



COSMETIC SURGERY: CURATING RACE AND ROMANCE IN CALI, COLOMBIA

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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed: Lorenza Irene Griffin. Date: 05/10/2018

Ethics Approval

Reference number: 5201700920

See ethics approval letter in Appendix.1

Abstract

As access to cosmetic surgery expands beyond the lifeworlds of the rich and famous, it becomes increasingly sought out by everyday people across cultural contexts. Its popularity in the cultural and historical setting of Cali, Colombia sees cosmetic surgery emerging as a conventional form of beauty work. In Cali, many perceive beauty to be a currency and indeed a virtue, denoting values of modernity, racial prejudice, and competition in romantic markets. While men are increasingly seeking out these surgeries, cosmetic surgery remains predominantly within the purview of the city's women. As such, the dominant feminine beauty ideal is normalised, and admired. It is cultivated by means of various forms of beauty work, and ultimately through cosmetic surgical intervention.

During two months of research in Cali, ethnographic research methods were used for an anthropological exploration into the underlying historical, gendered and socioeconomic issues informing Cali's dominant beauty ideal and the value of beauty in this city, which influences and reproduces women's conceptions of their bodies, and relationships.

The research reveals how, and the extent to which, historical colonial and drug trafficking legacies impact contemporary constructions and expressions of beauty in Cali, and the ubiquitous practice of cosmetic surgery. I explore how beauty is imbued with values of "modernity", which are intertwined with racial stigma and neoliberal subjectivity. Further, within a traditionally *machista* (chauvinist) society, the operated-on body is perceived to be a source of leverage and power in romantic relationships for women.

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INTRODUCTION: Cali

“Better - is more beautiful, more successful”- Sofia

After two months of planning via WhatsApp, Anabel picked me up from Cali airport on a typically warm and humid Caleña afternoon. My plane was forty-five minutes late and even though Anabel had a crisis at work that day, and needed every minute to make up for an absent staff member, she showed no indication of stress. With a big smile on her face she greeted me as I appeared from inside the terminal. Anabel is a fashion designer, and with a “Miss Colombia” pageant happening in Cartagena within a few days, she had taken time out of her day to collect me from the airport amidst a frantic rush to finish putting together bejewelled and colourful bikini swimsuits for the contestants in her workshop. Once in the car, she schooled me in the most necessary and important safety precautions that must be taken while in Cali. “Lorenza, you must be careful; this is very serious. When we are in the car, even if the car is moving, do not take out your phone and be careful of people on motorcycles who ride beside the car”. Anabel was curious as to why I could speak Spanish, and asked me how I learnt. I mentioned my Peruvian partner. She expressed surprise and excitement and told me, “*Bueno Lorenza*”, “anyway, Lorenza, we will find you a nice Colombian guy, Colombian men are very attractive and passionate”. I laughed it off, saying, “but my partner, I care for him too much”. She responded, “Ayyy it’s fine Lorenza, us Colombians...” – she gestured putting her fingers to her lips, as if to zip them up – “we don’t say anything. You have to experience all the nice things that Colombia has to offer”. I laughed off the persistent enthusiasm and encouragement expressed about my potential disloyalty. As I was to find throughout the research, playful allusions to infidelity and sexuality were commonplace among Caleños. In fact, a certain openness about one’s erotic power revealed itself to be of social value in this highly sexualised society, especially for women. Stemming from ingrained structures of gender relations and rapid economic change, which has come with its own accompanying values of competition that pit women against each other in markets of love, one informant declared in confirmation of this, “beauty is currency here”.

As Anabel continued to drive along the highway leading into the city, I gazed out the window toward the agricultural fields and the misty green mountains that delineate the boundaries of the Cauca Valley, and I imagined how this land encompasses much of the

racial and economic history that I had read about before arrival. Michael Taussig's (2012) words occurred to me: "cosmic surgery was practised on the Colombian landscape long before it was carried out on the bodies of Colombian women" (p. 24). Anabel asked me what I knew about Colombia, what food I wanted to try and where I wanted to go. She was excited to hear that I looked forward to eating *chontaduro* (a locally grown peach-palm fruit that is eaten with salt and honey). As we drove, Anabel repeated her recommended safety precautions several times, as she closed the dark tinted windows. Suddenly, Anabel spotted a street side vendor and declared loudly, "Chontaduro! You can eat it now!". Slowing the car beside the road where the vendors worked, she lowered the window and spoke loudly to the women at the stall. Three Afro-Colombian women talked with her as she asked the price and told them that we would take the fruit with salt and honey. While the women were pouring salt and honey into the bag Anabel leant over to me and said, "there are a lot of *negritos*¹ [black people] in Cali". Already aware of the demographics of the city, I replied, "Yes". She continued, "Me, I don't like them", while shaking her head. Somewhat taken off guard, I asked why. Anabel waved her hands in front of her face as if to say, "They smell". Bewildered at the overt racism, I was grateful that one of the women from the stall had returned to the car window with the bag of chontaduro, interrupting the conversation. Anabel gave the woman the money, the woman gave me the bag of fruit, and we sped off back onto the road. Anabel continued, perhaps sensing my doubt, justifying her statement, "Most of them are drug traffickers, or commit crimes".

Not only is this untrue but it is rooted in historically situated racial relations within the Cauca Valley in which Afro-descended peoples have been positioned in society with little economic or social capital. Anabel had confused the women's presumed transgenerational socioeconomic hardship—observed in the women's clothing and economic activity—for a naturalised racial characteristic. This has been reinforced by way of structural violence (Farmer 2004) that stems from a history of slaveholding in the Cauca Valley (Walker 2017, Appelbaum 2003, Fernandez 1986). On a societal scale, structural barriers and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2001) extend beyond obstruction to accessing medical care, and occur in everyday sociocultural and economic life (Farmer 2004, Mullan 2007, Walker 2017). In Cali, pejorative stereotypes and cultural narratives follow Afro-Colombians around, like those

¹ The term *negro/a* in Colombia can be a term of endearment among close friends or a racially defamatory term (Wade 2009). The diminutive suffix *-ito*, *-ita* is often used to soften the expression of a word in Spanish, or it can be used to infer affection between people by adding the suffix to the end of somebody's name. Anabel used the suffix when talking generally about Afro-Colombians "*negritos*", presumably to remain politically correct, despite her overtly racist remarks that followed.

which Anabel expressed, i.e., involvement with criminal activity, and a state of uncleanness – “smelliness”, assumed to be the result of poor hygiene. Demonstrative wealth, beauty, and hygienic appearance form constitutive elements of the socially sanctioned “modern” and “civilised” urban Caleña subjectivity. The narratives of criminality and incivility that Anabel has attached to black people seem to justify her dislike of them (which later on in the research was revealed to be an ambivalent dislike, mixed with genuine empathy). Unfortunately, however, racism is common in Cali, and it fortifies barriers that obstruct social and economic autonomy and mobility for many Afro-descended (and Indigenous) people. Indeed, a study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme has recently shown that 60% of Afro-Colombians are living in poverty² (United Nations Development Program 2012). The patterns of socioeconomic disadvantage suffered by Afro-Colombians, as a result, inform dominant stereotypes of this community. They further carry into valued cultural domains like beauty contests and the dominant aesthetics seen in beauty ideals, reinforcing historical racial stigmas.

Focus

This first ethnographic encounter I had in Cali demonstrates how beauty ideals and the cosmetic surgery culture intersect with race and female fears about infidelity. These two themes constitute two focal points of this anthropological investigation. Beauty and race are concepts informed by myriad social and semiotic meanings that evoke wealth or poverty, modernity or backwardness, power or oppression. A woman manages the symbolism of these concepts through beauty work in Cali, namely aesthetic surgery.

Part one of this thesis will explore the extent to which women perceive that undergoing cosmetic surgery can secure some degree of stability and control over heterosexual romantic relationships. In Cali’s economic setting—especially among the poor, romantic relationships provide economic and social mobility or stability for many women who find themselves working within historically gendered roles in caring and domestic spheres; thus, they often do not and cannot aspire to share equal human capital to men (Giraldo, Arias, Arce & Serna 2006). Accordingly, cosmetic surgery appears as a tool for cultivating a different type of capital: erotic capital, and thus visibility and security in markets of love. This will be theoretically supported by examining the symbolic and socio-structural

² The UNDP report can be found (in Spanish) by following the link:
<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/colombia/docs/ODM/undp-co-odmafrocolombianos-2012.pdf>

origins of gendered habitus (Bourdieu 2001). Gendered habitus provides a theoretical basis for understanding why and how the exaggerated feminine aesthetic ideal is reproduced. This furthermore becomes significant in analysing women's perceptions of men and heterosexual relations.

Part two will focus on the ways that race is conceived of through historical social relations which thereby influence contemporary conceptions of beauty. I explore how historically racist notions influence beauty ideals and interact with "modernising" economic policies which inculcate a certain neoliberal subjectivity (McGuigan 2014). That is, Cali's (read: Colombia's) neoliberalised economic framework accommodates a re-valuation of some colonially rooted racial markers that inform concepts of beauty. I examine how many Afro-descended women see cosmetic surgery as the only means by which they can successfully manage the historically stigmatised semiotics of their bodies so as to conform to "modern" hegemonic beauty norms that are constructed through the Valley's racial history. Through cosmetic surgery the Afro-Colombian woman appropriates the symbolic "virtues" of whiteness which balances out her stigmatized and fetishized corporeal symbolism. Likewise, women who are phenotypically identified as white or mixed-race appropriate the aesthetic markers of fetishized blackness. Thus, there is great fuss over one's image in Cali. And pervasive evaluation and cultivation of image disseminates symbolic messages among the body politic regarding how much one has mastered the power-charged urban values of economic modernity, and civility in Cali.

Beauty Culture in Colombia

Colombia ranks consistently within the top three countries in the world for the most cosmetic surgical procedures (Heidekrueger, Juran, Aung, Tanna, Broer 2017). Within Colombia, the flourishing plastic surgery industry is culturally linked to the cities of Cali, Medellin and Pereira. These cities are where the booming industry was bankrolled and thrust into the mainstream by the infamous drug trade of the 1980s and 1990s (Appelbaum 2003, Hunt 2015, Taussig 2012). This is a delicate topic for Colombians who have since worked hard to rid their country of the reputation it received from this violent time. Indeed, the ill-famed drug trade together with 50 years of paramilitary violence with the state have dominated international media representations of Colombia. It is a country where legacies of war, colonialism, and slavery continue to affect the peoples and structures of Colombian society politically, socially and, I will argue, aesthetically. Moreover, Colombia is renowned for its beauty queens, and it is a medical tourism destination for beauty treatments that lie at

the vanguard of the industry. With this in view, Colombia presents as an interesting site for ethnographic research that aims to explore the historical, economic, and cultural forces that fuel the increasingly high value assigned to beauty. This has implications for a beauty paradigm that is expanding across the globe (Griffiths & Mullock 2018, Hakim 2010, Rosen 2004, Wolf 1991), and the growing global beauty industry that is converging with medicine and discourses of health (Edmonds 2010, Winch, Hester & Walters 2016).

Beauty work in Colombia—especially in Cali—sees masses of the female population invest a great deal of time, money and energy on beauty practices, including surgical procedures. As such, I explore the following questions: How do dominant conceptions of beauty and practices of cosmetic surgery in Cali intersect with issues concerning markets of love, issues of gender, status, and race? In the context of Cali, are the advantages that are perceived to come with erotic capital the most powerful form of capital that a woman can wield? What does this reveal about the symbolic underpinnings of the shared socio-structural psyche³?

Based in Santiago de Cali where plastic surgery is becoming a conventional form of beauty work, I conducted two months of ethnographic research where participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews made up the bulk of the research methodology. Through these methods I gained insight into the discursive, economic, interpersonal, and historical spheres of influence that underpin the Caleña culture of beauty and the widespread practice of cosmetic surgery in the city.

In Cali, beauty is highly valued and speaks to a contemporary metropolitan subjectivity that is imbued with values of so-called “modernity” and progress which become inscribed on female bodies through the cultivation of a curvaceous aesthetic ideal (Schaeffer 2012, Hunt 2015). This ideal, for the great majority of women, is only achievable through undergoing cosmetic surgeries. With the high value placed on beauty within the city, many women dedicate considerable time, energy and money on cultivating a version of “ideal” beauty as a form of erotic capital. Through this, cosmetic surgery is becoming a normative practice of beauty work.

³ I use the term “psyche” frequently through-out this thesis. I do not necessarily wish to invoke psychoanalytic theory by the use of this term. Rather, I refer to a shared space of the community imaginary where individuals recognise common symbols and meanings within a cultural setting.

Gender, Romance and Infidelity

Firstly, the research gave insight to the significance of romantic relationships which factor into women's motivations for undergoing cosmetic surgery. Using Bourdieu to theoretically approach gender relations, I analyse my interlocutors' repeated remarks about fears and patterns of male infidelity in Cali, and how these are linked to practices of cosmetic surgery. Infidelity, gender, and socio-structural symbolism are interlinking variables that influence and reproduce the ubiquitous practices of beauty work in Cali. I will show that perceptions of widespread male infidelity inspire cosmetic surgery on the part of heterosexual women. Ultimately this portrays women as wielding considerably less power in Caleña society compared to men. Feminist perspectives on beauty work and cosmetic surgery have been diverse and conflicting. Hakim (2010, 2011) argues for erotic capital as an emerging resource for women that is approaching equal value to economic, cultural and social capital. This is criticized by Green (2013: 139,149) who convincingly argues that Hakim's thesis is "asociological". Nevertheless, Hakim's term "erotic capital" has made an impact and she has argued that its cultivation underlines a woman's potential to become empowered by manipulating "the large imbalance between men and women in sexual interest" (Hakim 2010: 499), that which Hakim calls the "male sex deficit" (ibid: 512) existing in male-dominant gender relations (Hakim 2010, 2011). From this perspective cosmetic surgery as a tool for the cultivation of erotic capital can be understood as a practical intervention in a female's path to empowerment. It is also this perspective of empowerment that women who undergo cosmetic surgery themselves most often corroborate. This is most evident across mediascapes like Instagram, a popular photo and video sharing application, and on websites like realself.com, where a community of women document their surgical experiences with photos and blog posts, and where themselves and doctors share advice, knowledge, and comfort during doctor selection and recovery. Likewise, women's agency in undertaking cosmetic surgery was highlighted by Davis (1995) whose research indicated that cosmetic surgery appeared to be a typically positive intervention in the lives of her research participants, who displayed knowledge and agency regarding the process of choosing to undergo surgery.

Conversely, feminist literature that criticises aesthetic surgery suggests that women's agency and participation in beauty practices such as cosmetic surgery is resultant of dominant and controlling patriarchal power relations (Bordo 1993, Morgan 1991, Wolf 1991). It is the latter perspective which will underpin my analysis. I will examine Caleña enthusiasm for cosmetic surgery using Bourdieu's (2001) '*Masculine Domination*' for theoretical grounding.

Race, History and Corporal Symbolism

Cali is the capital city of the Cauca Valley in Colombia, which is situated at the foothills of the central and western mountain ranges that divide the valley from the Pacific Ocean. It is a temperate zone where subtropical weather patterns mean that the seasons are divided into a wet season and a dry season, making the Cauca Valley extremely fertile. Because of the region's weather, agricultural activities have historically made up the bulk of its economic production (Taussig 1978, Fernandez 1986). This saw the transatlantic slave trade arrive to the Cauca Valley, imported by landowners to work the land (Fernandez 1986). Thus, the demography of Cali and its surrounds includes a large proportion of Afro-descended people whose history has contemporary sociocultural and symbolic significance on beauty aesthetics. In this thesis I explore how dominant conceptions of Afro-descendants' bodies and the symbolism read on them affect the way Caleños conceive of beauty and practice beauty today, especially in light of Cali's history of racism (Appelbaum 2003). I look at the specific ways Afro-descended women engage with beauty practices in Cali and link this to a history of racist semiotic links to Afro-descended people's bodies and the enduring racism in Cali today. I argue that racism is perpetuated symbolically through practices of beauty work and cosmetic surgery.

In academic literature, there is no denial that conceptions of race factor into beauty ideals (Hunter 2002) and thus factor into cosmetic surgery cultures and beauty work (Webster & Driskell 1983, Edmonds 2010, Schaeffer 2012, Hunter 2002). Schaeffer (2012) and Rahier (2011) underline how racism and race-typical features of the female body denote particular meanings in Colombia and Ecuador, along with the degree of one's conformity to or rejection of modern values of civility, progress and morality. Sierra Becerra (2017) and Rahier (1998, 1999) highlighted how racialized bodies are stigmatized or fetishized and thus inform popular conceptions of beauty where whiteness dominates. Along similar lines Jarrin (2015) argued that cosmetic surgery in Brazil is a "neoliberal extension of eugenic concerns" (p. 537), emphasizing a tendency of the cosmetic surgery industry to pathologise and degrade race-typical or ethnic-typical features through its increasing social normalisation (see Aquino [2017] for discussion of pathologisation of race-typical features in South Korea's cosmetic surgery industry). Additionally, discourses of race in Latin America have been connected to cosmetic surgery and nationalism in countries where policies and discourses of miscegenation, or "race mixing", have historically defined the racial make-up of its diverse citizenry (Jarrin 2015, Edmonds 2010, Sierra Becerra 2017). In places like Brazil and Colombia, scholars have analysed cosmetic surgery cultures to advance the concepts of

“aesthetic citizenship” (Edmonds 2010) and “aesthetic nationalism” (Hunt 2015), linking beauty work with practices of citizenship and nationhood. For Alex Edmonds (2010), the aesthetic citizen is an individual who enacts his or her “right” to accessing beauty work such as cosmetic surgery, which has been incorporated into the public health system in Brazil. Consequently, this enables women to conform to the dominant, racially-particular aesthetic ideal, notwithstanding socio-economic positioning (Edmonds 2010). More recently in Colombia, Stacey Hunt (2015) borrowed this concept from Edmonds and described an economic development model, with the cosmetic surgery industry at the centre of it, which was put in place by the state. This policy aimed to strengthen the Colombian aesthetic surgery industry by bringing in foreign medical tourists, using special visas. Through this, international tourism marketing seldom failed to mention Colombian “beauty”—geographical and of the body politic—as a feature of national pride. Subsequently, the promotional efficacy of using the beauty of Colombian women to bolster international tourism and public pride projected an aesthetic Colombian nationalism which, Hunt (2015) argued, “mediates women’s relationship to the nation-state” (p. 551).

Narcoculture and Parallel Neoliberalisations

This thesis also addresses links between neoliberal economic adjustment and the recent history of drug trafficking, which have impacted Caleña sociocultural trends and psyches. These themes interlink with the beauty phenomenon in Cali. While I lack the space in this thesis to explore this in depth, I note the parallel values shared between neoliberal economic policies—which generate a certain neoliberal subjectivity (McGuigan 2014)—and the entrepreneurial and capitalistic practices inherent in *narcocultura* (narcoculture) (Rojas-Sotelo 2014). For example, Philippe Bourgois’ (1995) ethnography on the poor and segregated Puerto Rican community of Harlem in New York underscored how his crack dealing informants of the underground economy operated with an entrepreneurial vision, adjusting their businesses, product and prices according to the evolving crack market in a way that paralleled the practices of the above-ground capitalist economy. Additionally, Bourgois (1995) explored how drug trafficking rings in urban locations wield significant influence on the cultural and ideological values of the (often poor) communities in which they operate. I suggest that not only have the entrepreneurial values of narcoculture exemplified the economic values of late capitalism, but that narcoculture has smoothed the way for neoliberal economic adjustment to enter the common-sense of the Caleña public psyche. This includes an “enlightened avarice [as] the motivating incentive for the self”

(McGuigan 2014: 224) in combination with a “cool” disposition in which one fuses sexual fetish with commodity fetishism (Taussig 2012, McGuigan 2014). The narco-aesthetic i.e., *la muñeca de la mafia*, the mafia doll (Salazar, Peña & Giraldo 2017), makes this precise fusion and demonstrates that the callous money-making values of narcoculture, have transformed into an “enlightened avarice” within the neoliberal condition, and the aesthetic symbolism of narcoculture has logically followed. Indeed, the result of objectifying and commoditising the body beautiful is economic opportunity and elevated social status, much like the hallmarks of narcoculture revealed by mafia dolls (Salazar et al., 2017) albeit without the demoralising stigma of appropriating such status and opportunity by way of criminal connection. Instead, meritocratic self-congratulatory confidence—spread through the myth of neoliberal prosperity for all—frames “operated women” (*mujeres operadas*) as champions of modern, civilised economics. The narco-aesthetic now speaks to the consumption praxis of the neoliberal era. The vanity and social climbing that reverberated out from narcoculture find their legitimated expression in neoliberal society.

Thus, the women who embody the narco-aesthetic have enjoyed the added benefit of shedding the heinous links to narco-trafficking that the narco-aesthetic entailed. These links have been dissolved under the neoliberal banner and replaced with “virtuous” associations to consumerism and capitalist commoditisation of the human body. With Cali essentially functioning as one of the cartel hubs during the drug trafficking upsurge of the 1980’s and 1990’s (Appelbaum 2003), I suggest that the aforementioned parallel values, of narco-culture and neoliberalism, prepared the sociocultural landscape in Cali for the continuous growth of the plastic surgery industry, projecting beauty as a virtuous goal in a time where sociocultural values are market-oriented. Indeed, the emphasis on vanity and eroticisation of the feminine figure through mass cosmetic surgical consumption encompasses a subjectivity involving a “hedonistic spirit that is no longer dysfunctional to business” (McGuigan 2014: 232).

Likewise, Taussig (2012), Schaeffer (2012) and Edmonds (2010) explored cosmetic surgery through its links to neoliberal subjectivity in Colombia and Brazil, emphasising that it is situated within a global consumer culture which commodifies the body. This also sees consumption practices surrounding beauty and body alteration as expressions of individuality, market participation, and compliance with late capitalism’s values of entrepreneurship and consumer sovereignty (Schaeffer 2015, Hunt 2015 Winch, Hester & Walters 2016, McGuigan 2017). Thus, within a capitalistic rhetoric of meritocracy where beauty is an object of value, it could be suggested that “ugliness” is not only a choice, but a concerted act of incivility or vulgarity on the part of one who enjoys the excesses of the

“modern” world but who does not “work hard enough” to contribute to it in an aesthetically modern, progressive or “civilised” manner (Schaeffer 2012, Winch et al., 2016). Beauty marks the societal “winners” and “losers” portraying the “fat” or “ugly” as neoliberal failures (Winch et al., 2016). As such, beauty stands in for one’s moral positioning around issues of economics, health, and “progress” especially in the global socioeconomic climate of neoliberalisation. With beauty tied to notions of modernity, civility and success, cosmetic surgery appears as an instrument for producing an ideal, socially sanctioned selfhood; Taussig (2012) remarks on fashion, consumption and cosmetic surgery in Colombia as a “civilising uplift like a new religion” (p.29).

Moreover, Taussig (2012) links the violence which the cosmetic surgery carries out on the body with the violence and tragedy in Colombia brought about by decades of drug trafficking and state-guerrilla conflict, while also looking back to colonisation. He outlines a violent history of colonialism, drug trafficking, increasing social polarity and environmental destruction that is resultant of neoliberal economic policies and projects. This, according to Taussig, has set up beauty in Colombia “not as form but as force” (p. 3). He further explores the extent to which women in Colombia regularly and voluntarily put their otherwise healthy bodies under the scalpel to be cut open, enhanced or drained, sewed up and often left deformed or injured, tying this to the multiple forms of violence in Colombia. As such, we can see that the legacies of narcoculture and the introduction of neoliberalisation have had social and cultural outcomes in Colombia. Corporal marking in the social sphere—especially as it pertains to ideas of beauty—excludes or amplifies one’s social capital. This implicates beauty (viewed dominantly as the *narcoestetica* in Cali) as a moralistic neoliberal practice, accommodately ushered in by the capitalistic activities of drug-trafficking organisations.

Overall, the socio-cultural meanings of cosmetic surgery, demonstrate that markers of social membership along with discursive and ideological discourses around race, gender and history, come to be expressed on and through the physical body in Cali. My research explores how the myriad meanings attached to beauty are abstracted and reproduced in the symbolism of the intimate body and the body politic, and how these meanings are connected to the particular historical background and ethno-cultural milieu of Cali.

Part One: INFIDELITY AND BEAUTY IN CALI

“The woman, here, likes very much to go out with guys so that they leave their partner; one has to be prettier than the other, more gorgeous than the other.” - Jimena

Introduction

Infidelity, the suspicion of it, the fear of it, and the expectation of it frequently appeared in conversations with Caleña interlocutors as a motivating force that leads women to seek out cosmetic surgery. For example, in the conversation I had with Anabel upon arriving in Cali, not only did the issues of race and economics (discussed in part two) become relevant, but Anabel, upon learning about my partner who waited for me back in Australia, spoke flippantly about finding me a “nice Colombian boy”, assuring me that, “Colombian men are very handsome and passionate”. At my assurance that I was not interested, she retorted, “us Colombians, we don’t say anything”, i.e., my boyfriend would never find out. She encouraged me to “enjoy all the nice things that Colombia has to offer” during my time there. Insinuations of being disloyal to my partner, from a person who I barely knew, did not seem outrageous for Anabel. She portrayed sex and its seemingly incidental result – infidelity – as part and parcel of the “fun” a foreigner can enjoy when in Cali. This flippant rhetoric about the pleasures of “handsome” and “passionate” Colombian men is playful and common. However, it runs alongside conversations, with just as much frequency, about emotional and personal experiences and fears regarding infidelity. For example, upon getting know Anabel during the research, she opened up to me about the painful history she had with her ex-husband who she found out was unfaithful. He had a lover and Anabel confessed that at one “low point” she had pleaded with the lover to disappear from their lives. Anabel’s history and experience with infidelity revealed that the topic which she had previously, playfully joked about, even encouraged that I partake in, is a commonly emotive issue in Cali. Anabel—who has undergone breast augmentation and liposuction surgeries—changed her rhetoric about infidelity from superficial to very serious when recounting the pain and “suffering” her ex-husband put her through when she discovered his lover: “I suffered, Lorenza, my god I suffered so much”.

Schaeffer (2012) has linked markets of love with Caleña women’s use of cosmetic surgery. She argues that cosmetic surgery represents modern, moral and civilized neoliberal selfhood, which is believed to demonstrate value in international love markets. Further, Hunt (2015:553) acknowledges the “added value” that women feel cosmetic surgery provides them

in their private and professional lives. This research project, likewise, finds a nexus between cosmetic surgery and romantic relationships, as it reveals culturally widespread fears and concerns that Caleña women experience around heterosexual relationships. These fears and concerns about infidelity mark a pivotal point in women's dedication to beauty work, and their decisions to undergo plastic surgery in Cali. Salazar, Peña and Giraldo (2017) acknowledge the legacy of narcoculture in Colombia, which produced its own aesthetic ideal, *narcoestetica*. This aesthetic is widely recognised in Colombia, where it is epitomised by the feminine body that is cosmetically and surgically augmented to exaggerated extremes. Salazar et al. (2017) underline the economic vulnerability of women in Colombian society which has driven many to engage the romantic interests of wealthy drug-trafficking lovers who finance multiple cosmetic surgeries that ultimately transform these women into *muñecas de la mafia*, "mafia dolls". The embodied narco-aesthetic is explicitly linked with female desire and necessity to please wealthy narco-trafficking male partners, "for when they [narco-traffickers] are not present in the relationship, women can suffer pressures, emotional annulments, even the rupture of the romantic relationship and the loss of material support for herself and her family" (Salazar et al. 2017: 60). This literature ties together beauty work and heterosexual relationships with female economic and social instability. Despite the fact that the authors write about beauty work predominantly within the representative boundaries of narcoculture, as discussed in the thesis introduction, the values inherent in the narcoculture of Colombia have continued to permeate society under neoliberalism⁴. Moreover, this literature (Salazar et al. 2017) aligns with Naomi Wolf's (1991) notion that beauty functions like a currency system: "Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact. In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves" (p. 12). In the cultural context of Cali, female economic vulnerability is often managed through women's beauty regimens and heterosexual romantic relationships as competitive arenas for socioeconomic stability.

⁴ As discussed in the introduction, there is a case to be made for the analogous values seen in the entrepreneurial spirit of the narcoculture and the dominant neoliberal paradigm that now operates Colombia's economy. The transition to neoliberalism can be argued to have provided easy passage for the cultural values born out of narcoculture like the sexualised narco-aesthetic – or vice-versa. Through this the narco-aesthetic is no longer minimised and disparaged by its links to the violence associated with drug-trafficking; but now these same features of narco-culture become virtuous qualities in the era of neoliberalism (McGuigan 2014). (See Hunt 2015, Schaeffer 2012 for the link between neoliberal subjectivity and cosmetic surgery in Colombia.)

Existing research on love and male infidelity shows that adulterous behaviour across societies is tolerated by women to varying degrees due to the material benefits that women experience by being partnered (Edin & Kefalas 2011; Macaуда et al, 2011; Rebhun 1999; Le Vine, Correa, Medardo Tapia Uribe 1986). While academic literature on infidelity is limited, what exists at present demonstrates that across societies and groups wherein females acknowledge a high probability of male infidelity, female socio-economic disadvantage is a constant. This also appeared to be the case in Cali. I argue that beauty work for women in Cali remains linked to their socioeconomic vulnerability, rooted in patriarchal power relations, that drive women to depend on the financial and social stability provided by males. Further, women make a “virtue of necessity” (Bourdieu 1977: 46, 57) in Cali such that being beautiful comes with twofold added moral or virtuous positioning within the inculcated structures of masculine domination (Bourdieu 2001, Gatens 2013) and neoliberalisation (Winch, Hester, Walter 2016, Hunt 2015, Schaeffer 2012). With women using cosmetic surgery and erotic capital in order to compete for economic and social resources in romantic markets, what follows is female anxiety that revolves around romantic relationships where men ultimately have the upper hand economically, romantically and socially. And thus, women’s perceptions of men abound with anecdotes and fears about infidelity.

The Eroticised Culture of Cali



Sticker on the back of a public taxi, it reads, '*Inquieto/a*' in English 'restless' instead of the 'o' or 'a' on the end of the word, a stencil outline of a couple in a sex position replaces the last letter.

On the same day that Anabel collected me from Cali's airport, her boyfriend, Jaime, advised me, "the reasons why people come to Cali are not for monuments and history. They are prostitution, drugs, and *rumba* [partying]". I told him that Cali is also a popular tourist destination for cosmetic surgery. "Oh, yes of course! That too," he laughed. "The Caleña woman is *muy operada* [very operated-on], but why?" He mused, "Some Colombian women like easy money and they are very beautiful [because of the surgery] so, I'm not saying that all Colombian women are prostitutes but there is a lot of prostitution here, especially in Cali". I ignored the temptation to ask him what makes him think that "prostitution" is "easy" and instead made a mental note about Jaime's conceptual leap from the mention of cosmetic surgery directly to sex work and feminine sexuality.

Feminine sexual suggestion simmered at the surface of daily life in Cali. The sexualised feminine body appeared in every corner of the city. Seeking relief from the heat one afternoon I entered a church in the city centre in order to quietly sit and cool down. Two women walked in who looked as if they were mother and daughter, tight pants hugging two big, round behinds and long hair dangled down their backs. They walked past me and approached the main altar where they piously made the signs of the cross, kissing their fingers upon "amen", before turning to sit in a pew. Constantly in-your-face, aside from the living breathing voluptuous beauties that can always be observed in public, plastic eroticised feminine bodies poke out from fashion-store fronts. Shop mannequins face inward and their giant backsides interrupt the footpath trajectory, parading skin-tight blue jeans. Once the bottom-hugging jeans have all been displayed, the following line of mannequins face outward to the footpath and people tilt their heads and swerve out of the way of the doll's bulging breasts. Tiny cleavage-revealing crop tops stretch over the mannequins' breasts; it appeared that, *all that reveals and all that suggests* provides the undergirding logic to fashion in Cali. One could also be forgiven for wondering whether the shop mannequins are advertising the skimpy clothing, or breast and buttock augmentation. This would make sense as I recall Anabel's words, "it is in the culture here that, in one moment we women change ourselves into mannequins". Further, Caleños seem to take for granted how pervasive images and suggestions of female eroticism are in daily life. Some expression of feminine sexuality often appears within all manner of human interaction: in church, in conversations, and in the most mundane activities of life in Cali, like avoiding collision with bulging plastic breasts on the footpath, or introducing a foreigner to the city. Jaime's introduction of Cali, and his male understanding of Cali's tourism drawcards— sex, drugs and partying—demonstrate this.

Jaime's comments stayed with me during my two-month stay in Cali; particular things would draw my memory back to them. One day I received a message from a journalist who had spent the last five months in Cali learning salsa. She was a Swiss girl who wrote for a globally popular men's magazine. She was interested in talking to me about my research as the magazine's editor had asked her to write another article about Cali. Remaining tight-lipped about the emerging themes and analysis that was coming out of my research, I spoke with her about the first article that she had written about the city of Cali. "Oh, it was about the sex motels here", she informed me, "they are pretty much in every *barrio* [neighbourhood]". This was not the first time I had come across the subject of sex motels as they are commonplace in many Latin American countries. Other Latin friends had told me that they are frequently patronised by young couples, as it is not uncommon for children to live with their parents until they marry. Thus, sex motels that rent out rooms by the hour provide retreat for young sexually active couples who rarely come by privacy in their familial homes. Conveniently, sex motels also provide sex workers with work space and unfaithful partners with privacy, while payment in cash provides them all with anonymity. I told one research participant that sex motels are, to my knowledge, non-existent in Australia or at least extremely uncommon. To this she replied, "they shouldn't exist, because what do they endorse?" intimating the culture of infidelity which was the topic of our conversation.

This chapter delves into personal affect experienced by one socially and culturally aware informant. Her critique of the eroticised symbolism present in everyday life in Cali spurred by the culture of beauty, revealed that it clashes against her personal values. This further reveals the beauty paradigm as an oppressive social force for a conscious minority. I also explore the prevailing eroticisation of the feminine body—fast becoming the standard—through cosmetic surgery. This is shown to have a significant impact on how heterosexual women experience romantic relationships: anxiously. This chapter further traces out the stigmas attached to single women, and the perceptions of men held by women regarding the dynamics of heterosexual romantic relationships amidst Cali's striking culture of beauty. These stigmas and perceptions inform the degree to which many women invest in beauty work. Additionally, commonly-shared ideas of the role that women's beauty plays in apparent norms and expectations of male infidelity demonstrate that within Caleña society, discourses of beauty exist within patriarchal structures of domination while simultaneously reproducing them. Moreover, these dynamics of heterosexual relationships endure alongside

a contradictory rhetorical emphasis on female “empowerment” through cosmetic surgery, further locating the phenomenon within ingrained patriarchal social relations.

Rejecting the Beauty Paradigm

Clara, a Caleña friend, was discouraged by the unceasing innuendo and pressure to conform to a beauty paradigm that only “empowers” women to the extent that they are willing to cultivate and exploit their erotic capital. She socially isolated herself, avoiding the famous Caleña *rumba*, despite the pleasure she took in dancing salsa. Clara was viscerally affected, and intellectually frustrated by the pressure for her to look a certain way, to flirt a certain way, to enact her femininity in a certain way – especially as an Afro-Colombian woman. This manifested itself in her tendency to self-exclude, and it came out especially strong during the Cali Feria – a time when Caleños have a five-day holiday between Christmas and New Year’s Eve. With concerts and temporary bars open every night all over the city, the Cali Feria is famous globally. I sat in Clara’s lounge room one night as she made a rebellious point not to answer texts or phone calls from her friends who were asking her where she was, and why she wasn’t out with them partying. One phone call Clara did answer: it was her father, a DJ in Cali, who called to tell her that she should come out and that her friends were asking about her. Clara rolled her eyes several times during the phone call, as she explained repeatedly that she didn’t feel like going out, that she would visit her dad and her friends another time. Exasperated, she turned to me and said, “There is nothing out there for me; why would I put myself amongst that?” A genuine sadness appeared in her eyes, her voice and her posture.

Clara has herself undergone breast augmentation as a young woman in her late teens. During this phase of her life (at the height of the narcoculture) she also underwent liposuction on her abdomen, but when I met her, she had not had any cosmetic surgical procedure for some years. Looking back on her younger years fondly, appreciating the fun and the privilege that she experienced as a young attractive Caleña woman, Clara, having experienced the lustful hedonism of relationships in Cali, now refused to participate in this cultural economy that prioritised beauty, status and money. It reaffirmed to her a certain hopelessness about finding love in the city as a matured and professional adult. In her evolving conscious rejection of this culture, she grew prouder and more defiant, telling me how she wanted to cut all of her hair off so that it could grow back natural. This is a pointed political statement against the culture of beauty in Cali as Afro-Colombian women’s natural hair is heavily stigmatised and much money is spent on “controlling” it. This was Clara rejecting a culture

that cannot appreciate the value that she can contribute to it, if it cannot accept and respect who she is: an educated and proud Afro-descended woman. Certainly, no slave to beauty, status or money.

The Lonely Cost of Rejecting the Beauty Paradigm

A particular dimension to Clara's self-exclusion and evident sadness that surrounded her discomfort in her home city was the degree of loneliness which left her torn between her principles and her longing for a partner. "I haven't had a proper boyfriend in ... oof... ten years" she told me. "The thing with Colombian guys is that they are very passionate and very complimentary and they make you feel so good when you are with them, but they cannot be trusted when you are not with them. Colombian guys are *muy coqueto*, very flirtatious". Clara often lamented, during the many evenings we spent talking on her back patio, that she was incredibly lonely, and that it caused her great sadness to be on the edge of forty without even a partner. "I never imagined my life to be this way ... you imagine that ... by forty you will have a life partner ... I just want, so much, to share my life with someone". Her solitude anguished her, and she explained that, of her friends whom she still had from school, all were partnered with Colombian guys. She told me, "They accept it, the way it is here. You accept that your man is probably going to be unfaithful, or you live alone". Clara felt the pain of both options equally and resigned herself to the pain of loneliness for the sake of her dignity. This was despite the pity her friends expressed over her lack of male company. "Yes, they always ask me why I don't have a man in my life, and they must think it is because I am hopeless with men, but I am not, I just don't accept the way things are here". Upon hearing how her friends often brought up her solo lifestyle, my mind recalled a conversation with another informant, Jimena, whose words echoed loudly in my memory: "*Una mujer que no tenga marido, la ven como bicho raro*", "A women who isn't married, is looked upon as a rare creature. Neither the status that a woman receives from having a husband or partner, nor the economic benefits that often accompany it appealed to Clara's personal values. Further, Clara objected to the way that the beauty paradigm and the normalisation of cosmetic surgery in the City reproduced patterns of patriarchy in heterosexual relationships that compel women to acquiesce to beauty ideals. She told me,

"You know what? [We] women are changing our minds, and changing the male mind. If more women have surgeries, then, guys [can] say..."ok, I want one of these ones [women]—why? if I can have one of these [operated-on/lipo-

suctioned/breast and buttock implanted] ones, why should I accept or choose the other kind of girl if I can have this one...the better girl....”

It was Clara’s perception and experience that beauty in Cali and the normalcy of cosmetic surgery was driving heterosexual men to expect their partners to embody the cosmetic surgery-beautified standard, supposedly in trade for romantic stability. This further reinforced her anxiety and distrust around relationships with men in Cali. If a wife or girlfriend did not embody this standard, there was seemingly always the option for the male to find a woman who did, considering the practice of undergoing cosmetic surgery was so pervasive among the city’s women.

Clara is a trained psychologist and I asked her if it was her impression that the women most embroiled in the Caleña beauty paradigm were themselves aware of how it drove them to participate in an oppressive social and romantic network. She replied:

“They [women] know, they know but the pressures are stronger. If the pressures are stronger, you forget... you just do it and don't stop and think “why do I do it?”, you just have to do it because you want to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, you want to have a group of friends, you want to go out to the nightclubs, you want to go to the university and have a group...you know?...”

For Clara, being beautiful by the dominant standards not only brought the company of a romantic lover, but the acceptance of a group of friends. Socialising in Cali comes most easily to those who are privileged and willing to cultivate erotic capital. I recalled my interview with Jimena and her friend Catalina (Venezuelan by birth). Catalina had told me, “I have girlfriends that only want to go out with friends who are pretty. And if they are going to take a photo and someone in the group is ugly, they don’t include this person [in the photo] ... they just say to this person ‘hey, take this photo please’ ...”

It is precisely this worship of beauty and the associated contempt for those who fail to cultivate beauty that drove Clara to exclude herself from social activities. The clash between Clara’s personal values and the dominant social values associated with beauty (broadly, wealth and status) in Cali caused her to reject the social milieu surrounding her, and the gendered romantic dynamics that come with it. Her affective state of loneliness was thus further compounded by the distrust she had for relationships with men in Cali. In hopes of leaving Cali, Clara dedicated her time, money and energy to learning English so that she could one day live and study in the Netherlands.

Clara’s story reveals the normalised physical (beauty) and emotional (coping with the threat and competition of a lover) adjustments expected of women. She refused to buy in to

these social expectations for the sake of obtaining or maintaining a romantic relationship. In this context, many women “make virtue of necessity” (Bourdieu 1977: 46, 57), and by virtuous submission to the beauty paradigm, social acceptance increases. Accordingly, contempt or pity is the result for those who do not conform to the internalised image of femininity inherent in an overly sexualised body politic; they are marked with low social positioning, and even low moral positioning (see Gatens 2013). Thus, in Cali there are social norms that stigmatise or pity a single woman, especially in her late thirties. Although Clara is well educated and has seen some success in her career, her perspectives on romantic relationships are severely underappreciated within her friendship circle, as well as generally, as they clash with the social values that structure the shared psyche of the city. Clara, however, revealed that her unpartnered loneliness provides her with her own sense of ambivalence as she confessed to me, “I often think about getting another liposuction ... in the taxi on the way home this afternoon, I saw a girl on a motorbike ride up beside the car, she was bent forward with her hands on the handlebars, and there was no pocket of fat poking out from her stomach – I thought, maybe just a little bit of lipo will make me feel better at least.”

Cosmetic competition

In Anabel’s workshop one day, I probed her and her two employees about their opinions on what I sensed to be a feeling of desperation underscoring daily life, due to a belief, perhaps, that there are finite resources that all people seem to be fighting for. I asked if they sensed this, and whether or not this might have anything to do with why women invest so much time and money in making themselves beautiful. Anabel responded by pinpointing men as a finite resource,

“Here, there are more women than men, and here they [women] compete for money, to acquire a man that gives it [money] to them. So, that is what happens ... in other words, here a married man is not respected as such [married]. If you have your husband but he has a nice car, or has obvious [economic] means, *mi hija*, my dear”, she said while shaking her head and raising her eye brows, “two or three women have their eyes on him. Basically, there are two or three women on a waiting list”.

Gender statistics from the 2005 Colombian census corroborated Anabel’s statement that there is a higher population of women in Cali than men (Cali.co.gov, 2018), however more recent census data will not be available until after the 2018 census has been completed. Anabel further mentioned later on in our conversation, “It’s easier to get a husband for a

woman who is operated-on than a woman who is *trabajadora*, a hard worker [who earns her own money]”, indicating that men are at least perceived to prefer a woman who has undergone plastic surgery against a regular woman regardless of the woman’s economic independence, further placing partner selection predominately in the purview of men. Following this logic, women perceive that men will choose an operated-on, “beautiful” and hence “virtuous” woman over a working woman, especially if the latter does not embody the dominant beauty ideal, suggesting that it is an image of lifestyle that is important. Additionally, the other side of the same coin – demonstrated by Anabel’s remarks on unmarried women’s seemingly fickle respect for marriage – revealed itself in several conversations with Cali residents about the motivating forces for cosmetic surgery. Following a line of questioning similar to the one I used in Anabel’s workshop – about underlying fears that exist in a society where there are scant resources and opportunities, thus leading all people to fight for a piece of the finite pie, such as women do via cosmetic surgery – a male interlocutor who worked at the surgery clinic where I spent time responded to these ideas:

“Oh yes! Well, as I see it, this is a goal that is very precise because some women here think that by being beautiful they have what is necessary to always *ganar*⁵ [earn or win]; in other words, they believe that by being beautiful they can get everything more easily ... and there are others who are very good people who just want to look and feel good about themselves. There are women who might say things like, ‘I want to look beautiful so... so that this woman doesn’t strip me of my husband’, or, ‘so that I can find someone with lots of money’ ... etcetera”.

According to my informants, many single women in Cali place themselves under the scalpel for reasons that surround *obtaining* romantic relationships and their potential pathways to socioeconomic stability. Single women are believed to beautify themselves in order to direct a man’s attention away from his spouse or girlfriend. Meanwhile, wives and girlfriends of men dutifully and endlessly beautify themselves in order to *maintain* romantic relationships, economic stability, and the status that comes with having a husband or partner in competitive markets of love. They undergo all manner of risky, invasive and non-invasive beauty treatments to keep their partners’ eyes squarely focused on them. This sense of the necessity for constant beauty work is buttressed by a fear of being constantly in competition with a potential mistress, either now or in the ever-threatening future. As Jankowiak, Nell & Buckmaster (2002) have shown, across cultures partners deploy “mate-guarding tactics” in

⁵ In Spanish, the verb ‘ganar’ can mean, ‘to win’ or ‘to earn’. I would think that the use of this verb in this context purposefully invokes a double meaning.

attempts to control their partners sexual behaviour. In the cultural milieu of Cali, it appears that undergoing cosmetic surgery and generally submitting to the dominant beauty paradigm performs a “mate-guarding” function for many women who perceive that their relationships with men are under constant threat by potential lovers.

Interestingly, while cheating partners of both sexes are certainly scorned, when mentioning infidelity and romantic relationships as a motivating factor for cosmetic surgery, not once did my interlocutors remark on or put the onus on a man’s agency to reject sexual advances from women who were not their spouse or partner. Indeed, the shared cultural belief seems to be that a man bends to the whim of his desires; if a beautiful woman should approach him at a time when his wife is perhaps “letting herself go”, he is perceived as having little incentive to remain faithful. Whether or not this is true of men in most cases, I do not have the data to show. But what matters here is that according to the women with whom I spoke, this is a major perception that they have of how men behave. This perception generates and reproduces commonly shared fears and concerns regarding romantic relationships. And thus, this belief generates and reproduces a culture of beauty work and cosmetic surgery, as women in relationships endeavour to remain attractive enough for their partners to remain faithful – or single women strive to capture the attention of potential partners. Infidelity appeared in the 1983 work of Rubbo & Taussig in the Cauca Valley who commented on the “contest for male attention that occurs daily in all walks of life, demanding much money and narcissistic care” (p.15). Further they commented that in a “culture based on sex-conquest and narcissism” (ibid: 16), infidelity was not a gender-bound practice; however, it carried considerably more risk for economically vulnerable women who may end up abandoned (Rubbo & Taussig 1983; McCallum 1999; Salazar Peña & Giraldo 2017).

Beauty vs. Intelligence

Dolores, a personal trainer at a local gym, took the time out of her day to meet with me one afternoon and gave me a very interesting and candid interview, although full of contradictions. At one point Dolores attributed male infidelity to *la esposa descuidada*, the wife who doesn’t take care of herself. She said, “women here need to look after themselves so that their husbands find them nicely put-together, because what happens is that, they get married, and then they get fat, they have kids and they don’t take care of themselves. They get around in sandals and their hair isn’t done, meanwhile the husband stays nice”. At the

time of fieldwork, Dolores was pushing forty, unmarried but with a long-term partner. She is what would be considered a “white” Colombian woman, accordingly experiencing some privilege by virtue of her phenotypic traits which have provided her a significant head start on the course to ideal beauty. Her work was focused on fitness; therefore, she went every day to the gym. Dolores had no children and had not, herself, had to get back into shape in order to repair the toll that pregnancy takes on a woman’s body. Her perspective on women’s investment in their self-care or self-image was thus skewed by these factors. While she condemned those who are unfaithful, she contradicted her previous comments and assured me that it is intellect that keeps a man anyway, not beauty.

What Dolores demonstrated by her critique of the wife who has “let go”, alongside, her assurance that it is intellect that functions as the key to locking down a man, is that there is an evolving rhetoric of female empowerment in Cali as a woman’s value in a relationship ideologically departs from sexual plaything and child bearer. However, notions that suggest that women’s intellect forms the most crucial aspect of female mate retention, are mixed in and undifferentiated with more ingrained historical structures and discourses of patriarchy and *machismo*. These ingrained historical structures of patriarchy are overwhelmingly more powerful, this fact is observed in the cosmetic competition that my interlocutors mentioned. As such, men are presented with a city of women who make a directed effort to cultivating an exaggerated voluptuous beauty alongside historically gendered power dynamics. The fact that Dolores submitted to the beauty paradigm to some obvious degree—she openly told me of the rhinoplasty, lipo-suctions and breast implants that she has had—yet asserted that the success of a relationship is attributed to “intellect, not beauty”, reveals her privileged position to make those claims, and a semi-conscious awareness and denial of the fact that women are subjugated by the beauty paradigm, perhaps even feeling some associated shame in submitting to it herself.

Masculine Domination

Rather than wholly condemning the Caleño man as a whimsical philanderer and women as shallow, vain and materialistic, I turn to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of habitus, and his (2001) exploration into masculine domination—the gendered-habitus. Bourdieu (1977) described the habitus as a collection of inculcated dispositions that reproduce patterns of behaviour, and that conform to objective schemas of social organization originating in the (synthetic) correspondence of symbolism between the natural world and the social world. These schemas appear as self-evident or natural, leading actors to embody them

through inculcation. As a result, the inculcated habitus reproduces itself; simultaneously the habitus works on us as we work on it, it reproduces us as we reproduce it. This is an embodied state of worldly knowledge and internalised symbolism experienced phenomenologically; therefore, the actions, perceptions and mental structures that it generates are not the result of conscious directing by the mind (Magee 1987). Rather, the habitus is a self-evident way of being in the world within a specific social field or culture (Bourdieu 1977; 2001). Due to this, social actors behave accordingly within objective (naturalised) super-structures. For example, women in Cali submit to the beauty paradigm (originating in a symbolically macho super-structure) by cultivating a particular image of femininity because it is self-evident that women should be beautiful in order to seek a man. Seeking males is also self-evident and becomes the concern of even young girls. Males, blind to their naturalised privilege follow the patterns of behaviour that reproduce structures of power skewed in their favour (Bourdieu 2001).

The gendered habitus (its dispositions, behaviours and roles) becomes inculcated and embodied by men and women via the internalized symbolism found in the biological or “natural” world (the domain of women), which come to be mapped onto the structures of the social/cultural world (the domain of men). The symbolism of the “natural” order of the world ultimately constructs a social field organised through symbolic masculine domination (Bourdieu 2001). That is, masculine domination becomes embodied in women and men’s gendered habitus as they both enact gendered social norms and practices consistent with an “androcentric world view” (ibid: 54). Representations of gender (masculine and feminine roles and behaviours) and social structures then appear as “regular” (self-evident, natural) as much as they “regulate” (naturalise and reinforce) accepted truths, social structures and perceptions, which take effect unconsciously (Bourdieu 1977, 2001). Habitus functions at an unconscious level. Actors operate in a self-interested manner within the habitus’ constraints, attempting to manipulate temporality by seeking eternal youth through cosmetic surgery and playing upon inculcated symbols of cultural weakness in order to seek power. The woman, who is symbolic of the natural, biological sexual or wild world (Bourdieu 2001, Ortner 1996, MacCormack & Strathern 1980), develops this symbolism to exaggerated lengths to become the ultimate woman, the most desirable and obedient to the androcentric world view. Through this, her acquiescence appears as virtuous and compliant to the structures of power that maintain male dominance. Further, following Ortner (1996), ritual forms a “border” between humans and nature, it is the product of culture, of humans’ attempt at controlling and making sense of nature, it is what makes humans conscious actors, rather than passive beings in the

course of natural events. As the domain of women in the androcentric world view is specifically the natural domain (Bourdieu 2001), by cultivating beauty through beauty rituals like cosmetic surgery, women transgress the “border” between culture and nature, demonstrating in some sense their readiness to enter into the masculine domain of power (Ortner 1996).

Thus, I propose that cosmetic surgery appears as a logical and strategic act on the part of women who remain constrained by the invisible structures of masculine domination, and yet who seek agency or power within its naturalised constraints (Bourdieu 2001). Women submit to the beauty paradigm—in the complex political economy of a developing country in the twenty-first century—to avoid transgressing social customs and ideals. Through beauty cultivation women act appropriately in the social field that structurally empowers men; the assumption is that men are consumers of female beauty, and although condemning male infidelity, society blames “the wife who has let herself go” rather than the man who transgresses sexually. Without being coerced or forced to obey any rules consciously, many women operate within the “rules of the game” (Bourdieu 1977, 2001) to find culturally meaningful “empowerment” by strategising within social constraints and structures. Thus, practices – like beauty work and heterosexual relationship dynamics – are, “collectively orchestrated without being the product of the [conscious] orchestrating of the conductor” (Bourdieu 1977, 72); that is, both men and women produce and reproduce the patterns of behaviour and gendered roles and dispositions in romantic relationships, as well as in wider society. In other words, women cultivate erotic capital due to taken-for-granted (unquestioned) dynamics in heterosexual relationships where power is historically ingrained and skewed toward male privilege.

Correspondingly, as Mariana’s comments demonstrate below, patterns of infidelity persist and reproduce themselves. The enduring strength of these patterned behaviours and power structures that disadvantage women demonstrates how deeply unconscious, and thus relegated to the realm of gendered habitus, these discourses around infidelity and its persistence may be.

Ingrained and Naturalised Patterns of infidelity

In the waiting room of the cosmetic surgery clinic, I conversed with Mariana about competition between women and the cultural acceptance of male infidelity in Colombia. She

offered up her own parents as an example of this. Mariana told me about her father, whose recurring infidelity she was aware of throughout her childhood.

“My dad has always been unfaithful but my mum always saw it as very normal, you see? And my mum, for her part, she always looked [at it as] very normal because you see... on the coast in general there is lots of infidelity... so there, they see it as something permissive, as if it is something very normal”.

Mariana told me that she herself had undergone ten aesthetic surgeries throughout her life, and I watched the surgeon inject her face with dermal filler. I suggested to Mariana that perhaps on some level infidelity, especially on the part of men, is accepted by society. She responded, “Exactly, and you know what? One repeats the patterns. [It’s] something normal and it is permitted, and since childhood you go on with this concept, so you do the same thing repeating it, because its already been marked as normal [behaviour] since childhood”.

I inquired further, “do you think that this is why women get some so much surgery? In an attempt to maintain faithful relationships with men? And to compete against other women?”

Mariana replied, “I think so, yes, but you know that every competition is between the same [kind of] women, well, that one wants to look prettier than the other one and – for example, if my boyfriend or my husband gets another woman, because this is very common here in Colombia, infidelity, you see? Here in Colombia infidelity is just a given – so the woman always wants to be better than the *amante* [lover]”.

When infidelity is such “a given”, especially where a double standard exists between the sexual behaviour of men and women, it is not all too surprising that the power wielders in society, men, don’t see that anything should be out of order. And more, when this standard is reinforced unconsciously by dominant structures of patriarchal power that inform the habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 2001), like cultural practices of beauty – which are ridden with unequal power relations—it is also not surprising that men may not feel moved to enact socio-structural change.

Not Empowerment, but Submission

Whether consciously or not, women feel the effects of the structures of masculine domination. Some act against them, like Clara; others act within them through beauty work, like Mariana. Mariana is one who *plays the game*, she has a feel for it and strategises (Bourdieu 1977; 2001) through cosmetic surgery, enacting a certain *art* to living in attempts to preserve dignity (ibid). Other women like Clara, who refuse to be “*carried along by the*

game” (Bourdieu 1977: 10), rebel against it, and pay a social price. In whatever way they manage it – through self-exclusion or through cosmetic surgery – women strategise within the constraints of the social field in order to reduce the suffering brought about by their inferior position in society and their inferior position in heterosexual relationships. The way a woman operates affects her life; loneliness is the price of subversion for Clara – the contrarian to her beautified and partnered friends – while Mariana remains with male companions but plays along, deploying “mate guarding tactics” through cosmetic surgery (Jankowiak et al. 2002).

Empowerment Marketing

In light of this, cosmetic surgery appears as a matter of control for women who carry little leverage in society and little control in markets of love. Kathy Davis (1995) argued that, those who seek out cosmetic surgery find it empowering, citing the women in her ethnographic study who, by undergoing cosmetic surgery, took enjoyment and satisfaction in taking their lives into their own hands. This rhetoric of empowerment appeared dominant in the Cali mediascape. Instagram accounts of popular cosmetic surgeons in the city boast strong public followings, and before and after photos elicit hundreds of comments from women applauding the art of the surgeon. The empowerment rhetoric forms the basis for most cosmetic surgery marketing. The surgeon who allowed me to conduct research in his clinic commented to me that he enjoyed “connecting at a personal level” with his clients, and took “great satisfaction” in seeing his patients “feel better about themselves”. His Instagram page shows many photos where he expresses gratitude to his patients who have trusted him to “improve their lives” by making them more beautiful. There are occasionally images posted on local surgeons’ pages of “thank you” notes accompanied with post-recovery photos of women in bikinis or skin-tight outfits enjoying their new bodies. One of these posts was particularly striking as one young woman videorecorded her gigantic new breasts in a low-cut top, so low cut that her nipples almost spilled out the top of it; in the video she gave the surgeon thanks and *agradecimiento* – “appreciation” – for his “marvellous” work.

Drawing from Bourdieu’s (2001) exploration of masculine domination, analysis of the “empowerment” rhetoric suggests that the women who undergo cosmetic surgery are merely submitting to the (androcentric) symbolic code that dominates them, not only in romantic domains but also in the social sphere. This extraordinary act (which Taussig [2012] would remind us is also exceedingly physically violent to the body) of cutting and injecting one’s

body is the most useful means by which she can ‘strategise’ in the game while remaining submissive to the rules and boundaries that reproduce male domination (Bourdieu 2001).

Conclusion

In a social sphere where females are structurally dominated, women find virtue and control by manipulating their physical bodies and appearance through beauty work and cosmetic surgery. This is due to enduring patriarchal structures through which women command considerably less social and cultural power compared to men. As it appeared in Cali, women also lack control over how freely they choose to enact their femininity; this is restricted by quotidian eroticisation of the feminine figure leading to social norms and stigmas that set the standard of acceptable appearance at beauty-queen levels.

Inasmuch as power is obtainable for women, it is perceived to be seized through competition for erotic capital. Manifest efforts in becoming, at least, less inferior to the next woman by cultivating the super-femininity that plastic surgery is capable of achieving, provide women with a sense of control or erotic power. The “mate guarding tactics” that partners deploy—seen in beauty work in Cali—appear, following Bourdieu (2001), not as a tool for romantic equality and empowerment, but rather as submission to masculine domination. Thus, it is clear that romantic relationships constitute, at least partly, a driving factor in the ubiquitous practice of cosmetic surgery and beauty work in Cali. Specifically, fear of infidelity is a motivating factor for socioeconomically vulnerable women *in* relationships, and provides a competitive edge to those *out* of them.

Part Two: DISCOURSES OF RACE AND BEAUTY IN CALI

“People are striving for a black standard body but they hate blacks...they like their culture, the dress, the big ass, the big boobs...but they don’t wanna be black because being black is poor, they just wanna *look* like [black people] but they don’t wanna *be* that” - Sofia

Introduction

After a hearty Caleño lunch one afternoon at a friend’s house in the lower-middle class neighbourhood of Tequendama—known for its proliferation of cosmetic surgery clinics—I sat with my hosts in their lounge room and we casually chatted while watching the afternoon news. The front door swung open and a young woman entered the apartment and gave a cursory greeting to us on the lounges. Long silky hair fell down her back and she carried a big bag. Without much interest in conversing with us, she dropped her bags in another room and walked into the kitchen, where she exploded into a fiery reprimand toward the maid, an Afro-Colombian lady. It appeared that when she opened the fridge door, she had jolted a dish inside, resulting in the dish falling to the floor, its contents spilling onto her shoes. The man of the house gave me a rueful smile and rushed over to defuse the situation. My attention was quickly brought back to conversation by my hosts, making it clear that any discussion surrounding this incident was strictly prohibited in my presence. The women of the house with whom I spoke quickly resumed our conversation. Once the older man had calmed the young woman down, she stopped yelling and left the area. The household hierarchy was made clear in this commotion as the maid remained quietly in the kitchen space while the man rejoined us on the couches.

I begin this chapter with a vignette that seemingly has nothing to do with beauty practices, as I aim to paint a paradigmatic picture of racial hierarchy in Cali. The racial hierarchy—especially between women—becomes painfully evident in the division of labour across Cali where every familial household that I visited had a domestic servant. Further, every single housemaid that I came across in my research was an Afro-Colombian woman. The middle class and upper middle-class families with whom I interacted, without fail, had a domestic servant, and she was always a black woman. Taussig & Rubbo (1983) described domestic servants in the Cauca Valley as “microcosm[s]” (p. 14) of the wider societal structures affecting Colombians. Rubbo & taussig (1983) mentioned that the supply of domestic servants had come from largely African descended families who, due to industrialization of the farming industry and expanding agribusiness, had found themselves with little land and job opportunities in rural areas, and thus sought work in the city.

However, focusing their analysis on gender-relations in domestic work, I extend Rubbo & Taussig's analogy beyond gender (while still inclusive of it) further into racial relations and maid's work in Caleña society. Racial relations, both historical and contemporary, offer an informative perspective on beauty ideals in a society where Afro-descended maids, whose circumstances are symbolic microcosms of the wider society, echo the history of racial stigma and mark an aesthetic antithesis to urban Caleña values around civility, modernity and beauty.

The sociologist Colette Guillaumin (1988) described race as an ambiguous social category determining many aspects of a person's life. This includes how one is seen by others, how one sees one's self, and how dispositions and "marks" that one exhibits and internalises become naturalised signifiers of racial identity. Guillaumin frames race around social relations. Historical power relations endure in the social world of Cali and imbue the body with symbolism. What's more is that for Guillaumin these social relations become so embedded that they appear as "natural" or taken for granted, unquestioned – thus reproducing themselves across socio-cultural phenomena, including beauty as a socio-cultural phenomenon. In Cali, beauty practices and physical sites of beauty work are also marked and internalised against conceptions of stigmatised and fetishized racial markers. Guillaumin (1988) explored how one's perception of race (constituted through social relationships) is often internalised as "natural". Once this occurs, it becomes a constructed "truth" seldom questioned, in fact, taken-for-granted. This naturalising effect obscures the historical and contemporary influences on the way we think about race. The arguments presented here draw upon Guillaumin's (1988) concept of racial interpretation, that is: ideas about race are shaped by naturalised social relationships between groups, historical and present. Similarly, Bourdieu (2001) posited that the *doxic* mode, in which taken-for-granted social relations are reproduced, becomes responsible for the process of the "transformation of history into nature, of cultural arbitrariness into the *natural*" (p. 2). Given these theoretical underpinnings, it should be noted that taken-for-granted social relations are constructed by means of many phenomena. As shown by Nobles (2001), Paschel (2013) and Wade (2009), racial categories in censuses, while often transnationally influenced, attempt to define and categorise race in Colombia, further problematising definitions of race, while reinforcing principles of *mestizaje* (mixedness). Additionally, social scientists such as Sierra Becerra (2017), Hunt (2015), Roshani (2016), and Schaeffer (2012), show how media representations in popular culture shape public ideas about race. Further, political policy in Colombia is explored by Paschel (2013) and Wade (2009) as to whether or not it has a decisive influence on

conceptions of race and racial hierarchies, proving that the question of race in Colombia is regional, complex, varying and highly political. Recently, Walker (2017) argued that the visual culture in Colombia remains tethered to the region's slaveholding past. She focuses on Afro-descended domestic servants who appear as central figures in Colombia's visual culture revealing the enduring racial discourses in the region by calling "forth the past and its legacy in the modern era" (Walker 2017: 198).

My argument rests on the Cauca Valley's colonial history of slaveholding, which has historically aligned Afro-Colombians with agricultural and subservient economic activities, such as domestic servant work (Walker 2017, Taussig 2012, 1987, Fernandez 1986). This history is pivotal in understanding how Caleña society imagines black people, and how black people are incorporated into the aesthetic ideals cultivated through cosmetic surgery.

Blackness in Latin America

Colonial and slaveholding histories are pivotal points of reference in the evolving social constructions of racial identities in Latin America. Wade (2010) points out that phenotypical signifiers of race that endure into the present are anchored in European colonial interactions with others. This makes the phenotypical variations that were built into racial categories in colonial times relevant to conceptions of race. Racial aesthetic markers and their stigmatised meanings become significant in the analysis of the beauty culture in the previously slaveholding region of the Cauca Valley.

This history helps us to understand how an economically "modernising" society where practices of beauty demonstrate one's commitment to "progress" and "modern" values has aided in the process from stigmatising certain race-typical features to fetishizing them. I draw on McGuigan's (2014) exploration of the neoliberal ideal type, a particular subjectivity arising from the values of late capitalism through which we can view cosmetic surgery as an entrepreneurial investment. Previously inalienable domains, like the body, become commoditised. This "neoliberal self" aligns values and virtues with the endless pursuit of individualistic economic growth, entrepreneurship, and a "fascination with self-identity" (McGuigan 2014: 231) which entails "a hedonistic spirit that is no longer dysfunctional to business" (ibid: 232). Thus, those in society whose image and position echo a subservient past are socially penalised and subject to contempt. In this climate of obsessive control over appearance, Afro-descended communities in Cali, who fill the lower economic rungs of society and who carry the symbols of economic history on their bodies, are doubly charged

with symbolic meanings that find resonance with past and present social conditions. Phenotypically black (using the markers of colonial history) Afro-descended women are subject to “symbolic violence”, “*censored, euphemized*, i.e. unrecognizable, socially recognized violence” (Bourdieu 1977: 191), a legacy of colonial conditioning. This impacts beauty culture and cosmetic surgery practices, as even though cultural resources change across time—i.e., cosmetic surgery appears as a cultural resource—historical continuities endure, and continue to reproduce historical racial relations (Sahlins 2004 cited in Wade 2010:149).

Consequently, historical social relations between racialised groups imbue beauty practices and can be read on the female body. As the symbolic site of the natural, or wild world (Bourdieu 2001, Ortner 1996), cosmetic surgery inscribes culture and Caleña values of “modernity” onto the woman’s body (Schaeffer 2012, Hunt 2015). In Cali, cosmetic surgery functions as a corporeally and symbolically transformative tool that signifies “progress” and economic capacity. This is especially true in a time where socioeconomic “heroism” is no longer found in the labouring worker, but in the consumer’s ability to combine the sexual fetish (of the racialised body) with commodity fetishism (Taussig 2012). Surgically altering the body becomes a new cultural resource and a morally virtuous practice within an internalised “modernising” economic paradigm where one disposes of the backwards stigmas of the past and instead appropriates the socially sanctioned sexualised symbols of modern progressiveness (Wade 2010) and prosperity. Where sexual stigma of the body previously prevailed and imbued the Afro-descendant’s body with puritanical judgments stemming from colonial conditioning—that carried over into liberal capitalism—now, modern sexualised commodity fetishism takes its place in the neoliberal era. And the feminine body is the site of virtuous consumption that fuels an entrepreneurial drive.

The stigma associated with the Afro-descended body in colonial contexts has been explored in an essay titled “The politics of race-blindness,” in which Keaton (2010) shows that globally, blackness has long been symbolically associated with incivility, uncleanness and lack of hygiene. These racially discriminatory associations have permeated generations of hegemonic discourse in ever more imbedded ways. Generally, meanings attached to the concept of race were spread by centuries of European or “Western” interference and empire building through which pejorative connotations of blackness were continuously reproduced (Rahier 2011, Keaton 2010, Guillaumin 1988). The influential psychoanalyst and black

activist Frantz Fanon asserted, “when one is dirty one is black – whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or moral dirtiness” (Fanon 1968: 189). Although Fanon did not specifically address the Colombian setting, the semiotics of blackness and dirtiness can be broadly attributed to colonial conditioning, which Fanon does discuss and which he attributes to European civilisation, of which colonial slaveholders in Latin America were certainly part of.

Perceptions of black bodies and peoples in Latin America have been further imbued with associations to “sexual intoxication” (Edmonds 2010:130, Goldstein 1999), supposed “hyper” or “uncontrolled” sexuality, and beliefs about black women’s sexual availability (Rahier 2011, Wade 2010). Regional antagonisms in Colombia, especially between the largely “white” and prosperous region of Antioquia, and the agricultural, black and mixed-race (henceforth, *mestizo*) population of the Cauca region, have historically pinned blackness to laziness, aggression, sexual access and backwardness (Appelbaum 2003). Schaeffer (2012) notes that lingering colonial racism conflicts with the values of modernity and notions of civility in Cali, and that beauty in Colombia is still semiotically tied to whiteness. I argue that historical semiotic links to corporeal blackness remain relevant and find expression in beauty work and beauty ideals in Cali. Beauty ideals have inscribed the body with specific values of “modernity”, and any resemblance to the past becomes antithetical to the “modern” neoliberal self, especially for Afro-Colombian women.

As Walker (2017) noted, maids resonate with the power dynamics of “human property” (p. 200) from colonial slave holding times, and therefore, domestic servants remain stripped of individual subjectivity and instead “function as indices of status” (p. 205). Status is a virtue in the competitive social arena of Cali, and it becomes neurotically inscribed onto bodies in attempts to avoid misrecognition as poor and uncompetitive, thus backwards and lowly—which accordingly elicits contempt and blame within a meritocratic ideology. This is where we find domestic servants at a nexus with beauty ideals in Cali, where the maid provides the antithesis to the neoliberal values of “cool” individualism, entrepreneurialism, progress and “modernity” (Schaeffer 2012, Taussig 2012). Edmonds (2010) suggests that vanity in Brazil can function to distance a woman from female and class domains of domestic labour. The symbolic meanings associated to being a maid (or mistaken as one) in Cali imbues one with the vulgarity of the past, an anxiety that appeared to be salient for Sofia. Sofia is a young Afro-Colombian doctor who was adopted into a wealthy white family as a baby. The internalised societal values of wealth, beauty and modernity in Cali were revealed

by Sofia to be directly contrasted with the image of the black maid. As a young black woman, Sofia felt a need to prove something, to compete and conform to society's standards, in order to appear compliant with the "modern" values of Cali. While conversing with Sofia about this she said,

"I don't have to outspend anybody, personally I don't like competition [except] in like very specific subjects, knowledge about my hobbies are the realms where I am more competitive...but in lifestyle, well I guess I do want to show people that I am not poor at least. Because I am black and, in this society, if you are black then you are poor, basically...and all the black people I saw growing up were maids so I don't wanna be confused with a maid or something like that."

Before exploring the specifics of beauty in Cali, I will first address important historical and contemporary political discourses, policies, and economic practices concerning race that have influenced the way beauty and race are perceived and represented in Colombia. This will underline how particular social relationships (historical and contemporary) impact conceptions of beauty. Following this, I will include further ethnographic data and analysis.

Race Mixing, *Mestizaje*

Mestizaje—in English, miscegenation—is a more recent phenomenon than colonial slavery that has impacted how racial relations influence the domain of beauty practices. *Mestizaje* is the practice of racial mixing and effectively a political policy of colour blindness (Edmonds 2010, Keaton 2010, Goldstein 1999). It has been well documented that national policies of *mestizaje* preference whiteness and contribute to, or at least silence discussion about, racial discrimination and disadvantage in societies across Latin America and elsewhere (Sierra Becerra 2017, Hunt 2015, Edmonds 2010, Keaton 2010, Schaeffer 2012, Wade 2009, Chamorro & Escobar 2006, Goldstein 1999, Barnes 1994). As such, these policies seep into the sociocultural psyche and impact micro worlds by disrupting intimate relationships, notions of sexuality, and family, while also obstructing claims to racial inequality and strengthening racial hierarchies on a macro scale (Wade 2010, Edmonds 2010, Keaton 2010, Jarrin 2015, Sierra Becerra 2017, Hunt 2015). Latin American discourses of race blindness or race mixing have been also linked to notions of national membership (Edmonds 2010, Paschel 2013, Hunt 2015, Sierra Becerra 2017, Barnes 1994). *Mestizaje* and nation building are intertwined to such a degree that scholars such as Alex Edmonds (2010) have advanced concepts of 'aesthetic citizenship', followed by Hunt (2015) who linked

mestizaje with ‘aesthetic nationalism’, arguing that bodies conforming to the national aesthetic ideal define the boundaries of the political community, and that non-conforming bodies are subject to discrimination and social exclusion. In the case of Brazil, social scientists have argued that discourses of race-mixing alongside state-supported economic access to cosmetic surgery have together functioned as a potent recipe for eugenic purposes (Jarrin 2015, Edmonds 2010). Goldstein (1999) observed unequal power relations and symbolic racism inherent in the commoditisation and fetishisation of the black woman’s body in Brazil. She observed that black beauty is considered more beautiful when it is mediated by particular white features (ibid).

In Colombia, *mestizaje* underpinned official policy and rhetoric surrounding the racial makeup of the country since the abolition of slavery in 1851 until the early 1990s. In 1991 changes to the constitution recognised Colombia, officially, as a multicultural and pluri-ethnic society (Paschel 2010, Wade 2002, 2009, 2010). The constitutional changes removed the state’s authority on national identity construction, leaving it in the hands of citizens and minority groups (Paschel 2013, Antrosio 2005)⁶. However, these political changes have been primarily effective for regional communities in Colombia such as the predominantly Afro-Colombian communities in the rural regions of the Pacific coast which are, as Paschel (2010) argues, often used as “a proxy for race” (p. 737). As such, the constitutional changes that have led the nation away from *mestizaje* and toward multiculturalism saw new “rights to difference” of identity and developmental resources funnelled towards the regions where the economic and racial disadvantage were most perceptible within ethnic boundaries, and where racial and ethnic groups were more organised (Paschel 2010, 2013, Wade 2010). Due to this largely regional allocation of economic development and political resources, the socio-political benefits of multiculturalism have scarcely reached the domain of urban centres (Paschel 2010, Wade 2009). Thus, the benefits of constitutional reforms which recognise multiculturalism have barely permeated discourses, practices, and conceptions of beauty in Cali, where beauty is a ubiquitous object of value and status (Rubbo & Taussig 1983). And

⁶ Prior to this policy change, the political discourse of *mestizaje* denied ethnically or racially distinct groups the right to assert difference of identity, customs and tradition; and neither to take a stand against racial or ethnic discrimination within a legal and political discourse that defined the nation as one mixed race, which is culturally and ethnically homogeneous. As a result, the constitutional changes opened up a dialectical process between politicians, activist groups and academics which enabled ethnic and racial groups within the country to participate and define themselves within the nation’s multicultural policies (Paschel 2013, Wade 2009). Antrosio (2005) attributes the autonomy ‘purportedly’ (p. 201) conceded to minority groups as a result of Colombia’s political and economic adjustment toward neoliberalism that occurred at around the same time, essentially marking the state as ‘neutral’ in identity formation for diverse groups and removing its role in issues of national development.

further, where the dominant beauty ideal remains tethered to images of *mestizaje*—that is, a whitewashed aesthetic preference for mixed-race phenotypic traits associated with discourses of “race blindness” (Keaton 2010), not multiculturalism. Consequently, the diversity associated with multiculturalism is not associated with beauty in Cali. Likewise, across the nation images of mixed-race women such as Sofia Vergara are admired as national icons of beauty, often exhibiting a particular arrangement of facial and corporeal features that bear semiotic associations to racial hegemony, i.e., “white” features such as straight hair, light skin, and small nose. And, semiotic links to historically sexually stigmatised “black” features, which find strategic placement on the commoditised and fetishized feminine body (such as large round buttocks and a curvaceous body) through cosmetic surgery. More, these seemingly curated ‘mixed-race’ figures continue to be circulated as idealised beauties in promotional material for nationalistic purposes (Taussig 2012, Hunt 2015). As a result, the Afro-Colombian population of urban Cali who have more phenotypically African features remain disadvantaged by the hangover of *mestizaje*, not only politically and economically, but also aesthetically.

Mestizaje remains firmly embedded in ideas of beauty, the language of beauty and practices of beauty work. As Cali is a booming centre for cosmetic surgery, by reading the semiotics of the racialised, operated-on and un-operated-on female body, I will illustrate how the ideal beauty of *mestizaje* (in its particular configuration) racially stigmatises and fetishises particular features of the Afro-descendant’s body in a curious two-way exchange of corporeal appropriation. Through this, the body beautiful is restricted to a particular arrangement of body features that are symbolically imbued with meanings linked to racial hegemony or domination. As such, women’s beauty practices are informed by symbolic racial stigmas, and racism in Cali is implicitly reproduced through beauty practices.

The Conundrum of Race and the Value of Beauty in Cali: Is Black Beautiful?

Historically-rooted associations to race, specifically blackness, and colonial power dynamics remain pertinent in the cultural domain where beauty queens are highly revered in Colombia. Black beauty-pageant contestants in Colombia, according to Sierra Becerra (2017), are not imagined as cultured or educated enough, and therefore are generally not accepted as beauty queens. Sierra Becerra shows that racial exclusion and poor representation of Afro-Colombians in national beauty pageants have been standard practice in the country dating back to the 1950s. Suffice to say, this history of white or mixed-white pageant winners has influenced aesthetic ideals (Sierra Becerra 2017). Literature on national beauty pageants

has shown that they carry considerable political charge, define aesthetic ideals and indeed produce political subjects (Banet-Weiser 1999). As such, beauty pageants have become a platform for exhibiting and institutionalising the socioeconomic and racial hierarchies that exist within particular nations (Barnes 1994, Wade 2010, Ahmed-Ghosh 2003, Sierra Becerra 2017). Writing about the controversial first black beauty queen in Colombia who was crowned ten years after the multicultural constitutional reforms and whose appearance toed the line between Afro-Colombian and *mulato or mestizo*⁷, Sierra Becerra (2017) underlines the absence of black racial markers in the winner's appearance. Mendoza (the winner) competed with straightened hair, she had a fine, thinly shaped nose, while her skin colour was darker (albeit still light skinned in comparison to many Afro-Colombians) than other contestants. She won the beauty competition and was declared the first black beauty queen on the national stage, despite lacking specific ethno-racial markers that “makes a group distinct and sets the conditions under which ethnic subjects can be incorporated within the multicultural imaginary and state apparatus” (Sierra Becerra 2017: 73). Sierra Becerra quite rightly asks: is this black beauty queen representative of a multicultural nation or a *mestizo* nation? Emphasised in this question is the evident resistance within Colombian beauty standards to open up to multicultural diversity despite the fact that multiculturalism was officially written into the constitution a decade earlier (ibid). Instead of having a diverse representation of beauty queens, the particularly configured mixed-race aesthetic (ideal *mestizaje*) that tends toward whiteness continues to prevail in national beauty pageants even in cases where the winner is considered ‘black’.

Besides some phenotypical features of the face and head such as curly hair or broad nose, common sites of beauty work for Afro-Colombian women, the fact that there are conceivably as many different sized and shaped African bodies as any other body is not necessarily relevant here, as it is the dominant *perceptions* of blackness and whiteness that underpin the semiotic indices informing the aesthetic ideal in Cali—an ideal beauty that my informants described (below) as mixed-race. Few people during the fieldwork were willing to engage in candid discussions about race and beauty; the subject occasioned visible discomfort even within a relationship of trust, and the topic was negotiated—or dodged—through the rhetoric of *mestizaje*. When I asked research participants to comment on the issue

⁷ “Mulato/a” is a colonial term that refers to the child of one white parent and one black parent. “mestizo/a” is a Colonial term that refers to the child of one indigenous parent and one white parent. However, “mestizo/a” is often used colloquially in Colombia to refer to a generally “mixed race” person—that is, one who does not appear phenotypically entirely white, black, or indigenous.

of racism and how it may or may not influence beauty ideals and cosmetic surgery in Cali, they commonly replied in the negative, like Hector, who said, “Well the truth is, here in Colombia, no. Here it is not as you say.” Hector, a young male administrative employee at the cosmetic surgery clinic where I conducted research, responded to my suggestion regarding the influence of race on beauty ideals: “It’s very mixed [here], very interlaced, there is no [totally] white, or black, or Indian, so, in truth ... no”. Mariana, an Afro-Colombian woman with long straightened black hair who is from Cali but lives abroad, is a repeat client of a plastic surgery clinic. I conducted an interview with her on the couch in the waiting room one day. Mariana was waiting to see the surgeon for a check-up on her recent jowl liposuction and to get some dermal filler injections in her face while she had the surgeon’s time. I asked her, “do you think that ideas of race have anything to do with beauty standards here?” to which she replied, “you will see that it does not, and it’s ... it’s that here, there are as many white women as black women, it’s the same thing, it’s just that, I think it’s quite blended”. What is particularly interesting about Mariana’s remarks is that she had just been telling me about her numerous cosmetic surgery procedures, which she estimated “must be around ten”. These included; rhinoplasty, several liposuctions (of which she cannot go back for more due to significant tissue damage caused by the cannula), and three breast augmentations, due to the fact that the first one was done very poorly, the silicone implants were misaligned and the subsequent surgery resulted in loss of breast tissue, so now the implants that she has “must stay put forever,” she said. Not only that, but Mariana mentioned that her young daughter of fourteen has asked her mum if she can get rhinoplasty done, citing her daughter who said of her own nose, “the one I have is very ugly”. Without reading into this, Mariana said that she advised her daughter that they will talk about it when she is 18. She didn’t feel that her own rhinoplasty and her daughter’s desire for rhinoplasty connoted any link between race and beauty. For Mariana, cosmetic surgery is simply a matter of course in the life of a woman: “everyone will seek beauty enhancement, it’s just the amount [of money] you have to spend will determine how you try to achieve it”. It seems that inherent in Mariana’s remarks is an internalization of a perceived “fact” surrounding what appears to her as constituting “objective” beauty of the face, making her and her daughter’s original noses “matter out of place,” to use Douglas’s (1966) terminology. In hindsight, I wish I had asked Mariana whether she conceives of herself as mestizo or Afro-Colombian.

Colonial Tastes in Postcolonial Times

It is no surprise that the symbolism of the African descendant's nose has been adopted by the beauty paradigm in order to factualise its unattractiveness and legitimise its stigmatisation. The beauty ideal in Cali inscribes racist symbolic associations of African descendant's bodies with backwardness, alterity, sexual pollution and uncleanness—essentially: otherness, filth and incivility. Dirtiness and incivility contradict the values of urban Caleña society, where the virtue of beauty denotes cleanliness, modernity, wealth and civility in continuity with colonial conditioning—a conditioning Fanon (1952) would suggest is mentally internalised. This internalisation of colonial hegemonic values and tastes occurs to such a degree that one of my female Afro-Colombian informants, Jimena, commented one day over lunch in a rather forward display of internalised colonial oppression, “before, black women were very ugly, and for me to have a back friend [she] needs to be pretty.” Jimena's close friend Catalina visibly flinched at that statement, before Jimena elaborated. “No, seriously ... before, black women had not evolved and now they are prettier than before, black women used to be very ugly. I'm a racist actually, before I didn't really like blacks, before, I never used to hang out with them”. Here, Jimena reveals her “factual” interpretation of beauty as non-African, conforming with the dominant ideals in Cali. Her unconscious assimilation of the pejorative symbolism associated with black bodies despite her own Afro-descended appearance illuminates her internalisation of postcolonial tastes and sensibilities, made most clear through her assertion that she would not have an “ugly” black friend, for this person would also contradict the values of modernity which are deeply etched into the Caleña obsession with beauty. For Jimena, beauty for Afro-descended women outside of the contemporary (yet historically rooted) standards—that is, the beauty of the black woman pre-cosmetic surgery boom—is inconceivable. Catalina responded in outrage to her friend who she endearingly called *negra*, “Oh please, negra, for God's sake!”.

Semiotic Beauty

Feminine beauty in Cali is performed by putting one's body on display. A woman's body should exude a controlled and sanctioned “modern” sexual suggestion which is symbolically mediated through beauty work and the civility of consumption — proof of one's ability to consume the latest fashions and brand-name goods denoting compliance with modernity's (neoliberal) values. Achieving this controlled and sanctioned “modern” sexual suggestion, the ideal body shape, 90'60'90—centimetre measurements of the breast, waist and buttocks respectively—becomes the work of the numerous cosmetic surgeons around the

city (Taussig 2012, Hunt 2015, Sierra Becerra 2017). Exhibiting ideal beauty in Cali is charged with many meanings which also are linked to neoliberal values of the market (Taussig 2012, Hunt 2015, Sierra Becerra 2017). Accordingly, beauty is also laden with values of class, denoting hygiene, civility, and status (Schaeffer 2012). A lack of control over one's appearance signifies "dirtiness", "incivility" and "poverty", which constitute ugliness and elicit revulsion, contempt, and *pena*—shame. For example, the apparent "smelliness" of the women selling Chontaduro to Anabel and me, whose unkemptness and distasteful clothes—that for Cali's standards appear offensive—elicited a kind of revulsion from Anabel. The lack of control they demonstrated over their appearance seemed for Anabel to harbour intentional indecency thereby strengthening her preconceived racist assumptions, as when she commented, "most of them [*negritos* black people] are drug traffickers or commit crimes". Without knowing them personally, the underlying semiotic index informed Anabel's perception of these women on the side of the road. This was compounded by their social relation to metropolitan Anabel – serving her while remaining firmly beyond the boundary of Anabel's (modern and economically demonstrative) vehicle. Their position on the edge of the freeway, meters away from the dusty earth of the *campo* (rural area, fields) naturalised and strengthened the symbolic meanings and historical relations that establish race and the social relations between racialised groups. *Mestiza* Anabel's metropolitan subjectivity—modern, hygienic, clean, civil, wealthy, and attractive—contrasted with the perceived subjectivity of Afro-descended women selling fruit on the side of the road: backwards, dirty, uncivilised, poor, smelly, ugly. This is a rather striking example of how much racist symbolism encodes not only the body beautiful in Cali, but also of how race is a relational object and its meanings are read in space (side of the road), place (outskirts of city) and objects (makeshift stall, fresh produce) (M'charek 2013). Ultimately, contrasts like this reinforce perceptions of race and prove that they are potently symbolic, becoming especially so across particular socio-economic relationships. Managing the symbolism of the feminine body is central to getting the balance of sexual prowess and modern civility right among the dwellers of the inner Caleña metropolis, many of whom curate the symbols through beauty work on their heads and bodies.

The Semiotics of the Beautiful Head

Synnott (1989) contended that the face is, arguably, "the prime symbol of the self" (p. 607). Tracing the semiotics of the face as a symbol of the self, Synnott (1989) locates its conceptual origins in ancient Greece where the face was purported to be a reflection of one's

character. Moreover, since beauty according to Synnott (1989) has principally resided in the face, beauty and the face are conceptually linked. The symbolism of the face as a signifier of the self has persisted through pseudo-scientific and hegemonic religious traditions (such as Catholicism in Colombia), conceiving of the face as a “mirror of the mind,” or a vista into the soul (Synnott 1989: 607). Synnott (1989) explores the history of key spiritual and philosophical writings on the semiotics of the face and beauty that suffuse contemporary hegemonic concepts of facial beauty. He uncovers how status and civility, purity, godliness and goodness are symbolised in facial beauty that finds its most clear distinction in hegemonic religious traditions, disseminated by the colonising historical groups (ibid). Likewise, in his unravelling of the symbolic order of the body, Bourdieu (2001) also attributed the face to the *public* domain of the body, the “face, forehead, eyes, moustache, mouth – *noble organs of self-presentation* which concentrate social identity, the point of honour” (p. 17). Moreover, Edmonds (2010) ties beauty and the face to whiteness; his review of literature on the semiotics of whiteness describes whiteness in Brazil as typically found on the face and head. Long straight hair is a white feature in both Colombia and Brazil; aside from the glistening straight hair paraded by the majority of my research participants, I remember the unrelenting suggestions from a friend to get keratin treatment for my humidity-frizzed hair, and my friend Dolores telling me about the beauty queens of Cali, “You have seen them everywhere, right? They are all photocopies of each other, big breasts, big bottoms, and long straight hair”. It was clear during research that beautiful hair was silky straight and long. Not surprisingly, African hair textures and styles like the Afro are not constitutive of the aesthetic ideal in nations within the Latino and Caribbean region despite large portions of the population being Afro-descended (Sierra Becerra 2017, Edmonds 2010, Taussig 2012, Hunt 2015, Jarrin 2015, Caldwell 2005, Barnes 1994, Appelbaum 2003). Considering this, I recall a conversation with Afro-descended Sofia who has grown up among wealthy white privilege. Sofia has enjoyed all the privileges that money provides, like attending private schools and living internationally. She speaks fluent English, and her adoptive parents put her through eight years of medical school. She is now a practising doctor who learns Korean on the side. We had lunch one day in a trendy new establishment in the south of Cali where the lavish country clubs are located, and where their members tend to live. Many of the women that surrounded us were immaculately put together and parading bulging curves accentuated by figure hugging jeans and unique and frilly upper garments. With long straight hair and “delicate” facial features, their eyes discreetly scanned the venue, often pausing on other women. Aware of how my eyes joined those of others who paused on

different women I asked Sofia about how she conceives of beauty on the face and head. She replied,

“For blacks it has always been like ‘how can I look more mixed-white or white?’ because being purely black is... You’re a slave, you’re from Africa and you’re poor, you’re a slave ... you know? ... it’s hard to say it, it’s like ‘oh my God you’re so racist’ but it’s true, it’s what everybody thinks and nobody says ... And if not, there would be no hair straightening for black women, they have to have hair more like white women because the ones who have that hair, are either white or were mixed with white so they are not *as* black.”

Sofia’s comments reveal an enduring racial stigma and indeed social relation between black people and white people that permeates beauty work in Cali⁸. For Afro-Colombian women the goal is to look *less* black phenotypically—not “purely” black—by straightening their hair and participating in beauty practices in order to “look more mixed-white, or white”.

Clara was another Afro-Colombian informant whose conscious rejection of the dominant values in Cali had driven her to rebel against them, after a lifetime of controlling her afro locks, which she did in order to feel more feminine. She told me,

“You know when I was a teenager, I really wanted to feel more feminine and I said to my mum, ‘ok, I really want to have my hair straight, ok let’s do it’. And so, I had to use chemicals with brushing and blow drying...and I had my hair down here (she points to her buttocks) it was beautiful hair, all black women [would say] ‘let me see your hair extensions, let me see your hair’ and I was like, ‘oh my god its natural [not extensions]’. In this process I started to use chemicals to straighten it, and I did this for all my life; and when I decided to let my curls grow I did it with products, you know conditioners and things, so still, I didn’t have it in a [totally] natural way, I cared for my hair like a treasure. I’m in this [different] process now... that’s why I want to cut it [my hair], because if you want to have it in a natural way you have to cut it off, everything [and start again].”

Clara was tired of spending the energy, time and money on managing her hair. I mentioned to her that it seemed to me that afro hair was rich with symbolism and that it must

⁸ Sofia’s reference to poverty and slavery also reveal the enduring and socio-economic and labour divisions that hark back to images of slaves and masters, which circulate in visual culture (see Walker 2017) and corroborate the racial implications of beauty work.

feel like a big deal to make the decision to go natural after so many years, particularly in this climate of beauty enhancement and excessive control over image. Clara responded, “Yes, but you can’t imagine how much work it is [managing] afro hair, it is not easy”. She revealed that for her, almost at the age of forty, it was more economically, psychologically, and emotionally laborious to conform to the beauty standards as far as her natural hair is concerned. She continued, “And I love it [my hair], I love it, I spent a lot of money on my hair and a lot of time, I love it but...sometimes I think, I am just thinking [about] how it looks...because, [as] you can see [in Cali] ... it’s more important how it looks...than [a woman’s] real desire or the real want”. Indeed, it can be surmised that a woman places her genuine desire—in Clara’s case, the desire to feel natural and comfortable with her Afro hair—second to the management of her image, which demonstrates a “civilized” control of symbolic values that are inscribed in each feature or object of beauty work. Clara and Sofia’s comments corroborate Synnott (1989) and Edmonds (2010) analysis of the domain of facial beauty as laden with symbols of whiteness and colonial dominance, of taming, civility, modernity, and thus virtue. This management of symbols of virtue on the face through beauty work has placed the aesthetic ethno-racial features of Afro-Colombians, such as the nose (which Mariana’s young daughter wishes to change) and the Afro hair (deemed out-of-control and necessitating product and treatment by Sofia and Clara) firmly beyond the historical and contemporary “white” conceptions of facial beauty.

[Sexual and Racial Semiotics of the Body: The Body ‘just made for sex’](#)

Synnott (1989) further examines how religious and spiritual traditions that have accompanied the powers of colonisation and past empire-building expounded messages of beauty as associated to godliness, along with messages of asceticism and resistance to succumbing to vanity and bodily desires (which may be understood as uncivilised) that have historically been pinned to Afro-descended peoples in Colombia and Latin America (Appelbaum 2003, Edmonds 2010, Wade 2010, Rahier 2011, Schaeffer 2012). We can see how stigmatising African bodies as sexually intoxicated (Edmonds 2010), or “hyper sexual” (Rahier 2011) in contrast to the “sexual constraint” of the elite and civilised in Cali (Schaeffer 2012:114) produces the meanings around which bodies have been virtuous, and which ones have not. By Synnott’s (1989) analysis, not only is godly beauty linked with the face, but the sin of vanity and bodily desires are made analogous, through which we can read the legacy that is assigned to them: impurity, incivility, filth. These meanings are ascribed to the body as it is the place of such transgressive desire.

My personal trainer friend Dolores had a lot to say about black people in Cali; she too subscribed to a discriminatory rhetoric that associated Afro-Colombians with drug trafficking and illegal activities. She expressed an air of entitlement when she employed the rhetoric of reverse racism on the part of the Afro-Colombian population, “in fact it could be said that they are more racist than us”. Dolores claimed after explaining that “they have their own clubs, culture and dance, their culture is nice but sometimes they exclude you [non-Afro-Colombians].” She undermined the logic of so-called reverse racism, though, when she expressed that black people are *muy relegados*, dismissed to an inferior position in Caleña society. Dolores stressed that black women participate just as much in beauty practices and cosmetic surgery as the white women and that they had certain “advantages” in a competitive modern beauty culture where previously stigmatised sexuality has become desirable and fetishized.

“Inasmuch as the issue of aesthetics and race in Cali, well of course [there is a link] because on a sexual level they say that being with a black person is better ... But it is on both sides [the pressure to look good] as much for *negritas* [black women] as for *blanquitas* [white women] we are involved in the same trend, wanting to be a voluptuous woman [because of the sexual inferences of, and preference for voluptuousness] in order to attract attention, so the *negras* have their obvious advantages because their curves are better than the white girls’ and it’s true they have a spectacular behind.”

Dolores ties together sexuality, race and beauty ideals around voluptuousness. This reveals that for her beauty practices like cosmetic surgery cultivate a specific sexual symbolism demonstrating its significance in the “modern” social system and economic model. The black woman’s curves, according to Dolores, are an advantage here. Internalised commodity fetishism obscures the previously pejorative link between the curvaceous Afro-Colombian woman’s body with sexual stereotypes that recollect colonial and slave holding times, making colonial markers of blackness in this instance a sociocultural advantage. Thus, Dolores clearly finds sexual symbolism in the Afro-descendant’s body and links it to beauty ideals inasmuch as there is a link between aesthetic ideals and race which is bonded to sexual desire, and “the same trend [of] wanting to be a voluptuous woman”. Additionally, Dolores mentions the desire to “attract attention” which suggests a level of competition among women in regards to being the most strikingly beautiful. This provides another layer of context and meaning to the word “advantage” deployed by Dolores to describe the

“spectacular behind” of Afro-Colombian women, exposing beauty as an arena of competition where internalised market values of neoliberalisation are played out. Indeed, Salazar, Peña & Gilardo (2017) write, “a voluptuous woman that does not go unnoticed before spectators, transforming her into a fetish.” (p. 59)

Conversing about the Caleña predilection for the Afro-inspired curves and buttocks, Sofia rationalizes why this may be the case:

“That [i.e. the black woman’s body] is the body that is wanted for sex. Because even though we do it for pleasure, at the same time it is for reproductive purposes, even though you wanna fuck people and not have kids, you don’t wanna fuck people that you don’t wanna have kids with. And that’s the right body to have sex [with], and with sex being less taboo now and less prohibited and not as, like, covered, it doesn’t matter if your body looks just made for sex.”

Here Sofia acknowledges that beauty on the body in Cali is cultivated under an objectifying and fetishized (even commoditised) gaze, that is, the ideal female body is “just made for sex”. Which, she also links to the Afro-descended woman’s body, although as a doctor she employs an evolutionary biological rationalisation in place of a racially stigmatised historical one. Sofia puts Cali’s excessively sexualised culture down to a loosening of taboos around sex, an activity and vulgar imagery that has predominantly been pinned to the (African) body in the region (Rahier 1999, 2011, Edmonds 2010, Wade 2010, Appelbaum 2003).

Wade (2010) suggests that the modern woman has become alienated from natural sexuality and that a progressive artistic current of primitivism has reframed the symbolic power of black women’s sexuality in the modern era. As a result, this has reversed the taboo on the now-celebrated, previously-stigmatised sexual excess symbolised in Afro-descended women’s bodies. In fact, what has always been “known” about black women’s “uncivilised” sexuality—by way of naturalised social relationships (Guillaumin 1988), in this time of modern sexual liberation and endless commoditisation, has become an object of fetish and hedonistic self-fascination that fosters an entrepreneurial drive within a market system that has been mapped onto the cultural psyche (McGuigan 2014). Colonial markers of racialised female bodies have been adopted by the beauty paradigm and the sexual “looseness” that has historically been attached to black woman’s bodies now constitutes an element of modern progress.

This has occurred to such a degree that surgical technologies and techniques have been developed to enable it. Buttocks enlargement via liposuction and the purification of

body fat—which is extracted through lipo-suction, then “purified” using new medical technology, after which the purified fat is re-inserted into the body—has allowed white and *mestizo* women to acquire the shapely curves stereotypically associated with the African body, namely the “Afro-inspired *pompis*” (Taussig 2012: 55). Taussig (2012) succinctly noted that cosmetic surgery in Cali is “playing havoc with our semiotic systems” (p. 44).

Even though the sexualised symbolism remains attached to the Afro-descended body, black women find themselves incorporated into the aesthetic ideal for the first time. But, this comes with a caveat: their sexualised and racialised features are socially sanctioned only as long as they are balanced out or tamed in relation to the semiotic arrangement of white features located on the face and head. That is to say, the sexual transgression of the black woman’s body is counterweighted by the cultivation of “white” beauty of the face and head resulting in a particular configuration of mixedness, *mestizaje*. Wade (2010) notes that *mestizaje* has controlled and marginalised the extent to which elements of blackness and indigenouness make up the mestizo national aesthetic, likening this to a drive to control diversity similarly seen in multicultural nations. During the research, such control, management, or taming appeared to be of little relevance for domestic servants, fresh produce vendors, shop assistants and interlocutors who occupied the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, and who remained subject to symbolic violence, destined to suffer as a consequence of being marked by the symbolic values of their un-operated-on, un-beautified, un-commoditised bodies.

Moreover, inasmuch as there exists competition to attract attention by means of participating in the beauty paradigm, the supposed sexual potency of the black female—and her parts—is emulated by many white and mixed-white women, faked via plastic surgery. The phenotypically “white” woman’s aesthetic hegemony is only marginally threatened by the black women’s sexual potency as the sexualised appendages are blatantly appropriated through cosmetic surgical intervention. Indeed, cultural appropriation does not stop with culture, but it extends into the biological. Biological (mis?) appropriation of the symbolism which accompanies parts of the black woman’s body is carried out and manufactured using cosmetic surgery. Likewise, the exchange goes both ways; black women or mixed women who exhibit features that remain stigmatised appropriate the supposed symbolic virtues associated with white women by engaging in plastic surgery and beauty work. What’s left is a community of women biologically appropriating historical meanings of race through beauty work in order to navigate the symbolically charged field of social relations that originates in

racially discriminatory histories and which yet lingers, uncritically, in contemporary understandings of race, beauty and social relations.

It seems the permitting of blackness as a constitutive element of beauty in Cali is, nonetheless, still mediated by white hegemonic traditions, beliefs and relationships to Afro-Colombian peoples. While it has been shown that race in Colombia is not a stable category, and one that is fraught with ambiguity regarding “what ‘black’ signifies” (Wade 1999: 455), Mariana’s, Sofia’s, Dolores’, Jimena’s and Clara’s comments reveal how blackness remains recognisable and signified within the domain of beauty. Furthermore, they reveal that the head is a space of beauty cultivation dominated with symbolism signalling whiteness which is also linked to femininity, modernity and status. The body beautiful is pregnant with symbolism regarding the previously stigmatised, currently fetishized, and indeed, uncivilised sexual impulses of supposed African desire. Further socioeconomic patterns reproduce the historical power dynamics between racialised groups that contribute to the semiotic meanings attached to beauty on the face and body. Maids embodied an aesthetic that conspicuously runs counter to psychosocial images of beauty, wealth and modernity in Cali that appear explicitly in popular media, visual culture and fashion trends, and implicitly in human relations where an uneven power dynamic endures.

Conclusion

I have attempted to describe how concepts of beauty in Cali are tightly intertwined with historical and contemporary concepts of race and racialised bodies. The conceptual link between race and beauty in Cali together with the legacy of *mestizaje* generate a particular beauty ideal that reproduces a material expression of racist values recalling the region’s colonial past. Practices of beauty work function to contrast or balance symbols of sexual capital—predominantly on the body—and social capital—predominantly on the face—resulting in a corporeal display of sex symbolism or erotic capital that doesn’t transgress the values of beauty: modernity, cleanliness, civility and morally-sanctioned sexual suggestion in Cali. This corporeal display of sex, however, must be mediated by the face and head, through the cultivation of opposing signifiers of status and sophistication linked to whiteness. Accordingly, I have shown how symbolism permeates beauty work on the face, and that hairstyling plays, to quote Taussig (2012), “games with history and the meaning of signs” (p. 105)

I have shown how the dominant beauty aesthetic in Cali constitutes a specific arrangement of black and white features that carry semiotic associations to sexuality and racial hierarchy. Correspondingly, the dominance of white features located on the head demonstrate the symbolic associations of status, class and civility to whiteness. Meanwhile, charged semiotic associations to sexual looseness and blackness are cultivated on the body. I argue that, rather than racial diversity being reflected in Caleña beauty ideals, mestizaje functions as a rhetorical and material manoeuvring that masks and perpetuates the racism entrenched in beauty practices. Guillaumin (1988) acknowledges that race is not all about skin colour and that it is commonly identified through distinct patterned social relations, which I highlight using the contemporary example of Afro-Colombian house maids in Cali, whose associations to blackness and poverty. The house maid's uncompetitive position in a neoliberal economic paradigm inspires anxiety in one Afro-Colombian informant who notes that she participates in a lifestyle competition in order to prove that she does not harbour the psychosocial imagery and undesirable social positioning—within the ideal modern subjectivity of Cali—that comes with being a black female. Ideas of race are formed and valued differently in particular settings. As a result of history, economics and aesthetic symbolism in Cali, along with racial stereotypes are embraced in particular ways and avoided in others through beauty practices. Racism circulates furtively in the discourse of mestizaje, in the socioeconomic order of the land, and in the visual culture of Cali and Colombia especially inasmuch as the visual culture imbues practices of beauty.

Concluding Remarks

In this thesis I have explored how cosmetic surgery culture in Cali reveals the inequitable power dynamics at play between gendered and racialised groups, and the symbolic signs that underpin them. Further, I analyse the way that the region's specific economic and racial histories have set the stage for a beauty culture in which cosmetic surgery is a normative practice in the course of many women's lives.

With women being the dominant consumers of beauty technologies, I have shown how the cosmetic surgery phenomenon reproduces patriarchal structures of power that play out in beauty practices and heterosexual romantic relationships. Widely shared perceptions of men as unfaithful partners foster the urgency felt by women to submit to the beauty paradigm by provoking anxiety about potential mistresses on the part of women who are in relationships. By eliciting anxiety among single women who wish to obtain a relationship within the competitive romantic market, cosmetic surgery is used as a mate-securing tool for women in relationships, as well as, a mate-attracting tool for those out of relationships. Thus, posing a threat to existing relationships, as women perceive attached men to respond almost without will to being courted by other attractive women – further generating anxiety about fidelity.

The eroticised culture of Cali reflects an internalisation of the values inherent in free-market economic policies that produce commodity fetishism. This eroticisation is marked by the manifest inclusion and exclusion of specific racial markers that date back to colonial times. The internalisation and submission to the beauty paradigm in Cali (and all the practices it invokes) demonstrates its coercive qualities, as becomes apparent when Clara's rejection of Cali's ideal feminine beauty causes her negative affect and lonely self-imposed social exclusion. Those women who are not perceived to be competitive in the sphere of beauty (due to lack of cosmetic enhancement) become symbolic of not only socio-economic backwardness, but moral backwardness that fails to resonate with the consumerist values of contemporary society. Despite the inflated value assigned to feminine aesthetic beauty in Cali, feminist rhetoric occasionally infused my informants' discourse through hopeful assertions that female intelligence holds significant capital in successful heterosexual relationships. This contradicts the ubiquitous empowerment marketing for cosmetic surgery that encourages women to "feel better about themselves" while doing something "for themselves" by undergoing aesthetic surgery. This rhetoric permeates popular media and

frequent discussions on public platforms regarding women who undergo cosmetic surgeries. Ultimately, however, I have shown that female submission to or adoption of the beauty paradigm reinforces patriarchal power relations, as many intelligent women opt for cosmetic enhancement in a bid to maintain or attain economic and romantic stability.

The second part of the thesis explored the links between Cali's colonial history, race and conceptions of beauty. These come to bear on the form that "ideal" beauty takes in Cali, making these themes essential to an analysis of the cosmetic surgery culture of Cali. Following previous scholars, I have illuminated the link between the political and discursive history of mestizaje in Colombia and dominant beauty ideals that are circulated through popular media and government advertising. This is despite constitutional changes that pay nothing more than lip service to racial diversity in cultural domains such as beauty. I investigate the issue of race and its relation to the value assigned to beauty in Cali. Particular informants associated blackness to domestic servants, and thus poverty and backwardness, while another asserted that black women have only been seen as beautiful in recent times, the times of aesthetic surgery and consumeristic practices that are tightly linked to a moral and modern subjectivity.

Analysing the semiotics of beauty in Cali illustrates how beauty is expressed through a precise corporeal arrangement of racial symbolism, which beauty work such as cosmetic surgery plays an important role in cultivating. I show how the head is a space of colonial sophistication and status that is historically tied to the symbolism of whiteness. And I show, consistent with other literature on the African descendants' body, how curvaceous bodies, sexual looseness, and vulgarity are historically linked to Afro-descended people's bodies in Latin America. However, in today's global economic climate, previous stigmas have become the sexual fetish to be bought and cultivated by the hedonistic spirit of the modern individual. This is commonly achieved through the morally mediating quality of virtuous consumption, especially consumption of beauty and its practices. Through this, we see how the pervasive practice of cosmetic surgery in Cali reinforces colonial notions of racial hierarchy.

While I have focused my analysis of beauty culture and cosmetic surgery on themes of gender and Afro-Colombian history, I have not had the space in this thesis to address other important and related areas of concern. For instance, I have not been able to explore in which ways indigenous bodies are symbolically incorporated into or excluded from dominant

beauty ideals. However, I hope that this inspires a new area of anthropological investigation for future researchers.

To conclude, this thesis has explored feminine experiences of heterosexual relationships and their link to beauty practices, and historical racial discourses that come to be inscribed on the body beautiful through aesthetic ideals, beauty work, and cosmetic surgery. I have shown how these themes are enmeshed with a globally prevailing economic paradigm, namely neoliberalisation, which has not only imprinted upon the Colombian economy but also on the cultural psyche, as aesthetic ideals curated by commodity fetishism are internalised. The economic ideology has inculcated a certain neoliberal self (Mcguigan 2014) in which the economic principles of market competition—limitless and unrestricted in its power to alienate all manner of physical and symbolic objects and subjects—have come to appear as sociocultural values in and of themselves. This has illuminated the narcoaesthetic and the practice of beauty work with a new virtuous and entrepreneurial light.

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Appendix 1 of this thesis has been removed as it may contain sensitive/confidential content