

Manufacturing Beauty, Grooming Selves: The Creation of Femininities in the Global Economy – An Introduction

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Recent decades have seen the rise of a global beauty industry, with profound effects on people's body images, ideals of beauty and beauty practices worldwide. In this special issue, we bring together original ethnographic contributions in order to explore an emerging field in social anthropology, showing how bodily grooming and beautification are linked to the creation of gendered bodies and moral selves in the global economy. Following the focus on the relationship between physical beauty and femininity in the scholarly literature, as well as the pattern of responses to our editorial call for papers for this issue,¹ we will address the role of beauty and self-making in relation to the creation of gendered, especially female, subjectivities. While contemporary beauty regimes affect all genders, this introduction will argue that they do so in different ways.

There are at least three reasons for studying the relationship between the manufacturing of beauty and gendered subjectivities from an anthropological perspective. First, in both focus and perspective, the social anthropological engagement with physical beauty and beautification brings with it an important shift away from existing research in the social sciences. Thus, the recent boom in the global beauty industry and the popularization of (medical) technologies for aesthetic body modification have often been linked to changes in consumption, the growth of the service sector and the feminization of labour that occurred in many 'Western' societies in the second half of the twentieth century. Accordingly, the debate has concentrated on women in the global North and

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¹ While this call for papers was not restricted to research on femininity, the vast majority of submissions focused on women's beauty practices and/or the making of femininity.

their subjugation to patriarchal regimes of the body and the degree of agency or individual choice respectively with regard to cosmetic surgery and beauty practices.² The anthropological perspective shifts the focus away from the question of the driving forces of beautification and aesthetic body modification to study the practices and meanings of beauty as they are embedded in everyday life, as well as the circumstances that have given rise to particular beauty cultures historically. Based on ethnographic research in a wide range of geographical places, an emerging anthropological literature seems to confirm the thesis that expectations and investments in bodily appearance and beauty are increasingly relevant for people worldwide. However, it complicates or even puts into question the common assumptions of the unilinear Westernisation and standardisation of bodies by documenting the ways in which different styles of bodily appearance and their alteration are tied to historically produced and culturally situated imaginations of race, class and gender.³

Specific looks often serve as a form of social distinction, and research shows that aesthetic body modifications have to be analysed in their respective social and cultural contexts, not as individual decisions, but as meaningful within specific circles of friends, in particular workplaces or urban neighbourhoods. To sum up, an anthropological perspective on beauty has much to offer the conceptualization of gendered and racialized subjectivities and hence is vital to our understanding of the contemporary condition. Not least, anthropological studies may be capable of foregrounding the sensual aspects of beauty, as well as the desire and sexuality often inherent in practices of beautification – aspects that are surprisingly absent from many studies of the topic (Pope-noe 2004: 187–197).

This leads us to my second suggestion for why anthropology is highly relevant to the study of body aesthetics and how it may contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic, namely its methodological approach. Thus, anthropological research is perhaps best suited to paying attention to the embodied nature of research and, more generally, of social life itself (Csordas 1993). Empirically grounded research, especially the kind of ethnographic fieldwork that goes beyond interviewing to engage in participant observation, is highly embodied and involves questions of subjectivization, affectivity and sensuality that, as Julieta Vartabedian shows in her contribution to this issue, turn the bodies not only

² See, for example, Black 2004, Bordo 1993, Callaghan 1994, Chapkis 1986, Davis 1995, 2003, Freedman 1986, Jeffreys 2005, Wolf 1991.

³ See Edmonds 2007, 2010, Jafar and de Casanova 2013, Miller 2006, Ochoa 2014 and Ossman 2002, among others.

of those who are researched, but also the researcher's body, into a site of mutual reflection. Confronted with interlocutors who invest immense efforts to pass, or, as in the case of the Brazilian *travesti* sex-workers Vartabedian studied, *surpass* local standards of beauty, many anthropologists doing research on beauty seem to share Vartabedian's experience of being regarded as unsophisticated or even as 'ugly' when it comes to a beautiful being-in-the-world or to the knowledge and skills of beautification. The embodied understanding of the sensualities, intricacies and skills at work in beautifying bodies in homes, beauty salons or clinics creates a deeper understanding of what happens when public or global imaginations and ideals materialize.

Finally – and in spite of its timely relevance, methodological assets and conceptual promises – the study of beauty has received surprisingly little attention in social and cultural anthropology. This is not to say that beautification and bodily adornment are something new or that anthropologists have come rather late to the study of what seems to be a recent phenomenon. In contrast, the description of bodily adornment and of practices of beautification that evolutionary psychologists consider intricately linked to human evolution itself (cf. Etcoff 2000) have always been present in ethnographic accounts. For example, in his first classic work on the Trobriand Islands (2002 [1922]), Bronisław Malinowski describes the magic of beauty that the male participants in the Kula exchange engage in on the beach of Sarubwoyna, including makeup produced by 'young betel nuts [...] crushed with lime' and spells to transform 'an old, ugly and ungainly man [...] into a radiant and charming youth' (ibid.: 346). Similar to what Henrietta Moore has analysed with regard to the representation of women in anthropology (1988), the problem with studies of beauty practices in the discipline therefore lies not at the level of empirical research, but at a conceptual and analytical level. This may be due to an ongoing male bias in anthropology that regards women's efforts at beautification as a self-evident 'natural constant' that needs no further explanation (Ivanov 2013: 50). As Paola Ivanov observes, much of the anthropological work on beauty focuses on men's, rather than women's forms of beautification and bodily adornment. Moreover, whenever women's beauty practices become the centre of attention for anthropologists, they are typically remote from the researcher's own life worlds and 'Western' ideals, such as the fattening of girls among Hassaniyya Arabs (Popenoe 2004) or, to add to Ivanov's list, foot-binding in China (Ping 2002) or female circumcision in East Africa (Boddy 1982).

A closely related reason for the dearth of anthropological analyses of beauty practices and aesthetic body modification are the ongoing effects of the Cartesian mind–body dualism. Within this dualism, the pre-

occupation with physical beauty as a characteristic of the devalued, ephemeral body is deemed superficial, vain and morally reprehensible, especially if engaged in by women. In recent years, the mind-body dualism has been questioned and problematized by anthropologists who favour phenomenological approaches and propose ‘embodiment’ as a methodological perspective for the discipline. From such a perspective, the dualities of mind and body, of the self and the other, ‘collapse’, and body, self and personhood appear as inextricably linked (Csordas 1993: 149; cf. Sharp 2000: 289 f.).

Perhaps as a result of these propositions, there has been an awakening interest in beauty and aesthetic body modification in medical anthropology and related fields in recent years, among them Alex Edmonds’ research on ‘*plástica*’ in Brazil (2007, 2009), Laura Miller’s on body aesthetics in Japan (2006), Michael Taussig’s on what he calls an aesthetics of ‘cosmic surgery’ in Colombia (2012), and Wen Hua’s (2013) on cosmetic surgery in China. As indicated by this admittedly incomplete list, the regional foci of many of these studies are Latin America and Asia rather than other parts of the world. Thus, in order to create a lively debate on body aesthetics and aesthetic body modifications across and beyond the discipline, more research is needed on what certainly is a worthy, relevant and very timely topic for anthropology.

In the following, I will introduce the main themes and conceptual outline of this special journal issue and its three contributions along the following lines: i) the workings of the beauty sector, ii) beauty and the creation of femininities, iii) beauty as a form of bodily capital, and iv) the location of beauty, that is, the relationship between beauty and both social and topographical space.

1. Global Beauty, Local Bodies: The Beauty Sector

In an era of ‘global flows’ characterized by mass migration and the circulation of mass-mediated images and global brands, it is hardly surprising that the ideals and imaginations of bodily beauty are also being shaped by an increasingly large and global market, the fashion-beauty industry. Yet, as numerous studies of ‘globalization’ and the (new) global economy have shown, global goods and images are never simply adopted or consumed, but are given diverse meanings and are appropriated, refashioned or rejected in various ways in different contexts around the world. Like other industrial sectors, the fashion-beauty industry, with its ‘old’ centres in New York and Paris, has come to realize that, up until the 1980s, markets remained highly fragmented and there were no truly global brands (Jones 2010: 203). While this has

changed dramatically since then, from the perspective of the industry, it is the ‘persistence of local differences, not the homogenization of global preferences, [that] is most striking’ (ibid.: 3). As mentioned above, an emerging anthropological literature on beauty has supported this claim and provided much material on the local repercussions of mass-mediated beauty ideals, images and practices. To reiterate, it has shown that the media clearly inform everyday practice, but also that the ideals and images that are dominant in the fashion-beauty industry do not necessarily lead to the standardization or ‘Westernization’ of people’s bodies worldwide.⁴

For example, the skinny female bodies that dominate the catwalks and advertisements of the fashion-beauty industry provoke a wide range of contrary reactions globally. Examples include the pity and ridicule of such bodies by Azawagh Arab women, for whom fatness continues to signify their own integration into a community of care, alongside sexiness, beauty, wellness and social standing (Popenoe 2004), as well as the dramatic, but ambiguous refashioning of women’s bodies in, for example, Nigeria (Balogun and Hoang 2013) or India (Talukdar 2013), where the preference for more voluptuous, feminine bodies is slowly giving way to ever slimmer feminine ideals bound up with notions of modernity, health and cosmopolitanism, especially among young, upwardly mobile women.

It is often noted that the fashion-beauty sector has become more heterogeneous with regard to the beauty ideals it propagates (Jones 2010: 362), especially in respect of skin colour. To a certain extent, some of these changes may be attributed to the power of social movements in the US and elsewhere, whose rallying cries, such as ‘Black is Beautiful,’ managed to effect some transformations in dominant standards of beauty (cf. Craig 2002, Tate 2009). On the other hand, these changes may also be attributed to the market-driven discovery of new consumer sectors in both the global North and South. Thus, while the definition of a skin as ‘black’ or ‘white’ is socially constructed and continues to mean different things in different places, the global market for skin-lightening or bleaching products is roaring, hinting at an ongoing valorization of lighter shades of skin tone, or what has been termed ‘colorism’ (Glenn 2009: 166). Accordingly, the neoliberal adoption of more heterogeneous beauty images does not necessarily result in a lessening of the effects of existing inequalities along ethnic or racialized

⁴ This is not to say that increasing standards of beauty do not threaten to result in an increasing regularization of the human body, a ‘pervasive smoothing out of human complexity and variation’ (Garland-Thomson 2009: 30).

lines, or even of certain beauty standards, but constitutes a new form of cultural racism through ‘economies of color’ (Harris 2009).

There is a clear relationship between the products and images of the global beauty sector and the manufacturing of beauty engaged in by the research participants described in the three contributions to this volume. The Brazilian *travesti* sex workers introduced by Julieta Vartabedian strive for beautiful, even ‘perfect,’ glamorous and spectacular hyper-feminine bodies that stand at the heart of their identity construction as *travesti*. The adoption of names that bring to mind Hollywood celebrities (‘Liza Lawer,’ or ‘Sabrina Sheldon’) hint at the ‘white’ aesthetics they seek to create in painful, risky and expensive beauty journeys undertaken to transform ‘ugly,’ ‘straight,’ ‘dark’ and ‘hairy’ male bodies. Nevertheless, *travestis*’ aesthetic ideals of whiteness, Vartabedian notes, are not simply ‘Western,’ but based on a Brazilian valorization of racialized bodies.

In her contribution on feminine attractiveness in contemporary Mongolia, Hedwig Waters observes that an increasing fixation on physical attractiveness and beauty in Mongolia coincides with the fragmentation and commodification of the body as analysed by the anthropology of the body (Martin 1992, Sharp 2000). In Mongolia, Waters shows, women’s refashioning of their selves with the help of styling and aesthetic body modification is linked to an economic transitioning into a post-socialist, globalizing ‘Wolf’ economy, with often dramatic consequences for women. On the high street of Ulaanbaataar, Mongolia’s capital, the performance of global brands and beauty trends is pivotal for women who invest in erotic capital to stay competitive in a fast-changing economy that is becoming ever more precarious for young, upwardly mobile women. Waters explores women’s desire to refashion their bodies and invest in erotic capital as a form of conspicuous consumption that encompasses not just handbags and purses, but eyelids, breasts and noses. Mongolian women of all social strata invest in eyelid or rhinoplasty surgery, for example, not to emulate Western beauty ideals, but to mimic an auspicious appearance that is tied to local understandings of wealth and success.

Finally, the contribution of Hester Clarke on shaping eyebrows and moral selves in the Muslim Pakistani community of Sheffield (UK) brings to mind another aspect of the global beauty industry, namely that, from its beginning, it was characterized by a strong presence of entrepreneurs, typically women of colour, who believed in a universal desire for beauty and typically made a living as self-employed or small-scale businesswomen (Jones 2010: 357, cf. Peiss 1998). While many of these small enterprises were marginalised by an expanding beauty in-

dustry in the mid-twentieth century, the example of young Pakistani-British women becoming beauty experts in Sheffield underlines the ongoing importance of the beauty sector as an employment niche and a viable source of income for young women against the background of social and economic marginalisation. This is supported by studies of the beauty industry in the UK and elsewhere, which describe it as a highly feminised and devalued sector that depends on expert knowledge, physical labour and, due to its service aspect, emotional labour (cf. Black 2004, Kang 2010). Like ‘Brazilian’ waxing in Berlin (Lidola 2015), ‘Korean’ nail care in New York (Kang 2010) or ‘South Asian’ threading and eyebrow-shaping in Sheffield (Clarke, this volume), beauty treatments are often ethnicized, which may help women constructed as ‘ethnic’ become recognized as beauty experts. Nevertheless, in Sheffield, alongside other beauty treatments, eyebrow beautification is considered to be the work of lower-class Pakistani women, especially from the perspective of high achievers from the same community. Thus, it may seem counter-intuitive that employment in the beauty sector is encouraged by an older generation of women as a viable occupation for their daughters. Clarke explains that this is due to the fact that beauty work is considered appropriate for ‘good’ girls, elaborating on the complex relationship between beauty and the crafting of moral (feminine) selves. This relationship, as the following will show, is a central aspect of the creation of femininities more generally.

2. Beauty and the Creation of Femininities

As has been stated above, beauty regimes affect both men and women, but not for nothing has there been a focus on femininity in the social science literature on beauty, which is also reflected in the compilation of this issue. As exemplified in the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993), gender is produced in a process that is never complete or finished, but that requires the constant performance and reiteration of gendered norms. For those who wish to be recognised as women, norms of outer appearance and standards of feminine beauty play a crucial role in accomplishing this task. Much has been written on beauty as an external symbol of femininity that is intricately linked to female identity and the self, typically from a critical feminist perspective. Analysing how femininity is constructed around ideals of beauty, Sandra Lee Bartky warns of the existentiality of the link between women’s bodily appearance and femininity that the feminist critique of beauty norms for women puts into question:

... any political project that aims to dismantle the machinery that turns a female body into a feminine one may well be apprehended by a woman as something that threatens her with desexualisation, if not outright annihilation. (Bartky 1990: 105, quoted from Black 2004: 51)

More recently, the feminist critique of femininity and beauty has been criticized for proposing singular beauty standards for women, assuming a generalized female subject that is a 'racially unmarked, implicitly heterosexual woman, of unspecified class' (Craig 2006: 162). Instead, Craig suggests we conceive of individuals and groups as differently located in fields that promote 'particular ways of seeing beauty' (ibid.). Such an approach underlines the importance of ethnographic research on the relationship between particular cultures and economies of beauty as being tied to the achievement of different kinds of femininities.

The salience of this relationship is widely exemplified by the contributions to this issue. Clarke's research in Sheffield shows beauty salons to be sites *par excellence* for studying the definition and achievement of morally and socially sanctioned femininities. The young women portrayed by Clarke struggle to be 'good girls' with regard to both religious norms and social expectations. For them, beautification in the form of eyebrow-shaping is morally prescribed as part of creating a feminine and disciplined self, but it is also potentially immoral, especially in respect of religious interpretations or when looks are perceived as 'exaggerated' or 'too sexy' to be publicly displayed. In spite of the fact that the young Muslim Pakistani British women in Clarke's study widely acknowledge that eyebrow-shaping is not permissible according to Islam, they employ different strategies for its legitimization. Thus, they agree on the requirement to look feminine and attractive for their husbands and, as a result, are careful to balance their femininity – defined as attractiveness as a woman – with pious modesty in a proper fashion. Looking well-groomed and 'tidy', while also showing an effort at beautification, is here tied to what other studies on the relationship between beauty and femininity have likewise analysed as central, namely a sense of looking 'appropriate' (Black 2004) or 'respectable' (Skeggs 1997). Not least, Clarke's findings are in line with Paula Black's rather apodictic observation, drawing on research on 'ordinary' middle-class women in the UK, that, 'for all women who wish to achieve an appropriate heterosexual feminine bodily disposition, facial hair is always and everywhere considered disruptive to this aim. Facial hair itself becomes a signifier of either a rejection of this appropriate femininity, or a disengagement with it' (2004: 73).

Trans-people who acquire femininity by creating beautiful feminine selves complicate the debate on femininity, as is exemplified by recent

controversies between queer theorists and feminists on this issue (cf. Goldberg 2014). Again, ethnography is of crucial importance here, and Julieta Vartabedian's study of Brazilian *travestis* contributes much to an analysis of the complicated relationship between (transgender) femininity and beautiful appearance. By stressing the difference between being female and looking feminine, *travestis*' aim is not a normative feminine body, but one that, in its glamour, is 'hyper-feminine' (see also Ochoa 2014). Becoming beautiful in the *travesti* understanding of beauty requires a long process of self-transformation in several steps, from hormonal treatment to the injection of silicone and finally, if one can afford it, cosmetic surgery. Becoming feminine in the *travesti* sense is therefore both a career and a transformation of the self that is simply unthinkable without the attainment of certain standards of beauty. As in the example given by Clarke of the young Muslim women in Sheffield, achieving femininity for *travestis* is therefore both a physical achievement and a moral one, so that a failure to meet beauty standards signifies a failure in becoming recognized as a full-blown *travesti* (as opposed to a *travesti* apprentice).

Finally, through conspicuous consumption of global brands and various aesthetic body modifications, the Mongolian women in Hedwig Waters' study similarly strive for a specific kind of femininity that has its own moral underpinnings, namely, in trying very hard not to look poor. In a society where indigenous concepts of fortune and reputation continue to influence social standing, a 'correct' outer appearance and public presentation, Waters observes, is crucial for the upwardly mobile woman she describes. The description of one middle-aged film director's momentary failure to meet social expectations and her subsequent move 'to switch to more feminine clothing and become increasingly mindful of her appearance' demonstrate the disciplinary power of beauty norms for women in this context. Mongolian women's investments in their appearance as a way to avoid sanctions and ridicule become ever more salient when they enter a highly competitive and rapidly transforming labour market. As the following section will show, they are not alone in investing in an attractive and erotic body as a form of capital.

3. Beauty as (Bodily) Capital

In his ethnographic inquiry into professional boxing in Chicago, Loïc Wacquant, following Pierre Bourdieu (1986), coins the notion of 'bodily capital' to describe how professional boxers 'conceive of, care for, and rationalize ... the use of their body as a form of capital' (1995: 65). In

this process, boxers become entrepreneurs who carefully manage their physical assets over time to produce ‘more value than was [originally] “sunk” in it’ (ibid.: 67). In similar terms, an emerging anthropological literature has shown how ‘body work’ (Gimlin 2002) aimed at creating more desirable, beautiful or attractive bodies constitutes an increasingly sensible form of capital accumulation for many (young) women and, to a lesser extent, men. For example, Alex Edmonds (2007, 2010) describes how cosmetic surgery and the beauty industry promise upward mobility for women and how aesthetic body modifications have become almost a prerequisite for finding a job in Rio de Janeiro’s highly competitive service sector. In her study of cosmetic surgery in China, Wen Hua (2013) likewise analyses ‘beauty capital’ as of great concern for young Chinese, who ‘regard an attractive appearance obtained from cosmetic surgery as a form of capital that can give them an edge in the job market’ (ibid.: 80). In Venezuela, a nation that has repeatedly won the international Miss World beauty contests, beauty, glamour and the fashioning of what Ochoa (2004) calls ‘spectacular femininities’ are vital for women entering the large employment sector of beauty and entertainment, in which aesthetic body modifications are ‘to a certain degree expected’ (ibid.: 194). To sum up, in many societies where service industries are expanding and wage labour is becoming feminized, an ‘aestheticisation’ of certain workplaces (Adkins 2001) seems to be under way, in which the bodily appearance, image and style of the workers is being emphasized, with immediate effects on beauty expectations and, as a result, the bodies of the upwardly mobile. These findings are supported and described further by the contributions to this issue.

The relationship between beautification and (economic) valorization is made most explicit in Waters’ study, in which she analyses ‘erotic capital’ as a relational and contextual category that may result in one’s increased access to economic capital. Mongolian women invest in physical attractiveness and perform a form of beauty that is commonly associated with the wealthy in order to safeguard their social and economic standing and in the hope of upward economic mobility. In the precarious ‘Wolf’ economy of present-day Mongolia, women believe that, in order to become wealthy and successful, one has to look wealthy and successful.

As has been noted above, for the young women in Sheffield described by Clarke, the beauty sector becomes a career option in a context of unemployment and marginalization. Thus, in Sheffield, an increased need for beauty capital helps entrepreneurial women to succeed by opening up salons that meet this need. Finally, for the Brazilian *travesti* described by Vartabedian, feminine beauty and attractiveness are certainly rewarded in their occupation as sex workers. However, for

them beauty and attractiveness are not simply bodily capital, but have a relevance that goes way beyond their professional lives. Instead, beauty work lies at the heart of their attempts to manufacture a new subjectivity as *travesti* and as such is an essential tool for empowerment. Given the high rates of violence and pervasive transphobia in Rio de Janeiro, for *travestis*, ‘passing’ as a beautiful woman is a question of survival.

Travestis’ empowerment through beauty brings up a question relevant to all (anthropological) studies of beauty: Can beauty, as a form of bodily capital, be understood as a tool of empowerment for the marginalized and disenfranchised – that is, for those who have little to lose but a body with more value than, to repeat Wacquant’s words, ‘was [originally] “sunk” in it’? ‘Rather than a social equalizer, beauty is a societal elevator,’ Hedwig Waters notes in her contribution to this issue with reference to Mongolian women’s hopes of social climbing in the midst of neoliberal restructuring. For the marginalized and disenfranchised, as both Clarke’s and Vartabedian’s examples stress, beauty may be vital not only in economic terms, but also more deeply in the manufacturing of confident selves. The ‘power of beauty’ that arises from the ethnographic material has been discussed extensively in feminist studies, typically from a normative angle that is critical of an empowerment perspective on beauty and that emphasizes fashion and beauty as a ‘trap’ for women (Jeffreys 2005, Wolf 1991). In this issue, the ambivalence of the power of beauty for women becomes clear from Clarke’s description of the reluctance with which young, highly educated British Asian women move into the beauty sector in spite of the (pecuniary) rewards it offers. Their ambivalence becomes understandable if one takes into consideration not only the gendered aspects of beauty, but, at a deeper level, an ongoing mind–body dualism that belittles beautification as superficial and vain and ideologically promotes the notion that beauty comes from within (cf. Tate 2009: 17–33), while at the same rewarding those who actually do manage to comply with the social, gendered and racialized standards of outer appearance.

4. The Location of Beauty

Finally, an anthropological perspective on the manufacturing of beauty and the creation of femininities that draws on ethnographic research is well advised to pay careful attention to the location of beauty in both the topographical and social senses. As exemplified by Terence Turner’s seminal work on the ‘social skin’ (2012 [1980]), a kind of socialization of the naked human body through cosmetics and body adorn-

ment, practices of (aesthetic) body modification and beautification are embedded in a symbolically loaded normative social order. The bodily adornments and modifications described in this issue are tied to collectively shared, yet place-specific imaginations of modernity, glamour and the nation in a variety of social settings.

In all three contributions, movements through space are relevant for the manufacturing and performance of beauty. For example, *travesti* sex workers migrate to Europe in order to earn the money required to pay for cosmetic surgery that in turn is needed for their full transformation into beautiful *travestis*. In this process, as Vogel (2013) similarly describes with reference to Venezuelan *transformistas* moving to Spain, 'migration' and 'Europe' assume a place in *travestis*' self-transformations that goes beyond mere topographical space and is influenced by the postcolonial situation.

While practices of contemporary aesthetic body modification have often been described in relation to particular cities and the urban space more generally, Water's contribution makes it clear that styling up and modifying one's body is not confined to urban centres. Thus, she notes how a female herder she meets in the apparently unkempt rural hinterland makes an effort at beautification in order to be 'fit for modernity' and describes how Mongolians' ideals and images of beauty are becoming increasingly commodified, regardless of where they live. Nevertheless, the 'world of style, aesthetic and performance' that Waters observes on Ulaanbaatar's central Peace Avenue points to a beauty geography that, in Mongolia too, is regarded as having an urban centre. In this particular urban space, there seems to be a 'hothouse environment' for aesthetic body modification similar to that Alex Edmonds (2007: 375) described for Rio de Janeiro, creating 'an intensely competitive and mimetic body aesthetics', especially among 'networks of female relatives and friends' (*ibid.*). Moreover, efforts at beautification and beauty work may be especially relevant for young women who move to the city from a rural hinterland to seek integration as 'modern' city dwellers (*cf.* Klenke 2011).

Finally, Hester Clarke's contribution shows that there may be different geographies of beauty even within the same city. In order to be truly successful as a British Pakistani beauty therapist – as shown by the story of one of her interlocutors, a young female entrepreneur in Sheffield – one may have to leave one's own neighbourhood or community and, in this case, move to the city centre to serve a wider, that is, a 'white' middle-class clientele. Clarke's contribution only touches upon the complicated relationship between female bodily appearance, beauty and its presentation in the public space in Islamic societies, a re-

relationship that women have to constantly negotiate in their everyday lives, even when it comes to an act as seemingly profane as shaping one's eyebrows (see also Liebelt, forthcoming).

The fact that beautification and aesthetic body modifications are tied to specific communities with specific institutions of beauty care, knowledge and technologies perhaps comes out most clearly with regard to trans-people. When asking each other 'Who made you?' (cf. Vartabedian, in this issue), Brazilian *travestis* seek information not about biological kin, but about *bombadeiras*, that is, *travesti* experts in injecting liquid silicone, or plastic and aesthetic surgeons, who each take up a central role in manufacturing *travesti* bodies and selves and hence become their genitors to a certain degree. The existence of *mães* (mothers) and *madrinhas* (godmothers), who instruct *filhas* (daughters) or *afilhadas* (god-daughters) – that is, guide newcomers to Rio de Janeiro in their journeys to becoming beautiful, urban *travestis* –, further exemplifies a hierarchically ordered system of new kinship. This example thus illustrates that, more often than not, beauty is not simply given, but depends on complex social institutions, being tied to performances in specific terrains. As such it has the sensual power and potential to transform subjects, thus unsettling patriarchal social order itself, as when *travestis* appear in the public space.

To sum up, this issue draws attention to the social location of beauty and beautification, explicating the ways in which feminine selves are produced. By doing so, it seeks to offer an ethnographically based exploration of an emerging field in anthropology, revealing how, at a particular moment in time, people's struggles around the manufacturing of beauty are intricately linked to the creation of gendered bodies and selves.

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