichie 2009 and see Owusu 2012) of Africa, of globalisation, and of beauty. While most scholarly and popular attention centers the global north, or emphasizes Africa’s marginalization through global economic exchange, a look at

Gulf-East African beauty industry through the lens of a feminist commodity chain analysis offers another story. The African trade in beauty products has a long history rooted in global circuits of colonial and postcolonial international exchange (Horton 2004; Nicolini 2009; Thomas 2008), with long-standing ties to Europe and the Americas, but also to the Gulf, East and South Asian regions. From the early 1990s on, East Africa underwent rapid economic growth. Uganda, along with Kenya and Tanzania, are particularly vibrant centers for the East Africa trade in beauty products – influenced continentally by the innovative fashion centers of the Congo, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria, and further afield through African diasporic circuits (Balogun 2012; Thomas 2012). Focusing on Uganda, between 1992 and 2011 the country saw an average rise in GDP of 7%/year (AEO 2013), albeit unevenly centered on the south and particularly the capital city of Kampala. In connection, Uganda has seen a growing middle class, estimated to be around 6.1 million people, and mirroring those of Kenya and Tanzania (Tentena 2012; ADB 2013). While the consumer-base of the hair and beauty trade extends beyond the middle class, these economic shifts have helped position Uganda as an increasingly important site for the trade in and consumption of beauty products. Kampala, the main economic center of Uganda is at the heart of this vibrant global connection. The city hosts some of the largest markets for clothing and beauty goods, including Gazaland Mall known popularly as “the House of Hair” and Luwum Street, a long-standing center for bridal shopping across the region (Whitesell and Faria 2018). The city also holds year round beauty-related events, including a range of pageants like Miss Uganda and Miss Tourism-Uganda, and has hosted the internationally recognised “Kampala Fashion Week” since 2013 (Elledge and Faria, 2018).

Uganda is also the home of an industrial base for the *manufacturing* of beauty goods. In the hair industry, *Darling Ltd* is the longstanding leader. Until its recent buy-out by giant Indian

conglomerate Godrej, *Darling* was owned and operated by an extended Lebanese family, based in Africa for over twenty years, with operations in twenty-two countries across the continent (pers com, June 2012). The Ugandan branch is a leading producer for the East African region exporting products to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Rwanda, and the new Republic of South Sudan. They design, test and release fifty new styles a year, drawing on inspiration locally, across the region and internationally and expanding their consumer base (which spans from low to high income levels and as young as eight to ten years old) through fashion show advertising, saloonist training, social media and mobile-salons that travel to rural areas to introduce Ugandans to the latest in synthetic hair fashions. In 2014, Darling Ltd was named Superbrand of the year in Uganda, and they continue to be one of the most successful and influential hair manufacturers on the continent.

While Darling Ltd is a major supplier of synthetic hair products across the continent, beauty products are also imported. And here, Dubai is a vital trading hub. Many of the products flowing into this region from Europe, China, the US and elsewhere do so via Dubai, transforming the city into one of the largest trading hubs, wholesale and logistical sites, and center for cosmetological connection via the BeautyWorld Middle East Trade Fair. Dubai is also an influential arbiter of style, and is home to Huda Kattan, a renowned beauty influencer. Although a large volume of goods now arrive in East Africa directly from places like China, Dubai remains influential. This is in part due to its proximity to Africa, and the neoliberalizing imperatives that continue to ease travel and business operations. Distributors like Mohammad and Llee, operating in the wholesale district Deira, have worked in Dubai for over a decade. They moved from Iran and the Philippines respectively in search of employment and found work in the city's "old town" in the lucrative hair and beauty trade. Small and mid-scale entrepreneurs dominate the emergent African trade,

purchasing less than 100 kilos of hair per visit from the city's downtown wholesale hair shops, a number of which are also owned and run by Africans. These traders are highly mobile, often (but not always) middle-class, and include some members of the African diaspora. Rather than exporting via the Jebel Ali free zone, these traders instead fly smaller quantities via suitcases and/or plane cargo packages to the cosmopolitan market centers of Lagos, Accra, Nairobi and Kampala. Traders making larger purchases move their orders through cargo companies, who will transport their goods by container from the Gulf to the port of Mombasa, Kenya. Traders like Lubega, a Ugandan man in his forties would buy hair in bulk freshly shipped into Mombasa, and filling the markets of Nairobi. He hired porters to help him pack and move five or more bags filled with hair onto a bus back to Kampala. When he began his business in the early 1990s, he was one of the first to import synthetic hair into the country and it was lucrative. He ran three shops in the city under his business name "*Lubex Hair and Beauty*", pioneering trade in a commodity that would become big business across the region.

Insight 2, "Sigh...Russians have the best hair": Ideologies of power in the global hair trade

A feminist commodity chain analysis secondly insists that we attend to power: the connected and complex ways that racial, gendered, sexualised and classed norms, ideals and geometries of power operate over the lifecourse of the commodity. A look at hair, hair care, and hair management through this lens is instructive. I (author 1) overheard the words that form the quote above at a 2015 Beauty World Middle East Trade fair event. The comment gave me the chills, a simple articulation of the power-laden work of hair and beauty. Indeed, critical race scholars have long argued that hair - and hair technologies like wigs, weaves and extensions - are highly visible and meaning-laden (Hill Collins 1990; Wingfield 2009) that are powerfully used to promote, reinforce and culturally

diffuse gender, race and class based norms and hierarchies. On one hand, hair beauty norms rely on and exploit historical precedents and beliefs about race, class and gender, providing products of corporeal alteration to meet these ideals (Thomas 2012). In turn, hair, and those traders, stylists and clients that work with and wear it, trouble and rework these norms (Balogun 2012). A feminist analysis of the commodity reveals the ways that these seemingly contradictory processes are at work, together. Interviews with traders and consumers, and an archival analysis of decades of fashion coverage in the country suggest that, until fifteen to twenty years ago, only elites bought and used hair additions. Then, this purchase acted as a marker of class, urban, gendered and cosmopolitan distinction (Faria 2013; Weiss 2009). However, this symbolic power of hair extensions heightened their demand. In response, the material object itself has been modified with a range of qualities, styles, lengths and modes of attachment created to expand the socio-economic consumer base raising new and interesting questions about a ‘subaltern’, ‘Vernacular’, ‘working class’ or otherwise non-elite cosmopolitanism (Gidwani 2006; Kurasawa 2004; Mohan 2006; Oza 2006) expressed through consumption. Young students in Uganda who regularly purchase hair extensions often described the way it made them feel: up to date; worldly; modern; successful. Women of the times. Of course, these modern hair styles and textures create anxieties about threats to “Ugandan” national or “African” continental ideals of womanhood, as evidenced elsewhere on the continent (Balogun 2012; Faria 2013; Hackspiel 2008; Thomas 2008, 2012; Weiss 2009).

Direct marketing techniques by *Darling Ltd* and competitor companies, and well-traveled traders like Lubega, have introduced hair extensions into markets across Uganda, building consumers even in more rural and poorer communities. Here newer, synthetic alternatives and cost-effective designs have sharply increased those who can afford these products in Uganda (pers com 2014; Faria and Jones, in review). On the international market, a similar widening of price and

product ranges, has driven the growth of hair additions over the last two decades, . Here price is determined by “quality”, a notion that reflects, and reproduces, a longstanding and *racialised* ideal of hair beauty. For example, one trader at the Beauty World Trade Fair described it as such: first the ranking is determined on the ‘authenticity’ of the hair (whether it is human or synthetic). Then it is based on phenotypical categorizations, such as the shape of individual strands of hair and their straightness. These thinly veil racial hierarchies that center on their likeness to “Indo-European” hair. For this reason, “Indian Virgin Remy Hair” (ie that which has not been chemically treated and where individual strands all run in the same direction) is amongst the most expensive hair on the global market. This ranking system also speaks to a very embodied classed, sexualised, gendered and *racialised* politics of hair that has been interrogated in the wider (primarily North American) African diaspora (Banks 2000), but remains largely unaddressed in continental Africa (but see Asante 2016, Fritsch 2018; Thomas 2008, 2012 regarding skin lighteners). A feminist commodity chain analysis pushes us to pay attention to the racialised complexities of the sale and profitability of long, straightened, European styled hair that mimic those of white bodies and are linked with the cultural practices and structural advantages of whiteness.

However, Ramamurthy’s framework also prompts deeper interrogation. A *feminist commodity chain analysis* insists that racial power is not fixed but performed, socially and historically rooted, and malleable. Even as they live within the racial logics described above, women who buy and style hair also do so *in defiance or outside* of these logics. For example, women consumers of synthetic hair in Kampala, spoke about how ease, fashionability, and playfulness guides their decision to buy and style synthetic hair. In turn, the use of hair weaves and the popularity of styles named after cultural icons like “Beyonce” and “Rihanna” demonstrate how women who sport them identify with a wider pan-African

diaspora, connecting them up with global cultural circuits of blackness (Rahier, Hintzen and Smith 2010) whilst also refashioning local styles. There's much more at work than simply an effort to mirror "Whiteness". The complexities of these relationships: between consumers and their products, and between the people and places of the beauty trade and wider processes of globalisation are revealed in these moments through the lens of an intersectional feminist commodity chain analysis. We see, for example, how commodified hair, and the wider beauty trade, are produced by, perpetuate and disrupt the logics of capitalism. And that these logics are braided with, and rely upon, others: those perhaps of nationalism, colonialism, racism, heterosexism, and able-ism to produce this powerful ideal, practice and industry of beauty.

Insight 3, Scalar innovations: The global intimacies of hair and beauty

Lastly, a feminist commodity chain analysis challenges the macro-economic and political emphases of previous commodity chain studies, insisting upon a *relational understanding of scale* that understands seemingly abstract supranational, national and regional policy as always bound up with the body, as themselves *corporeal*. Attention to the embodied and emotional workings of commodity circuits here relies productively with the conceptual geographic work of the 'global intimate' (Pratt and Rosner 2006). This is a particularly elegant conceptualization of power, space and scale that we use in our research to better understand globalisation. Centrally it troubles understandings of "global" processes as masculine, distanced and disembodied and the simultaneous rendering of the "local", the "domestic" and the "bodily" as essentialized, feminized and characterized by the minutiae of the everyday (Mountz and Hyndman 2006, 446). Through this framework, seemingly abstract processes like neoliberal globalisation can be rethought by

examining the intimate, the familiar, the sensory and the embodied experiences of “living and knowing the global” (2006, 448). The global intimate frame also draws upon Katz’s (2001) methodological and epistemological call to construct “counter topographies” by recognizing connections produced through global processes to other places, people and times. In doing so the global intimate framework “trac[es] lines across places to show how they are connected by the same processes, [whilst] simultaneously embedding these processes within the specifics of fully contextualized, three dimensional places” (Pratt and Yeoh 2003, 163). By moving away from the conflated binary of the global and local, where scales are rendered discreet, oppositional and in moral or power-based hierarchy, the global and/as intimate framing foregrounds the embodied, sensual, emotional, grounded operations of global capital – ‘undoing’ (Mountz and Hyndman 2006, 20) with this move, the grand narratives of neoliberal and postcolonial globalisation.

This lens is particularly instructive to think through one particular encounter in our research on the global hair and beauty trade. At one BeautyWorld Middle East booth, a Russian saleswoman woos a group of Iranian visitors. They are part of a contingent of about fifty female salon owners, distributors and clients who arrived together via a high-end chartered bus.

[Insert figure 1]

She hopes her product, a high quality “Virgin Remy” Indian hair dyed blonde, and available in eight, ten, twelve, and fourteen inch lengths, will appeal to them. Demonstrating how to attach and style the pieces, she encourages the women to touch them – to feel the softness, attest to its purity, its lack of prior chemical treatment, its hair cuticles that run in the same direction and above all to its authenticity as human. They comply, teasing strands of hair between their manicured fingers, sighing, laughing with pleasure, and nodding in

agreement while others clamor to photograph the stylists' fashionings, so they can replicate it back at home. Indian hair, dyed, processed and sold by Russian workers and sales representatives, in Dubai, for the high-end markets of Iran: the varied travels of purity, authenticity, beauty, glamor. In this moment we see the power-laden nature of the global hair and beauty trade, and of this particular expression of economic globalisation. Global intimate scale-thinking pushes us to tell this new geographic story: of the always and already embodied and emotional nature of international commodity exchange and globalised political decision-making: its sensory experience, its grounding in the tired limbs of travel-weary traders, the aching fingers of stylists, the relief, excitement, satisfaction of representatives who make that sale, the pleasure and anxieties too around consumption, around dressing-up.

Conclusion: Towards a feminist geography of hair and beauty

Just a few weeks before the 2014 Beautyworld Middle East opened its doors, the first African Global Business Forum was held in Dubai. Organised by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) (Geronimo 2013) regional investment agency, the event was designed for African countries to “display their main attractions, facilities and business opportunities” and to “highlight Dubai’s strategic link between the continent and the rest of the world” (AGBF 2013). The Ugandan Prime Minister Amama Mbabaza and the Ugandan Minister of Trade Hon. Amelia Kyambadde were both key speakers at the event, demonstrating the central role Uganda has begun to play in promoting more open trade between the Middle East and East Africa. This vibrant, emergent and multi-billion dollar beauty industry thus reflects, but also drives, the rising economic integration of Africa and the Middle East over the last

fifteen-twenty years. Hair is a significant part of this trade. African entrepreneurs are extending hair beauty products onto and within that continent, and local manufacturers are developing their own styles through the labor of women braiders and stylists. In connection, the hair trade is driven by the magic of the material object itself: the complexly gendered, classed and racialised desire evoked by commodified hair, and its promises of class distinction, cosmopolitan style, its visage of modernity.

But there are many other geographic stories of beauty that should also be told. Beauty is a powerful ideology, a set of material objects and practices that dramatically shapes lives and places. The material objects and affects produced from and through ideologies of beauty, the relations of people, places, and times brought into webs of beauty, and the cultural, economic, and political confluences created as beauty is consumed, challenged, and reproduced are many. An interrogation of beauty across the field, from an intersectional feminist lens, could yield new, intimate geographic stories and deeper understandings of health and wellbeing, migration and mobility, urban change, national development and tourism, the reproduction of violent sexual, gendered and able-its norms in our everyday environments, to name a few. There is a long-established work outside of our field on beauty, like Priti Ramamurthy, and led by scholars of color, critical gender and race theorists and Crip-studies theorists (Baggio and Moretti 2018; Balogun 2012; Cepeda 2018; Clare 2017; Dolan and Johnstone-Louis 2011; Ford 2015; Gentles-Pearl 2018; Oza 2006; Özdemir 2016; Wingfield 2009 to name just a few examples). As geographers, we can valuably build on and extend this scholarship with our own spatial insights. We close then with a call for a *feminist geography of hair and beauty*, one that is postcolonial and intersectional: attentive to the connected work of racial, gendered, sexualised, classed power and their grounding in, and escape from, the past-presents of colonialism.

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