



Review forum

Feminist Geopolitics: Material States, Deborah. P. Dixon. Ashgate, Farnham, UK (2015). xii and 189 pp., maps, photos, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$46.71 paper (ISBN 978-1-472-48020-0); \$140.25 cloth (ISBN 978-1-409-45546-2); from \$21.98 electronic (ISBN 978-1-472-40356-8)

1. Introduction: Jo Sharp (University of Glasgow)

Feminist geopolitics has been a dynamic part of political geography since the first use of the term in 2001 (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2001). To see a monograph published 15 years later under this title is, therefore, an exciting moment in the development of the approach, and one worthy of extended discussion in *Political Geography*.

Deborah Dixon's version of feminist geopolitics is written in a very different style, and drawing on a very different corpus, than the body of work that has thus far been known to us as feminist geopolitics. Her vision is a post-humanist one, "an approach to the embodied, geopolitical body that does not thereby presume an individuated corporeality" (113). Post-humanism, as another critic has explained, "seeks to destabilize the centrality of human bodies and their purported organic boundedness, foregrounding the technological production of bodies in the indeterminate and often unacknowledged co-development of consciousness, tools, bodies and culture" (Livingston & Puar, 2011, p. 4). Dixon seeks to re-examine feminism, seeing it as infused with the individualism of Western Enlightenment thought and thus perhaps seeing feminist geopolitics as having more in common with conventional forms of geopolitics than some of us would like to acknowledge. She contrasts the form of feminism most often drawn upon by feminist geopolitics – what she tentatively calls the Anglo-American tradition – with other feminisms, notably continental European feminism which has, she says, "dwelt more upon the articulation of womanly differences," especially linked to bodies, mothering and "liberation as libidinal, as well as a political economic, project" (4).

In an ambitious historical sweep, Dixon shows how fleshy concerns linked to colonialism and imperialism were linked to globalisation and the emergence of the Westphalian state concept. Thus, she ties these key geopolitical concerns to place and earth, biology, evolutionism, environmental determinism, to reinforce the *geo* in geopolitics (rather, she says, than the usual feminist geopolitical concern with the *politics* in geopolitics). The process is not one of inscription onto otherwise passive flesh. Instead she sees this materiality through a web of relations, what others reconceptualising critical geopolitics have tended to refer to via the literature on assemblage (Dittmer, 2014; Shaw, 2012).

This book works these ideas through a number of fascinating cases, developing a resolutely aesthetic geopolitics foregrounded in art, science and literature rather than more conventional subjects of (critical)

geopolitical analysis. Dixon considers feminist internationalism to provide an alternative geopolitical imagination to those centered on military confrontation and the balance of power, to highlight the historical and geographical locatedness of all geopolitics. She seeks to juxtapose things usually rendered separate in our geopolitical accounts, going beyond even the challenges to geopolitical hierarchy that other feminist writers have undertaken under the banner of the personal is political, or the global and intimate: her concern with difference and embodiment refuses to stop at the boundaries of the body. For instance, in "Flesh," Dixon charts the potential capabilities of non-corporeal, or extra-corporeal, flesh, refusing to limit citizenship and agency to whole bodies, and instead seeing the potential for it also to reside in fleshy parts (such as stem cells), while "Abhorrence" highlights the centrality of the monstrous at the heart of geopolitical encounters between self and other.

Such a brief summary can only scratch the surface of the complexity and nuance of Dixon's book. In the space I have remaining, I want to raise a number of inter-related themes which were provoked by my reading of it.

The first is a more general question: why has feminist geopolitics proven to be such an attractive concept? While feminist geographers have been reluctant to identify with the label "political geography" it seems that there has been much greater enthusiasm for "feminist geopolitics". When Lorraine Dowler and I first used the term in 2001, it was for quite specific reasons: to highlight the interdependence of other scales with the international in order to bring bodies and the everyday into sight, as processes and identities everywhere and always entangled with the scale of global geopolitics. Simon Dalby controversially – but I think quite correctly – suggested that work using the term "geopolitics" should engage with the global representations and practices of international politics, while not being limited only to this "scale".

The initial provocation implicit in the term critical geopolitics is now in danger of proliferating to such an extent that the term simply becomes a synonym for contemporary political geography. ... whatever else might now fly under the label "critical geopolitics" my argument in this paper asserts that, if it is to have any coherence within the discipline, it is still about trying to challenge militarist mappings of global space (Dalby, 2010: 281).

This is, I think, why there is such a need for a book like *Feminist Geopolitics*. Dixon's work is clearly trying to foreground an understanding of the material that is resolutely global; like Dalby, she proposes an Anthropocene geopolitics in which the earth is not seen as external to geopolitics, as just providing a stage upon which geopolitics is played out, but is instead deeply imbricated in the remaking of our political world. And this is to be welcomed.

But, I think in many ways it is an account firmly situated within the tradition of critical geopolitics, rather than feminist geopolitics. Despite the emphasis on the aesthetic and material, the account still seems highly textual. The book has a breathtaking scope both historically and spatially, with connection between diverse examples prioritised over sustained engagement with particular cases. It is an account written

from a critical distance, an elite set of mostly high-culture references from art, literature and science. It may not be a geopolitical God's-eye view in the singular (see Sharp, 2000), but it is nevertheless a view of the world from the Gods. The sweep of history and the geographical vision is on the scale of the conventional geopolitician – and so I wonder, why not call this “critical geopolitics”? Why call it “feminist geopolitics”?

For me, for an approach to be feminist at heart there must be a concern for social justice; in the context of feminist geopolitics, this has tended to be expressed through a highlighting of the bodies, processes, subjectivities and identities that are vital to the remaking of global politics but which have been hidden from the gaze of geopolitics and critical geopolitics. At the outset, Dixon seems to suggest this is also key to her work; she wants to draw in material and perspectives that have been hidden from existing accounts of geopolitics, and more than this,

... I have sought to tease out the lived experience of government, science, and the arts, as these all help provide a sense of place for people, and as these proceed to offer constraints and opportunities for reimagining that place. (xi, emphasis added)

But, in *Feminist Geopolitics* this “lived experience” is somewhat elusive. For instance, in the chapter, “Touch,” we read about Mierle Laderman Ukele’s “maintenance art”, a ritualistic cleaning of floors and steps of Wadsworth Athenaeum in Connecticut, “performances that translated the value of otherwise menial and invisible tasks into curated acts” (158). In this aesthetic geopolitics, it is the performance of cleaning as an artistic practice that is lingered over and held up as key to understanding geopolitics, rather than the geopolitical processes that might render migrant female labour precarious in this role. What are the effects of this for understandings of subjectivity, agency, meaning, politics?

More broadly, this raises questions about the empirical focus of Dixon's book. From the pioneering work of Cynthia Enloe onwards, feminist engagements with the geopolitical have been concerned with revealing what's hidden by the usual tales of globalisation and international politics – thinking about what the globe would look like if the hidden tales were put front and centre. Now, in some ways Dixon does this, with examples that are indeed generally left out of feminist geopolitics, but as these are from a western, intellectual, elitist perspective, these do continue to hide certain things. Dixon anticipates this line of critique:

In pursuing flesh, bone and so on as objects of inquiry, there is a vulnerability, to be sure, to the charge that other, more worthwhile, lines of inquiry have been slighted. For me, this is preferable, however to [...] “any analysis which pretends to be able to encompass every vector of power runs the risk of a certain epistemological imperialism which consists in the presupposition that any given writer might fully stand for and explain the complexities of contemporary power” (Butler, 1993: 18–19). There is no sympathy here for such an imperialist ‘pretence’ (171).

Of course, it is impossible to disagree with this point. However, it cannot be a complete “get out of jail free” card. There is still a politics to this choice, and such choices matter. For instance, Dixon focuses on individualised high tech biopolitics, the sorts of quasi-sci-fi arguments which suggest, after Rose (2007: 253) that, “biology is no longer destiny”. Biology and the body are no longer containers of the geopolitical agent, the argument goes, and should no longer be our unit of analysis. Subjectivity and agency are being made and remade in different ways. Kearns and Reid-Henry (2009) however, temper the enthusiasm that is woven throughout such analysis. They argue that while advancement in biomedicine and biotechnologies has, undeniably, politicised life in a new and unprecedented manner, there remains some ‘basic geographical questions one might ask about the way “life itself” is politicised today’, noting:

The questions must turn less on the possibilities opened up by new technologies and more on the problems of their uneven distribution, because, clearly rather less novel and more mundane material inequalities exist alongside (and in some cases they are being reshaped by) the technological developments that preoccupy much of the recent literature on the politics of human life. (Kearns & Reid-Henry, 2009: 555)

It is only from this place of privilege that Rose (2007: 253) – and, here, Dixon – can make the optimistic and exciting proclamation that “biology is no longer destiny”. If social justice is indeed at the heart of feminism, it requires of us a more critical engagement with such projections of future politics so that we do not become complicit in imaginative geographies that naturalise the privileged wealthy western subject.

This leads to another potential silencing, that of the academic voices cited in the text, and those not. The politics of citation and recognition, especially for feminist, postcolonial, queer and race theories, are important. So, I was surprised not to read a more sustained engagement with existing feminist geopolitics – or a sense of what feminist, postcolonial, queer and race re-theorisations of geopolitics and IR have achieved – in setting out a distinct agenda for feminist geopolitics (given Dixon's focus, perhaps most notable an absence is Jasbir Puar (2002, 2006; 2012)). Dixon states that this is because she wanted to go beyond an abject position where feminism must always critique and react, to instead propose a positive, proactive and pre-existing feminism, independent of the mainstream. While I applaud this agenda, it can become complicit with those processes that confine the achievements of already existing feminist geopolitics to these (abject) margins, reinforcing a politics of citation that celebrates the contribution of critical geopolitics, but not the achievements of existing feminist geopolitics.

In the conclusion Dixon draws on the distinction between Deleuzian fluid, multiple, “minoritarian” politics and a molar politics, as marking the distinction between her and existing feminist geopolitical accounts:

I want to conclude my own discussion of a feminist geopolitics by insisting that though such a molar politics [of identity] can certainly help to advance women's self-determination in specific contexts, thus enhancing their capacities for action and thus their materially composed selves, it can also congeal women's possibilities of becoming, as well as the very notion of what a feminist project is (183).

But, this is just the kind of binary thinking that feminist geopolitics has tried to avoid: it is not either/or, it is both. A recognition of becoming, of the fluidity of all identities – of the construction of all borders and divisions, of the impermanence of all solidarities – makes the existence of certain borders, identities and oppositions in particular times and places for particular marked bodies no less real. And, while critical geopolitics is important for its relentless spirit of critique – as the oxymoronic pairing was initially introduced to achieve – for me what is distinctive for a feminist politics of any kind is also its normative agenda, its overarching concern for social justice which seeks change as well as critique. It is *both* the being and becoming together that is the challenge for any feminism to address.

I think in her book Dixon offers us a fascinating take on critical geopolitics which engages a new materialism, enlists new agents and maps out new connections between them. However, I am less comfortable about the politics of this vision as a specifically *feminist* geopolitics.

2. Juanita Sundberg (University of British Columbia)

I commend Deborah Dixon for the creative approach pursued in *Feminist Geopolitics*. The book places in relation events, people, and objects usually kept apart in neatly bounded compartments. Two of my

favorite conjunctions include masculinized geostrategists and the feminized spaces of Parisian salons; and war, bones, and Enlightenment anatomical science.

In the brief comments that follow, I articulate less concern than Jo Sharp about if and how Dixon's book exemplifies feminist methodologies. In my reading, Dixon's approach builds on the old, yet so very current feminist mantra: the personal is political. Dixon complements this with a more recent geographical imaginary centered on the intimate global (Pratt and Rosner 2012), signalling a shift away from scale to entanglement (47). Moreover, Dixon elaborates on a long standing feminist interest in “the matter-ing of the body” (47), in materiality, bodily processes, and bodily leakages. Hence, feminist socio-spatial imaginaries are situated in relation to feminist materialism to advance “geopolitics as an assemblage of site-specific practices, grounded through bodies” (47). Where Dixon differs from prevailing trends in feminist geopolitics is to include more than human bodies, “the matter of life on Earth” (7). As such, Dixon crafts an approach to feminist geopolitics that builds on and converses with a significant body of feminist work concerned with biology and environmental science (9). Indeed, Dixon attends to the *geo* as well as the *political* of geopolitics “to worry away at the difference-making configurations (or ‘imaginaries’) that are either posited or glossed by a classical geopolitics” (12). Ultimately, Dixon seeks to reconfigure the *geo-in* geopolitics to offer insights that not only intervene in the world but also generate “a broad-based feminist imaginary of the world and the place of ourselves and others within that” (53).

Readers will spend time with flesh, detached from individual subjects and distributed through networks of value and exchange (chapter 3); splintered bones and anatomical mappings, careers built on the bodies of the injured and dead in war, and bones animated as materializations of wounded nations (chapter 4); monstrous and deformed natures that disrupted European attempts to map and delineate natural orders and classificatory systems (chapter 5); and the *Vibrio cholerae* bacillus that attaches itself to clothing, hands, intestines only to be redistributed in the form of vomit and diarrhoea (chapter 6). We follow these objects through colonial entanglements and aesthetic elaborations, including the imperial Gothic, struggles over scientific knowledge, and the medicalization of women's bodily processes, especially childbirth.

What emerges from these trajectories is a critique of imperial masculinist framings of the geopolitical subject as contained, bounded by corporeal and territorial limits. A critique of colonial imaginative geographies demarcating a discrete European self and leaky or weakly bounded racialized others. And, a critique of what counts as the appropriate subject of geopolitics as a point of study.

As a feminist geographer who has engaged feminist geopolitics in my research on the United States-Mexico borderlands, this book reinforces for me the importance of two points. First, Dixon's book reaffirms the urgent need for feminists to engage with the *geo* of geopolitics. To elaborate feminist approaches to engaging life on Earth. To recuperate and revamp the powerful dimensions of earlier feminist work on nature in conversation with recent work in this vein (Bosworth, 2017; Curtin, 1991; Gaard, 1993; Grosz, Yusoff, & Clark, 2017; Plumwood, 1993; Rose, 2013). And, along these lines, to engage Indigenous feminist work that enacts ways of worlding which do not presume political subjects as contained, discrete or even solely human (Povinelli, 2016; Todd, 2016; Watts, 2013). Such engagements allow feminist work oriented towards more-than-human encounters to further provincialize a Eurocentric ontology of the human-as-Man – to use Sylvia Wynter's term – that for so long has sat as the foundational subject of geopolitics. In so doing, however, feminists need to carefully acknowledge the ongoing colonial geometries of power that rely on references to human-nature relations – the *geo* of geopolitics – to differentiate the human from not-quite-humans and nonhumans (Weheliye, 2014). Calls for more-than-human geographies that overlook ongoing systems of racialization are sure to reproduce colonial

violences (Mollett, 2016; Sundberg, 2014).

Second, *Feminist Geopolitics* elucidates the implications of fully accounting for matter/materiality. Indeed, I was left wanting more empirical detail, more elaboration of specific sites and practices (as opposed to or in addition to wide ranging explorations). For instance, a section of the book that really captured my attention focuses on an elite site, the Parisian salon as a space where alternative cartographic renderings of sociality were actively cultivated and discussed (chapter 2). Dixon presents Madam Scudéry (1607–1701), a popular writer and critic of the absolutist French state. Scudéry's salon operationalized a feminine mode of sociability founded on amiable relations (as opposed to elitist, patriarchal, and militarized modalities valued by the state). In one of her novels, published in 1654 at the end of a conflict in which King Louis XIV consolidated monarchical power, Scudéry included a map of *Le Pays de Tendre* that charts a path to citizenship achieved through conversation and amiability. Intrigued by this powerful yet ridiculed woman, I wanted to know more about how Scudéry's novels circulated. And what kind of influence did they achieve? Who was influenced by the conversations in her salon? Who was touched by Scudéry's critiques of Cartesian ontologies of separation and mechanization? Perhaps the question is more about what is achieved by situating Scudéry's philosophy alongside the more familiar Westphalian geopolitical frameworks that ultimately prevailed (and continue to prevail in the study of geopolitics). In sum, I was left wondering how Scudéry's life and work came to matter, to materialize, and to be embodied. Addressing such questions is crucial to give feminized spaces (even if elite), affective, embodied encounters between humans, and relationships between humans and objects (like Scudéry's maps and novels) their place in conceptualizations of geopolitics.

Thank you, Deborah Dixon, for nudging feminist geopolitics in new directions. May we take up the challenges posed by this book. Let the work begin!!

3. Jill Williams (University of Arizona)

In *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States*, Deborah Dixon starts from the position that she is interested in exploring what a feminist geopolitics *can do*, rather than what feminist geopolitics *is*. In turn, she eschews a simple teleological narrative of the development of the subdiscipline, instead challenging us to see how ‘feminist’ insights (as well as ‘feminine’ spaces) have been part and parcel of the development of classical geopolitical thought and the modern nation-state system upon which it is based. At the same time, she pushes us into the future to explore how feminist attention to practices of bordering and differentiation can help us understand the geopolitical processes through which new technologies and relations are materializing.

Dixon draws on the work of Rosi Braidotti (2008) to employ a feminist material approach that “asks questions of the body as existing in and for itself, as well as part and parcel of a web of relations that stretch well beyond the social realm” (9). This is a “body aware” social theory that explores the materiality of the body “in and for itself”, while also examining the various imaginaries that have enabled bodies to materialize in particular ways (10). However, and somewhat curiously, throughout much of the text Dixon is not focused on (human) bodies *per se*. Rather, this text takes the feminist impulse to rescale analysis away for the national or global scales to the finer scales of the body, home and community, a step further to look at bodily components (e.g., stem cells, flesh, bones).

In her riveting discussion of “corporeally disassociated” flesh—

living material that has been removed from the body, stored and modified to serve diverse experimental, commercial or therapeutic purposes, transported across international borders, and held in reserve in banks or processing centers for use in the laboratory, the hospital, the factory, and even the art studio (60).

—she shows how these bodily objects have materialized in relation

to cross border efforts to conquer territory and regulate the mobility of people, goods, and capital. Legal frameworks for what counts and doesn't as human life determines where certain forms of cell and flesh harvesting, preservation, and processing can occur, while disparities in wealth at a variety of scales structure who sells pieces of themselves and who purchases the resulting matter or associated services. In doing so, she illustrates how these pieces of bodies are, in a sense, global citizens that emerge from and in relation to a complex transnational regulatory environment. The concept of citizenship is upended as we gain insight into the rights and limits granted to disassociated pieces of human bodies.

In addition to exploring the lives of bodily components, Dixon uses these objects as a lens through which to explore traditional geopolitical topics of inquiry such as political borders and war-making. For example, through her discussion of the development of Edinburgh as a medical centre of excellence, we learn how war making has been a central driver of medical knowledge and development. The trauma wrought through war necessitated better understanding the vulnerabilities of the body in order to both fix those bodies injured during war time and to develop weapons better equipped to maximize the harm they inflicted.

The feminist materialist approach employed by Dixon allows us to inquire into and understand how lines are drawn between things and people—even when those things come from people and often reinhabit the bodies of people (the return to the/a human body often being a precondition for transnational mobility and existence more broadly). It is this 'feeling for the edges' that Dixon cites as central to what a feminist geopolitics can do. While work in the field of feminist geopolitics has long drawn attention to how human subjectivities are produced and bounded in relation to geopolitical processes, this text challenges us to think critically about the very boundaries of human-ness.

This text pushes the boundaries of feminist geopolitics in important and provocative ways and has compelled me to reevaluate how I understand the field—what it is, has been, and could (or should) be.

Since the coining of the term, feminist geopolitics has, in many ways, not been defined by an explicit focus on women or gender. Rather, as Hyndman (2004) wrote over a decade ago,

The term 'feminist' is employed in a broad and inclusive sense to describe analyses and political interventions that address the asymmetrical and often violent relationships among people based on real or perceived social and cultural differences ... it is the prevailing power relations and discursive practices that position groups of people in hierarchical relations to others based on such differences that remain critical to this feminist analysis (309).

It is this two-pronged attention to both differentiation and hierarchicalization that is often recognized as a defining feature of feminist geopolitical scholarship. However, while gender is often decentered as the defining category of analysis, there remains a deep and explicit focus on subjectivity in scholarship that falls under the banner of feminist geopolitics—the way in which (human) subjects come into being and the material and ideological effects of these processes.

For feminist scholars who associate feminist inquiry with an attention to (human) subjectivity, this text is provocative as it pushes us to think about the utility, problems, and political (im)possibilities that emerge when the boundaries between object/subject are challenged. Dixon clearly illustrates the way in which notions of human-ness are far from fixed; rather they are manipulated, reworked, and continually redefined through and in relationship to geopolitical and geoeconomic processes. At the same time, these processes of reworking challenge the very notions of subjectivity that geopolitics (and much political theory more broadly) are founded upon. This text compels us to ask: if feminist geopolitics has traditionally been a field concerned with exploring the (geo)politics of human subjectivity, what happens when our notion of a (political) subject is exploded beyond the traditional framework of

human-ness?

What Dixon's analysis illustrates is that this expanded framework allows us to see how (bodily) objects materialize, affecting and being affected by geopolitical and geoeconomic processes, taking on a (geo) political life of their own. While I find this approach both intellectually fascinating and useful, I'm left wondering whether or why it should be considered feminist. In many ways, it is the attention to bodies that most readily links Dixon's text to feminist theory and scholarship more broadly, yet the framework of bodies she adopts radically challenges how the body is conceptualized often obscuring the obvious connections to traditional framings of feminist thought.

In her conclusion, Dixon argues against a molar feminist politics—defined as a rights-based feminism that presupposes some cohesive identity. She writes: "though such a molar politics can certainly help to advance women's self-determination in specific contexts, thus enhancing their capacities for action and thus their materially composed selves, it can also congeal women's possibilities of becoming, as well as the very notion of what a feminist project is" (183). Put simply, rights-based feminism can effectively improve the lives of women (or other marginalized groups), but identity politics are inherently contradictory, paradoxical, and politically problematic—we mobilize identity categories to fight for rights, reinforcing the very categories that led to the problem in the first place. While I fully agree with this line of argument on a theoretical and intellectual level, I am also left wondering how the feminist materialist geopolitical framework put forth by Dixon can be put to work to improve the material conditions of women and other marginalized groups.

Central to the field of feminist geopolitics as it has been articulated since the early 2000s is a critique of the deconstructive project of critical geopolitics and an explicit focus on intellectual engagement as a mechanism for offering productive tools and commentary for resistance (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2001, 2004; Massaro & Williams, 2013). Feminist geopolitics in this formulation is not just about arm-chair theorizing, but about proactively contributing to the production of more just worlds by illuminating how geopolitical processes reverberate through time and space and unevenly affect different populations based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and the list goes on and on.

Dixon provides insight into how a feminist materialist geopolitical approach can be theoretically useful in examining processes of differentiation at various scales, however I'm unclear how this approach can be used as a basis for political organizing/action/praxis that has the capacity to improve the material well-being of women and other marginalized groups. How does this theoretical framework move out of the arm-chair and into streets, homes, or communities to help us both understand and *make* more socially just worlds?

The boundaries and definitions of academic fields are constantly being reworked in relation to shifting political, economic, cultural, and intellectual transformations. Dixon's text is provocative, offering up a radical reimagining of both what a feminist geopolitics is and what it can do.

4. Caroline Faria (University of Texas at Austin)

Deborah Dixon's *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States* offers a new materialist perspective that "feels for the borders of thought and practice" (1): the state borders across which stem cells are lucratively collected, manipulated, stored, and traded; the borders of science, technology, art, and activism where figurations like the Santa Muerte "Skeletal Woman" live; the epidemiological borders that prompt panic, signalling the "ever-more connected or 'in touch' populations" while proliferating difference (142); and our own ethical borders as humans in the wake of environmental destruction. Cases like these, taken up via the themes of flesh, bones, touch, and abhorrence, prompt uncomfortable and productive questions: What intellectual and ethical openings emerge when we undo the human body and reimagine its

relation to and in the world? And what are the risks posed by such a move for a feminist and antiracist political geography?

Despite the book's authoritative title, Dixon spends little time on an overview of feminist geopolitics, its lineage, its current state. Though we expect to be told what feminist geopolitics *is*, Dixon refuses this question in favor of another, “what can a feminist geopolitics *do*?” With this move, the text vibrates to the rhythm of a new materialism, grounded in the feminisms of Braidotti (2008), Grosz (2008) and Irigaray (1991), that fundamentally disrupts the human body. The bodies centered aren't the ones that feminist political geographers have fought to see acknowledged. The stories of colonized subjects, immigrant workers, female activists, mothers (of the nation, to-be, for a moment) are told but they're not the protagonists. Instead, she highlights the lives of lucrative stem cells, stolen skeletons, infected intestines and “wombs for rent” (72). It's embodied, in a kind of way, but the bodies are often body *parts* that take on a geopolitical life of their own. This focus on partial corporeality can leave the text feeling depopulated when compared with most feminist political geographies. But Dixon is feeling for the borders of the body, a drive that opens up creative opportunities to imagine feminist geopolitics anew.

In this creative spirit I'm drawn to consider what Dixon's unraveling and re-grafting of the body offers for my research on the globalized Gulf-African economies of hair and beauty. This multi-million-dollar industry relies on the infusion of desire into border-crossing human and synthetic objects, and as such might dovetail well with materialist concerns. Thus far, I have conceptualized it as a feminist postcolonial commodity chain analysis (after Ramamurthy, 2014). I am politically invested in troubling entrenched, paternalistic, patronizing, and violent imaginaries of Africa and Africans through an account of the embodied experiences of hair product manufacturers, traders, and consumers. But Dixon's bodily *undoing* prompts new ways of thinking about its global flows, border politics, emergent subjectivities, and the affective relationships amongst the human subjects, body parts, and beauty products I follow.

For one, Dixon engages with art that troubles taken-for-granted bodies and boundaries, offering a fresh geopolitical perspective on the co-mingling of things, the affective tensions that bind and repel, and the new configurations that form and dispel across borders. In one piece she examines, an artist accompanies sanitation workers on their routes in New York City, observing the way they are publicly abhorred as polluting while they in fact keep the city clean and ‘alive’ (158–162). This drives me to pay attention to the provocative insights offered by artists like Wura-Natasha Ogunji. Ogunji creates social-justice oriented performance art that pushes the body across mediums, in her words, “to explore movement and mark-making across water, land and air”.¹ She's concerned with the violences and possibilities of the ordinary, upturning everyday spaces and practices to reveal the layers of power that maintain them. In one performance piece, ‘Beauty’, women are physically woven together through the co-braiding of their hair, standing for hours on end in mundane spaces: a Lagos transit station, an Austin university campus. Through this performance, the everyday becomes out-of-place, and then spectacular, as the boundaries of the body, hair, and elements of the urban are confused. Through Dixon's lens, I now see this as an artistically informed and corporeal geopolitical analysis of the relationship amongst the body, hair, and the city, one my commodity chain analysis alone cannot offer.

Second, Dixon's materialism revels in rendering the familiar strange. My favorite examples are the unnerving coming-alive of mouse cells seeded into a leather jacket and (more grotesquely?) the travels of Rick Perry's stomach fat. But most effectively she disrupts the everyday via her engagement with time. In one moment she's concerned with violent states and the fraught geopolitics of remembrance and forgetting that shroud the remains of their victims. Here the past isn't used to

contextualize the present, but instead animates the powerfully political afterlives of their old bones (see also McKittrick, 2013). This concern with the past-presents of disassociated figures and objects offers denaturalized vision of the geopolitical. Hair is mundane, another object lining the shelves of beauty salons and stalls, spilling across the bedroom floor, filling purses and suitcases in anticipation of that big night out. But, with Dixon's eye to the “warped” (xi), there's also a way that hair - cut, dyed, stacked on the weighing scale of a downtown Dubai wholesaler - is rendered strange, ghoulish perhaps, revealing the power geometries of border levies and corruption, beauty businesses, trader relationships, technological magic. Such a rendering pushes us to recall both its past lives in Malaysia, China, India and its future as an object of desire on new heads in the US, Nigeria, Iran.

These are just two of the ways Dixon's materialism made me “feel for the borders” of my own research. But any analysis of beauty must interrogate the politics of coloniality, race, and racial power embedded both in its mattering and its circulation as a commodity. It is here, around the importance of a politically incisive geographic analysis of race, that my uneasiness lingers (see also Mohammad & Sidaway, 2012; Mollett, 2016; Saldanha, 2006; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Hair, as a highly visible and meaning-laden material object, is a powerful beauty medium through which gender, race, and class based hierarchies are culturally diffused and reinforced (Banks, 2000; Hill Collins, 1990; Wingfield, 2009). Interrogating the postcolonial intersectionalities of beauty (Mollett & Faria, 2013) - the way racialized, gendered, and sexualized power is enacted through the body, place, and across time - remains vital. Objects, affects, and capacities are a powerful part of the operation of beauty on the continent but they work through the always racialized, gendered, sexualized, mattering body; those French colonial policies of “racial improvement” that targeted the self-care and comportment practices of West Africans in the early 20th century; the advertisements of a leading Lebanese-African hair retailer that sell ideals of whitened modernity and cosmopolitanism through the silken and straightened synthetic hair of its models; and the varied layers of resistance and innovation embodied in edgy contemporary designers like Gloria Wavamunno² who are challenging these norms via the influences of emerging and historically embedded diasporic circuits of blackness (Balogun, 2012; Faria, 2015).

In Dixon's work, such bodies are there but not quite there, dissipated, disassembled, reconnected to new objects, flows, processes in unfamiliar ways. And in this rendering, we (intentionally) lose the voice and the political stance of a fully sovereign gendered, racialized, sexualized subject. In its place, she puts forth something else: also political, also radical, also ethical, but not in the vein of feminist geopolitics thus far. Dixon may argue that this is precisely the point: to render feminist geopolitics itself unfamiliar, strange. But, there's a way that decentering the human subject within a complex web of relations, capacities, objects, nonhumans, risks obscuring stories of racial power, racialized violence, and the still-contested question of what constitutes the Human. As Mollett (2016 and see 2017) has argued, “when making claims for social justice or any kinds of ‘ethics’ we can't talk about ‘more-than-human geographies’ or “Human Rights” while leaving unquestioned *who* is included from the category of *human* and *who* is not”.

I don't view this risk of erasure as necessarily *inherent* to a post-humanist project; indeed, Dixon's engagement with flesh, bones, abhorrence, touch *could* lay the foundation for powerful analyses of coloniality, whiteness, and the violences of dispossession, incarceration, and enslavement. Moreover, some posthumanist calls to attend to the viscosities of race have gained incredible and productive traction (Sundberg, 2014; Weheliye, 2014). However, the embodied violences of racial power are not Dixon's project here. Perhaps this is part of what's worrying about much of the materialist turn. With deliberate care it can

¹ <http://s3.otherpeoplespixels.com/sites/26153/resume.pdf>.

² Gloria Wavamunno designs fashion that responds to her surroundings in *Design Indaba* [accessed online at <http://www.designindaba.com>].

be put to work to think in new, provocative ways about race. But when we move too quickly beyond the human (especially when the human itself remains a contested and contentious category), we lose sight of the racialization of bodies, racist actions and the embodied violences of racial power.

There is a politically invigorating, radical and worldly ethics at work in Dixon's text, resonating with the thrust of feminist political geography. Her materialism deliberately avoids machinic metaphors in favor of "an Earthly, 'always within reach,' touch" (166). It's a connective ethics that grapples with a commitment to the human, but one deeply entangled and dismembered. It is this emphasis on corporeally dissociated matter, dissolving the lived experiences of bodily being in favor of new networks of becoming, that urges reiteration of Tolia-Kelly and Crang's question about the opportunities and dangers of fleshy approaches to race: "How do we materialize race in ways that grasp the vitality of bodies, the corporeality of emotion in the face of narratives of race, of phenotypes that fix the marked body through a different regime of truth and value, postcolonial yet fundamentally biologic?" (2010: 2312). As we feel for the borders of the body, state, and corporeal world, and our own geopolitical thinking, it is all the more important to consider what, and *who*, is obscured and what new or age-old violences are made manifest through this new connective mattering. This concern must also be central to a posthumanist, new materialist feminist political geography.

5. Response – Deborah Dixon (University of Glasgow)

My sincere thanks go to Jo Sharp, Juanita Sundberg, Caroline Faria, and Jill Williams for sharing their responses to the book.³ A textbook on the emergence and unfolding of feminist geopolitics that dwells on the work of those explicitly identifying with such a field of inquiry is a grand idea. This is not that book.

Initially intended as an interrogation of the Anthropocene from a feminist geopolitics perspective, the book gradually took on a retrospective tone as the making of 'feminist geopolitics' itself became an engaging puzzle. Was feminist geopolitics a matter of critiquing not only a classical geopolitics, but a critical geopolitics also, for their variously missing or mis-taken accounts of women? Was feminist geopolitics a matter of making women's lives visible? Did it mesh an interrogation of discourses around the category of 'woman' with an account of the power relations that both enabled and ensured from these? What is more, I asked myself as a scholar engaging in geographic debates, what did the 'geo' – encompassed here by, or perhaps anchoring, the terms 'feminist' and 'political' – import? As readers of this forum, or the book itself, will know by this point, these questions, and more in the same vein, prompted me to take these lines of inquiry not as starting points for an analysis of the Anthropocene, but as objects of analysis in and of themselves. Where, when and in what form did these emerge? Who is speaking to what problematics? What is gained, and lost, from the effort to define a 'feminist geopolitics' according to its purported history, key concepts, methodologies or self-identifying adherents? Is there another way of approaching feminist geopolitics such that it escapes such a taxonomic imperative? And if so, what might such an approach look like? Perhaps an answer would lie in a closer examination of what a feminist geopolitics could do.

Certainly, one thing a feminist geopolitics can do, as I expand on in the book's Introduction, is feel for the borders of feminist thought and practice. As a former Editor of *Gender, Place and Culture*, I was able to appreciate not only the diversity of feminist scholarship available, but also the critical reflexivity driving much of this work. And, I would add, the careful efforts made by authors and reviewers alike to probe

dissonances as well as forge resonances. How might such a sensibility to difference, and the different ways in which difference itself can be mobilised, help situate the doings of feminist geopolitics (whether explicitly expressed as such or not – a point I will return to) and perhaps, I hoped, set in train new doings?

As will also be clear by this point, in thinking about new doings in feminist geopolitics my focus was very much on, as Sundberg describes it, "imperial masculinist framings of the geopolitical subject as contained, bounded by corporeal and territorial limits. [The book is] A critique of colonial imaginative geographies demarcating a discrete European self and leaky or weakly bounded racialized others. And, a critique of what counts as the appropriate subject of geopolitics as a point of study." Classical geopolitics has a pervasive, corrosive legacy comprising strikes, but no wounds; territories, but no trauma; and borders, but no traversals. Since the book's publication, the issues I deal with in the chapters on 'Bones' and 'Touch' have escalated. Eugenics never disappeared as an imaginary of a purified population, or even as a set of biopolitical practices; but, it has reappeared in places where, only a few years ago, we would not have expected it to do so (eg, [Raw, 2018](#)). The political Gothic that fuelled centuries of racism in the US, and policed its borders, has now merged with the Bakhtian grotesqueries of Trumpism ([Wolff, 2018](#)).

In this context, I have returned time and again to thinking about Faria's comment that, "decentering the human subject within a complex web of relations, capacities, objects, nonhumans, risks obscuring stories of racial power, racialized violence, and the still-contested question of what constitutes the Human." Bits of bodies proliferate across through the book, to be sure; but, and this is crucial, these bits have been made and remade as such to the gain of a few and the loss of many. What is more, an attentiveness to 'more than human' approaches decenters a particular understanding of subjectivity, I would suggest, that renders the 'social relations' within which human being emerges somewhat devoid of a geological, even environmental, context. In the book, I strive to answer the 'how are bodies made less than human' question by drawing on a feminist geophilosophy that, I would urge, constructively extends what is usually referred to as a feminist geopolitics literature. For it is a feminist geophilosophy that very much takes the 'geo' in geopolitics to task, activating forces, dynamics, capacities and potentialities that a classical geopolitics has long sought to contain and rise above. And, it is a feminist geophilosophy that takes to task the scalar imaginary that undergirds Jill Williams' commentary, which moves from "the national or global scales to the finer scales of the body, home and community [and] a step further to look at bodily components (e.g., stem cells, flesh, bones)". If we interrogate the emergence of such imaginaries, then we query the politics they both enable and presume.

In asking what a feminist geopolitics can do, I have drawn on scholars from a wide range of disciplines, from Women's Studies to Art and Performance, Philosophy, Medical History, and English Literature as well as International Relations and Geography. Over 80% of the references in the book are by women; a choice that was dictated by the materials I wanted to draw in, and their authorship, but also deliberately attenuated. I wanted the impactful voices of women researching and writing on the 'geo' and the 'political', as well as the typed conjunction of the two, to pervade *Feminist Geopolitics: Material States*. I have given an agential presence in the book to objects as well as ideas; a choice that belies the signalling efforts of an Index. I have sought breadth over depth, while adding in clause after clause to round up a point, only to nuance it. Through it all, I have left issues unresolved, perhaps the biggest of which is negotiating an early training in a poststructuralism bound to discourse, with a feminist commitment to bodies as visceral, touching, vulnerable and responsive. And I have set myself the task of, next, answering the question raised in the Conclusion (2015: 172), which is, "in the absence of a scaled and externalised Earth upon which geopolitical subjects tread," what kinds of *conceptual personae* emerge, and what kind of grounding do they draw sustenance from?

³ My sincere thanks also to Lorraine Dowler for her comments at the Author Meets Critics session at the 2016 meeting of the American Association of Geographers, San Francisco, April.

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