

The Domestication of Hair and Modernised Consciousness in Cameroon: A Critique in the Context of Globalisation

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Reposant sur l'expérience camerounaise, cet article soutient que le style féminin de coiffure en Afrique révèle la manière dont la culture populaire africaine entre dans le marché mondialisé. Les auteurs démontrent les modalités selon lesquelles les subjectivités en matière de consommation révèlent l'interaction entre les modernités capitalistes issues de la mondialisation et les modernités locales. Ils analysent en outre la manière dont les inégalités entre les régions du monde et les disparités économiques locales structurent la rencontre entre la culture locale et la culture globale. Selon les auteurs, bien que dépendant énormément de produits et modèles importés de l'Occident, les styles de coiffure des femmes en Afrique ne reflètent pas une totale dépendance vis-à-vis de l'Occident. Il existe toujours un espace où la liberté d'initiative s'exprime. En fait, l'entrée des femmes dans le marché mondialisé signale précisément l'exercice du choix et les possibilités d'indépendance, d'autonomie et de créativité. Ce qui réfute l'idée de passivité des Africaines. Les femmes africaines sont en train d'explorer de nouvelles possibilités de négocier la grande variété des options culturelles disponibles. Ces possibilités les situent loin des extrêmes que sont la dépendance ou l'indépendance totale vis-à-vis de leur passé ou de l'attraction de l'Occident.

The concept of globalisation is becoming pervasive in social scientific studies, but its effects are still poorly understood, and its dimensions are only beginning to be explored in their wide range of subtleties. Although the movement of ideas, people and material items across parts of the globe has undoubtedly been part of all human history, the currently popular concept of globalisation is associated primarily with modernity and the modern - two concepts with subtle and often underexplored implications. Against globalisation is poised the countervailing force of localisation: a disengaging of materials from the surging tides of modernity, from "McDonaldisation," and their entanglement with conservative local knowledges. Modernity is, indeed, in one of its aspects, what is specifically nonlocal, and to accuse something of local meanings, of local contextualisation, is to defer its claims to modernity itself. It is this equation and more that have marginalised Africa and Africans in the "marketplace of cultures" and the "transnational flows" that are celebrated by champions of globalisation. In this paper, we will argue for the necessity of understanding the hegemonic nature of western globalised modernity, but only against the forms modernity takes and the orientations and practices through which it is recogni-

sed in Cameroon. In effect, we argue for examining the link between globalising, purportedly universalist modernity and the very real, very important oxymoron "local modernities."

Let us take, for example, hairstyles. We will examine below how western and neo-African hairstyles are articulated with a highly particular vision of "the modern" in Cameroon to decenter ideas of modernity and globalisation. In Cameroon, as elsewhere on the African continent, many women curl, dye, straighten, lengthen with extensions, and supplement with wigs their hair. And they have been severely critiqued for pursuing a frenzied quest to consume things western, a critique found across the continent (cf. Stambach 1999, Burke 1996). But, to open the discussion, let us consider how hairstyles more broadly may be interpreted as part of the flows of globalisation to appreciate exactly how Africans are seen to participate in these flows. The straightened and permed, extended and curled hair of the "modern African woman" is depicted in two ways, each insisting upon an asymmetrical relationship to these "flows," leaving Africans more as receptacles than active contributors to the global economy of things and meanings. On the one hand, to the proponents of globalisation, hair is an example of a worldwide exchange of styles, and the consumption of western products and media images in Africa parallels, perhaps, the appearance (or consumption) of African hairstyles across the Atlantic and by those media images themselves. But the movements of items into the "global economy" from different parts of the globe are not, in fact, the same.

Hence the critics of straightened and curled hair note the potency of western styles and products to westernise, even modernise, those who try them on, alienating them from African modes. And if one looks at the reciprocal action - the appearance of African items in the western consumer world - these African items, whether hairstyles, cloth or ornaments, music, "ethnic" foods, or even *ngangas and sangomas*, do not threaten to Africanise their western consumers, to imprint upon them new orientations to the world and self. These African items have been "globalised" - which here means "westernized" - even before the moment of consumption. Indeed it is this transformation that makes them consumable. Catalogued and marketed and transformed to feed the modernist projects of self-making in an already global marketplace and economy, they are effective only when stripped of their original properties to suit the standardised, routinised consumer culture.

Things African do not globalise; they are globalised. Here, Africans provide only the raw materials for the global marketplace, much as they have produced other raw materials in imperialist and neo-imperialist systems, to be converted

and transformed into “useful” items, endowed with the potent magic of western romantic consumerism (see Campbell 1987) for western-modern projects. A European woman walking down the streets of Buea, Cameroon threatens to transform Cameroonian hair with her own blow-dried style; a Cameroonian woman in recognisably nonwestern hair walking down the streets of Boston is seen either as still indigenised and not yet incorporated into the globalised market of style and identity or, at best as a resource that might be picked apart and adapted for novelty and someone’s project of exoticising herself to differentiate herself from her mass-marketed counterparts in the city.

This is the simpler understanding of globalisation, which sees it as a series of flows outward from the metropolises, a process of “McDonaldisation” of the rest of the world, where the replication of certain rationalised forms of production and consumption replicates entire systems of values, orientations, and practices (Ritzer 2000). Against this, it has been remarked that when restaurants appear in other societies, even McDonald’s are adapted to local projects and imbued with local meanings. Instead of McDonald’s entirely westernising and transforming other cultures, the McDonald’s themselves are transformed, and “localised,” and the homogenising project may be compromised (Watson 1997). But, when applied uncritically, the opposition of countervailing tendencies of “globalisation” and “localization” also marginalise African (or other nonwestern) agency, allowing it to occur but circumscribing it to narrow local spheres. Indeed, the suggestion that modern, transnational, or global forms are “localized” can suggest the old dichotomy set forth by Lévi-Strauss (1966) between “hot” and “cold” societies. In hot societies, history dominates and changes are effective, but, in cold societies, such changes as intruded were subordinated to the conservative trends of “system” (the structures of meaning, mythologic) through bricolage - through the dissembling of items from the assemblages of their sources and reassembling them to reinforce local structures. This process of localisation denies imaginative agency to the cold actors. For, although they are depicted as adapting and transforming items of western/global culture, it is only under the compulsive exigency of a conservative culture that brooks no history, no self-transformative creativity, and in which what one creates is only an eternally recurrent pattern.

Recognising the danger of setting off a dynamic, creative, and powerful notion of globalisation against a conservative, constrained, and only weakly agentive version of localisation, we can then explore the tensions between the global claims of western modernity and the local visions of modernity. These local modernities recognise western forms and act upon them, sometimes in

ways that seem as acts of subjection more than independence. We will argue that this occurs in the space between “creativity” and the modern - or global - “imagination.” Creativity has marked African hair in “traditional” as well as “modern” settings. But when it is attached to modernist projects of self-making, of desire and distancing from a “past,” it becomes the means of capture by western goods, products, and popstars. Indeed, Miller (1995:1) seems to set up a similar opposition, when he opposes the “consumer” of consumerist culture and theory to “the aesthetic ideal of a creative producer.” The creative producer, within the modernist and romantic aesthetic that developed in Europe since the 18th century, is associated both with the authenticity of the artist/author, and the idea of natural relationship of maker to object through the investment of labor/self. “To be a consumer,” writes Miller, “is to possess consciousness that one is living through objects and images not of one’s own creation” (ibid.) - and consumers living within the modernist aesthetic constantly attempt to negotiate the rupture between creativity and (imaginative but coopting) consumption.

For us, pursuing the problem of modernity, hair, and self-imagination involves asking what makes a hairdo “modern” to Cameroonian women, and how is that modernity confirmed in their lives? To what extent is the embracing of “modern” hairstyles an effective means of participating equally in the process of globalisation, and what does that participation mean for them? And, at the same time, can the hair choices of Cameroonian women also be seen to resist some of the implications of modernisation and globalisation? To answer these questions, we want to explore further what modernity and modernisation mean to those who link them with globalisation and western hegemonies, and then explore what modernity means to Cameroonians and how local modernities are both related to and in tension with western notions. We need to recognise that western, globalising forms often present themselves in local contexts through local agents. Durham (1999), for example, has shown how, for Herero in Botswana, “modern western” dress appears as the style of a dominant, unchanging local Tswana hegemony, whereas the colorful “ethnic” dresses Herero women adapted from 19th-century missionary styles present themselves as aspects of transnational, global connections, inverting expected ideas of local/global, conservative/historical. Within Cameroon, regional and class relations also shape the ways in which “modernity” and “global” materials present themselves. As Moran (1990) has shown for Liberia, women’s relationship to class and status systems differs from that of men, and their claims on such statuses as “civilized” (a term used in Liberia) - or modern - are far more tenuous and need constant enactment.

Keeping these aspects of globalisation and localisation in mind, we will discuss how, indeed, shampoos and conditioners, straighteners and dyes, curlers and blowdriers create new spaces in which women make themselves neither according to conservative local structures nor in the exact image of the west. African women's hair, increasingly dependent on foreign products and models, is not a mere replica of modern styling, but a testimony to creativity - not only of hair, but to their need and ability to imagine new social projects as a whole. Women and youth are particularly poised to exercise this imaginative capacity, which both liberates and captures. Women's hairstyling is a symbol and medium of local efforts to deconstruct victimhood by reconstructing modernity, thus empowering those who would otherwise be disempowered in the end, both locally and by the giant compressors of global consumer capitalism.

Globalisation and Modernities

The term globalisation may refer to the increasingly rapid, increasingly open, and increasingly fertile flows of materials, ideas, and people around the world. At its most extreme, it is a process of creating a truly "rhizomatic" world (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987), structured by networks not centers, in which the self, identity, and the localities to which these are fragilely attached become increasingly unstable and related to the flows of images, information, and things in contradictory tension. Globalisation offers disparate realms of production and consumption, the opportunity not only to compete with but also to complement one another (cf. Surin, 1995). The center and periphery are conflated in cosmopolitan centers and distant village markets; catalogues carry clothing from St. Louis (Missouri, USA) to Saint-Louis (Senegal), and vice versa - whereas the clothes themselves may have been assembled somewhere else entirely. Mass-produced consumer goods that flood markets in all corners of the world thanks to global capitalism enter into competing and complementary relationships with individually crafted products of local manufacture both at the centre and at the peripheries. Cassettes, radios and TVs engage with *balafons*, flutes and gamelans; tables, chairs and carpets with mats, hangings, and carved stools; medical doctors and psychoanalysts with *sangomas* and *ngangas* - and perms and curls with plaited extensions and dreadlocks (see Warnier 1999).

But it is notable that globalisation is most strongly and consistently associated with western capitalism, with its decentering from its historical sites in western Europe and America, and its accommodation of, integrating or adapting to, nonwestern productive and consumerist forms. Although Appadurai (1996)

carefully insists, quite rightly, that “globalization is a localizing process” and “does not necessarily or even frequently imply homogenisation or Americanization” (p. 17), the localisations take place within the context of transformations of the subject, the consumer, that are rooted in western modernity, capitalist social processes, and, indeed, media forms associated with them. When Appadurai directs us to look fruitfully at the “new role for the imagination in social life” and “the imagination as social practice” (1996:31), we must also explore the extent to which the particular social practice of “imagination” is a product of imperialist, capitalist, global relations and itself the primary western export, the sign of modernity (or, for some, of postmodernity¹). As Castells (1997) has argued, new projects of self-making are an effect of the exclusions, the peripheralisations, and the interruptions in the “flows” that characterise globalisation; “selves” become significant both in the creation of the modern subject and in his/her disconnection from the apparent global spaces where these creations are most vividly portrayed. Here, because we examine modernity as a universalist claim and a local orientation, we will be simultaneously asking about the encounter of western and local imaginations as social practice. For although transnationalism and globalisation may leave the world “incorrigibly plural” (MacNeice, cited in Comaroff and Comaroff 1993:xi), the articulation of that plurality in a global space is profoundly shaped by expectations of the global - modern - subject. With the help of the global entertainment media as magic multipliers of desire and consumerism, this results in plurality without diversity.

Thus, although there are, as the Comaroffs argue, “many modernities” (1993:xi), these modernities are not necessarily spatially distinct, but are in competing and complementary relations everywhere. The copresence of hair coiffed through relaxers, curlers, dryers, and sprays with tightly cropped unadorned hair, with elaborately sculpted plaits reproducing older African styles, with flamboyantly tucked and drawn headdresses and modest scarves covering immodest hair is as vivid an example of this as one could want. But modernities are not just the styles themselves, although their identification with modernity as perceived in Cameroon will be an important part of our argument. Modernity has both simultaneous multiple local forms (what Piot 1999 calls “vernacular modernities” rooted in different notions of the subject) and a singular character inimitably connected with the nature of global flows and itself connected with an assumed liberalist and consuming actor. Hiding behind its local emergences in the global marketplace are its claims to universality and universalism - claims that originate in its own localised nature as a product of western history and cultural orientations. Modernity’s forms - rationality, master narratives of history (whether progressive/evolutionary, or marxist/materialist), aesthetics, manners and style, philosophical assumptions of individuals and “rights” - are presented

to the world as universally applicable and universally right. The inherent desirability of things western - much as the rightness of concepts of civility and civil sociality - are inscribed into the new globalism. How women treat their bodies, or how women's bodies are treated, has been one of the most dramatic stages for arguments over these universalist claims - where western ideals of the body, gender relations, femininity, and "human rights" meet over the issue of enforced veiling of women or, more dramatically, female circumcision (Obiora 1997).

Arguments about female circumcision ultimately target not only the physical details, but the nature of the subject, self-consciousness, and selfhood and liberalist notions of human agency as an *autonomous* agency, and agency whose outstanding feature is the unconstrained ability to make choices based upon rational (unencumbered by either "tradition" or social constraints) thought. And it is here that the western hegemony behind globalisation must be sought - in the process of "converting" consciousness to that of the liberal consumer, able to pick and choose between the various "styles" presented to her in the new economy, whether these styles be "localist" or "cosmopolitan" (cf. Ferguson 1999, after Hannerz 1996). Although western models of rationality are not so characteristic of the west as they once seemed, to the point that their own "occult" nature may only complement other "irrational" notions of accumulation (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993, Comaroff 1999), the modern notion of the subject as consumer, performer, and stylist is novelly engaged in new economies of desire. Media, commerce, and the movement of peoples in a global socioeconomy provide a range of new models of living and new structures of desire. Globalisation presupposes an intensification of consciousness of the world as a single space integrated through the movements of styles, people, and things - and also a consciousness of relationship to them. The Comaroffs relate the words of a Tswana farmer: "[t]hings modern...seem always to be in the next village" (1993:xii), and the material aspects of modernity do by nature seem always to be in the next village, in the city, in Europe or America - or in the neighbor's or co-worker's house.

Although some students of the global economy focus on structures of production (e.g., Ritzer 2000), new attention is being given to structures of consumption. Modernity means desire, the desire to refashion the self, to imagine new ways of being, it is this imaginative seeking that brings together modernities under the aegis of a globalised consumer ecumene. We see this consumer ecumenical movement at work not only in the open bazaars where most work on globalisation look, but in the small choices people make about everyday appearance. We see it at work in a woman picking and choosing from a range of hairstyles drawing from different cultural repertoires, styles or fashion. She may,

over any period of time, arrange herself in the ideal-type African style or the ideal-type western one or in one of the hybrid styles that proliferate, as it suits her that day, or her wallet or the wallets of her sponsors, according to the time at her disposal and the context she plans to enter or create around her. While doing so, she acts both within the new consciousness of a “modern” subject, and also according to local frames of modernity.

This notion of modernisation as intimately connected not only with desire, but certain structures of desire, has been well captured by Laburthe-Tolra and Warnier (1993). Following Eisenstadt, they present modernisation as a process of transformation of nonwestern cultures (unfortunately characterised as backwards and irrational) to the types of social, economic and political systems that sprung up in Europe and North America between the 17th and 19th centuries and spread to the rest of the world through imperialism, capitalism, and now globalisation. Accordingly, modernity as a mode of being refers to subscribing to a logic of consuming novelty which is seen as making progress. Three important aspects stand out. As Back (1985), an American sociologist, does, this associates modernity with a conscious break with the past and a definite shift of cultural communication from old styles. This notion of modernity is particularly strongly felt in Africa, which has been subjected to centuries of discourses on progress and separation from a multiply condemned past (Ferguson 1999). With Jensen (1990), it argues that modernity should be seen from a relativist point of view. Modernity, he stresses, exists only in relation to a pre-modern time; these can be arranged in a duality of stability/instability. The most important feature for us is that modernity involves the consciousness of being modern over and against some other way of being, and that consciousness is directed at as a break from a past that is seen as (correctly or not) relatively fixed and unchanging.

Although these ideas may seem superficial, they are precisely the ones that bring us into local modernities (as Rowlands 1995 describes for Cameroon). At the same time, the structures of desire, the spirit of accumulative capitalism and conspicuous consumption (see Veblen 1899) associated with consuming novelty direct us towards a global subject. In the following paragraphs we will consider first this consuming modern subject, and then, as a start to developing an idea of local modernities in Cameroon, the association of the modern with the rationalised, progressive west.

This global subject was an urban subject in early Europe, as modernity emerged from industrialisation and consequent forms of urbanisation. Simmel has analysed modern consumerism as a characteristic of modernity intimately connected with urban living in *The Metropolis and Mental Life*. Bocock (1994) sug-

gests that living in a city exposes urbanites to “an increasing awareness of style, the need to consume within a repertory or code which is both distinctive to a specific social group and expressive of individual preference” (p.180). In so-called traditional settings, it has been conventional for anthropologists to analyse dress and hairstyles as not only functioning to communicate status (married, mature, wealthy, noble) (see Leach 1954 on communicative functions of culture), but also often deeply imbued with the personhood of the wearer, emotionally and magically (Bogatyrev 1971). Modernity, whether ushered in by urbanisation or a collection of forms connected with capitalism, produces quite a different relationship between the dress and the wearer. Dress becomes in multiple ways what Lipovetsky (1994) calls “ephemeral”: with the rapid circulation of information, the increasingly frenetic competition for status, and the creation of the idea of the individual as agent, style and wearer became detached. Indeed, clothes became the means for establishing individuality, not group status, and the means of such individualisation was autonomous choice².

What Lipovetsky (1994) misses is how persistent structural inequalities and stratification within western societies and between parts of the globalising ecumene shape choice (cf. Castells 1997, who argues that self-fashioning becomes a response by those excluded from open-ended image-making). Many have noted that people do communicate with clothes about status claims, lifestyle attachments, and attitudes (Davis 1985). A woman who relaxes, curls, and arranges her hair in a western coiffure instead of covering it with a scarf, or trimming it to a tidy cap does so not because the meanings of each are ephemeral, but because they are status-laden and situate her with respect to different lifestyles, which are themselves associated with occupations, prestige, and forms and sources of wealth. These claims and the consumption of clothes and hair are built upon desire. Haug, in his “Critique of Commodity Aesthetics” (1994) treats the consumption of modernity as a mere venture into seductive illusion (see also Ewen 1988).

Modernity, Haug (1994) argues, seeks “to invent something which enters one’s consciousness unlike anything else, something which is talked about, which catches the eye and which cannot be forgotten; something which everyone wants and has always wanted” (p. 70). Colin Campbell’s (1987) study of commodity culture in the west complements this approach, arguing that the development of department stores and forms of marketing goods marketed less the items than the lifestyle they represented; furnishings, clothes, foods represented certain lifestyles that people desired. In consuming items, they attempted to incorporate the lifestyle, trying to romantically refashion themselves. But the

consumer goods themselves were unable to produce the lives to which they aspired - which, as Bourdieu (1984) has shown, are shaped around subtle expertises and orientations habitually honed. Thus a chair, a cereal, or a hairstyle fail to produce the romantically reimagined self; the consumer, always disappointed by the promise, seeks new selves with new items. The process is facilitated by the plethora of images and lifestyles presented to consumers - to be young, chic and upwardly mobile, to be established and opulent, to destabilize situations with radical inversions, to be African in its most mythologised image. Desire, the desire to create a new and better self, shapes the modernist subject as consumer in the new global ecumene.

But, as we have noted, these studies often overlook the effects of inequality and unequal abilities to acquire the means of self-fashioning. They overlook the ways that such consumerist subjects were reproduced in Africa. African-inspired romance has entered into, left, and entered into western consumerist fantasies again and again. In the 1970s, women in America adopted the "baby Afro," following the lead of African Americans who sought to reaffirm an Africanist heritage. In the 1980s, Americans followed Bo Derek's lead from the movie "10" with cornrows and beaded plaits, a style hidden under scarves by African Americans until Cicely Tyson popularised cornrows and elaborate Nigerian-based sculpted plaits (on TV screens across America) (Sagay 1983:47). But these appeared as ephemeral indeed; the contrast of the brief fashions of these fantasies with the perduring imitation of western hair by Africans indicates a sharp difference.

Colonisation/imperialism in Africa depended on the creation of a subjugated, but at the same time choosing subject who would desire a different - and new - lifestyle. This took place within what Mudimbe (1988) identifies as the "colonizing structure": the domination of physical space, the integration of local economic histories into western perspective, and the reformation of the natives' minds (pp. 2-4). Reforming the native's mind involved despoiling him/her of his native and novel rights, of his will, and degrading and despising him (Fonlon 1978:25). Burke relates a comment by the first Anglican Bishop of Mashonaland in Zimbabwe, G.W.H. Knight-Bruce, who observed that Africans' bodies were "infected by the disorder of the natural world, exuding dangerous contagion at all who came into contact with them" (1996:3-6). Against this, Europeans provided toiletries such as soaps, perfumes, new lotions and oils, to assist those Africans who desired to remove their natural dirtiness and live like civilised men. As the Comaroffs (1997) have written, "Modern European empires were as much fashioned as...fought for....[t]hey also relied heavily on the circulation of

stylized objects, on disseminating desire, on manufacturing demand, on conjuring up dependencies" (p. 219). This process seems to be ongoing.

In Cameroon and across Africa, Europeans seem to have succeeded in "creating the myth of the westerner as superman or omniscient by whom the desperate African was to be teleguided in every sphere of life" (Nyamnjoh 1997:197). Western lifestyles have become the measure of individual development and achievement; one's prestige is much higher when one consumes imported western goods than local equivalents (Rowlands 1995:119). Wole Soyinka (1994) joins others in recognising the nature of this consumer desire and condemning this abandonment of African lifeways: "By succumbing to hunger for the latest novelty, we [Africans] paradoxically consume ourselves and what is left of us is consumed in turn by the industrial machine which churns out the latest novelty"; succumbing to an "incurable dependency syndrome" as African "consume...to death" all sorts of "toiletries and other forms of body enhancement...now legitimised only by their appearance in air-conditioned super-markets" (p. 209). Nyamnjoh (1995) notes that a good number of African men and women who use "skin-poisoning, cancer-causing, mercury-ridden toners and soaps" can testify to the torture they go through in a frenzied quest for modernity. Using bleaching creams and soaps, they reap indeed an ephemeral benefit as their complexions become once more dark and blotchy and scarred after applications are discontinued (p. 46).

There is, then, this one significant difference between African consumption of things western, and the idealised modern consumer subject who populates a democratising global marketplace. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than with hairstyles, which readily lend themselves towards impermanence and remaking. Although certain styles do indeed appear ephemeral, ever shifting, novel for the sake of novel self-imagining, the perdurance and permanence of attempts to model self on the west contradict hopes that Africa has been summoned into the global bazaar as the idealised modern subject, able to pick and choose from a bewildering array of styles, and to change style, orientation, ambition, self-fashioning with ease if the old one disappoints (see Nyamnjoh 2000). As we recognise that the modern, choosing, self-styled subject is both created and discouraged at the periphery of the global bazaar, we need to question more critically the assumption that choice, self-invention, and the agentive subject are exclusively western. What ideas of agency, orientations towards self-fashioning, imaginations of the self that take form in adornment and material objects might Cameroonians bring to the process of conversion to global citizens? And how might women - or, indeed, other consumers of western-styled hair - be particularly engaged in those processes? Addressing this, we move on to examine the

specifics of Buea and the women of this study, where the self-fashioning subject looks at the offerings of the media-saturated bazaar of hair styles through distinctly local and simultaneously cosmopolitan eyes.

For the implicit contrast between hair as fashion and style, as both sign and medium of the new global subject, hair is bound up with fixed statuses, much as Bogatyrev (1971) described for the “traditional” Moravian peasant. Traditional accounts of hair in Africa focus almost entirely on how different modes of cutting or dressing the hair were bound up with statuses, and changes of hairstyle were simply reflexes of changes in status. For some places and times, hair in Africa is caught up in sumptuary codes that denote certain ranks and privileges. Egyptian kings and elite, for example, at one time reserved the right to wear wigs, and the length of beard (both real and false) was attached to the high status of the wearer. More typically, hair is depicted as indicating one’s position in a generational and sexual grid: children wear their hair so, marriageable girls so, and married women so. Widows hair reflected directly their widowhood. For example, Dassanetch pastoralists of Ethiopia, for whom age-sets form the primary structure of local society, “[mark] the transition from boyhood to manhood” with a new hairstyle worn by men known as kabana: “the hairdressing ceremony is an essential prerequisite to social recognition of manhood” (Almagor 1978:75, 73). Such emphases draw attention away from the creativity that goes on, at least within the statuses, as for example the Dassanetch age-peers, negotiating between an ethos of equality and internal competitions, “pass time chatting and arranging each other’s coiffures” (ibid.76), or in the exuberant styles of women (sometimes associated with specific statuses) in “traditional” Nigeria (Ogunwale 1972). Creativity, ambition, and, indeed, certain processes of self-fashioning are integral to “traditional” Cameroonian society as well and more particularly to the articulation between urban life and village life today.

Buea : A Context for Modernity

A brief study was made of 110 women in Buea³. The town of Buea and its associated rural area comprise some 86,000 people in the southwest province of Cameroon, only some 80 kilometres west of Douala, Cameroon’s largest commercial centre. Since the 1800s, and contact with Europeans, it has had a dominant agricultural base, but is currently growing as an urban centre. Although it shares the neighbourhood with modern agro-industrial plantations, such as the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and Pamol, and serves as the provincial administrative capital, Buea has no large industries, and trading is carried out mostly by “migrants” from such ethnic groups as Igbo (of Nigeria), Bamiléke, and from the Bamenda area. In 1993, the Buea University Centre was

upgraded to the University of Buea, and this has contributed to the town's growth as an urban centre. The ever-increasing population includes those who provide services to others, including taximen, traders, tailors, bar attendants, medical doctors, pharmacists, teachers, university lecturers, administrators, prostitutes and others seeking a way to get by. Social activities abound in nightclubs, bars and off-licences, and there are many facilities to meet the demands put on urban life: cinemas, hotels, cosmetic shops, bakeries, and, of course, hairdressing salons.

One of the significant features of Cameroon, as of most African countries, is that there are multiple spheres within which status is recognised. In home villages there are title ranks, claims to royalty and access to local authority, and the forum in which individual achievement is made manifest through distribution of its benefits to others. Buea is located in the southwest region of Cameroon, where "traditional" society is typically egalitarian, but a significant proportion of its population are migrants from the inegalitarian and hierarchical grassfield regions of the country, where society is organised around prestige associations with putatively inherited titles and kings (*fons*). Various forms of disruption over the colonial and postcolonial period, including interference of colonial authorities, revolts, and the new sources for power and authority associated with the states, have created a situation in which those who achieve success outside their home region have been able to convert their success into titles. This conversion is effected through contradictions between "modernity" and "tradition" and serves to reinforce the local meanings of both (see Rowlands 1995, Warnier 1995), while knitting them together at the same time.

"Modernity" is perceived by Cameroonians as associated with consumption of things western - from education to clothing and furnishings - and with the denigration of "traditional" lives. Status is strongly correlated with the ability to acquire these things (for the older generation, western education is sought for junior relatives) and the incomes that allow access to them. Status is visualised and displayed in city residential patterns - where neighborhoods clearly display the conjunction of western styles and income and status (see Nyamnjoh 1991:71-74, 81-83 for a fictionalised account). Even within a high-status house, status areas are set up around the source of material objects: in a wealthy man's house, Rowlands describes a series of "sitting areas," one for village and local visitors comprised of Cameroonian-made chairs and, at the other end of the series, a "prestigious imported leather-covered suite" (1995:30). But it is within the last, the most prestigious and highest-status of the sitting areas, that the owner has situated a sculpted bust of himself in traditional dress. For the

modern items so sought by many Cameroonians are not, for the most successful of men, the ends in themselves, nor is the conversion of themselves into westernised subjects complete. Success and achievement are confirmed for men only when domesticated into effectively "traditional" structures. As Rowlands (1995) notes, success may be measured in the material displays of TVs, Italian shoes, and western house forms - but these are not, in fact, the ultimate nature of success at all. Success is seen as on-going. It is an attribute of (among the grassfielders he worked with) *one's sem*, a reproductive, productive, and transformative potency, and its confirmation comes in the display not the items themselves. These men are driven to display - although less in the restless search to continually reimagine a possible self, but to make oneself into a known embodiment of *sem*. Like the romantic self-creative consumer of the west, the Cameroonian attempting to establish success in status must do so through continual renewal of consumer practices. But doing so, they also reproduce the patriarchal structures of dependency and redistribution. For Bamileke businessmen, in the examples provided by Warnier (1993, 1995) and Rowlands (1995), the income that sustains the successful displays is derived from extractive use of the labour of dependents - of young men hoping through such subordinated labour to be granted means to their own success, and of women.

Furthermore, the consumption of items is for these men a simultaneous act of distribution as Rowlands (1994, 1995) describes, TV sets and videos play constantly for the visitor (unlike in Europe and America where they would be turned off), feasts and celebrations are expected, and claims by relatives must be satisfied. Attention given to the body (body lotions used by both women and men, such as Johanna, Mixa, and more recently, Avon) and to hair and dress displays ones endowment with success as an on-going process. To fail to do so attests to ongoing and processual failure, because "physical appearance as a sign of personal and group well-being and achievement is...closely monitored" (Rowlands 1995:13) for the etiology of failure. Thus, in a double move for these grassfields men, modernity simultaneously turns its back on something seen as traditional and backwards, and yet, at the same time, embraces both its patriarchal privileges and the novel visions of power and success that come from the contrapuntal dance (Goheen 1992, Fisiy and Goheen, 1998).

This is a crude sketch because we are ultimately concerned not with these businessmen, civil servants, and other successful seekers of status at the crossroads of consumption, display, and patriarchy, but with the women whose hair is fashioned in perhaps a slightly different predicament. We want to draw attention to the fact that women in anglophone Cameroon, along with "young" men who have not yet gained access to the means of adulthood (wives, and through

them, wealth), were positioned slightly differently to engage with modernity - not only with the things modern that it offered but the subject position of consumer. Both Warnier (1995) and Rowlands (1995) describe how young men (at first) and women (later) fled the strictures and limitations on success of inegalitarian patriarchies for the income and possibilities for success offered by colonial labor and postcolonial urban life.

Although some managed to make the kinds of achievements that allowed them to re-enter rural life as emblems of success, for many more, the promises of modernity remained elusive, albeit in slightly different ways than the project of imaginative self-recreation remains elusive for the romantic western consumer described by Lipovetsky (1994) and others. Always limited options, compounded by economic and political crisis have made the kind of success described above nearly impossible for the "silent majority." They, instead, are left in "a dream-world evoked by publicity and TV" the disappointment of which have "become so glaring that there are signs of a general turning away from modernity and a search for other role models" (Geschiere and Rowlands 1996:552; cf. Nyamnjoh 1997). But the search itself is significantly different from the appearance of the bust in the wealthy businessman's high-status sitting room: it fulfills the ultimate promise of modernity, which is the possibility of making, or imagining a new form of being through the consumption of objects prepared and presented by others and associated with other ways of being. In other words, the search for new forms of identity, the novel imagination of self fulfilled in entirely different modes of life, the attempts to fashion success in new guises is more compelling for women and for men curtailed to "youth." They are compelled to try new forms because of the disappointment of those to which they have aspired. But women are also compelled to try to fashion new modes of being through the objects they consume because it is through the new identities that they make with them, identities of a "modern" woman, that they, in a very pragmatic sense, survive. More so than men, women's recreations as modern images - modelled after pictures from western fashion magazines, international popstars, Nigerian film stars and African-American celebrities, the images and descriptions of wives of the rich and famous - are necessary for them to find the well-paying jobs or the men who will provide the means to achievement.

Hair is of course a part of this self-fashioning. It is particularly amenable to an investigation of how women are able to remake themselves repeatedly, modern in their sensibility of consuming modes of being-in-the-world and to an examination of how differently economically positioned women respond to the allure of modernist, globally situated, imagination. One of the things that we

noticed most in our survey of women in Buea was that women said they changed their hairstyles often, primarily for different occasions. Women adjusted their styles to fit the situations as they expected them - *the banane* hairstyle (of which Chantal Biya, Cameroon's first lady, is a leading symbol), for example, or a well-organised plait would be worn to formal gatherings but not to nightclubs where the "kind of person" one wanted to be was embodied in a more "crazy" coiffure. Women wore different styles to school than to wedding parties or a bachelor's eve [stage party that girls present but for the bride to be].

It is interesting to note here that many of our respondents tended to describe the hair and the situations that the hair was designed to complement or fulfill in terms of personal conditions or states - "crazy," for example, "responsible" or "mature." As women (in response to our questioning and in focus group interviews) contemplated why they "chose" hairstyles, then, they referred less to the obligations of status and more to the ways in which the hairstyles were part and parcel of reformulating themselves as particular kinds of persons. These kinds of persons were associated with certain settings - with nightclubs, classrooms, and with the salons and receptions of the wealthy, powerful and "responsible." One might note that this is similar to how items of consumer culture in the west gain their power over consumers for their promise of reformulating the self (as avant-garde, bohemian, alienated and drugged, comfortable with old wealth) by their associations with entire assemblages that represent a lifestyle. (As, for example, a perfume is marketed through association with ballrooms and romance; a towel by Ralph Lauren through associations with labrador retrievers and old leather chairs⁴.)

We need to note that a very large segment (31/8%) of our sample population was in the 21-25 age bracket, and overall 50% were students. They were not only female, then, but young, and as such, less directed at modalities of achievement and success that enmeshed others in patriarchal webs of distribution and control. Only 4.5% were over 45; it may be at that age that they start having different relationships with achievement, and with their hair. Possibly this age distribution accounts for the fact that economic activity was indicated as shaping hairstyle by only 7.3%.

This analysis is furthered by the fact that when asked why they were meticulous about their hair in self-presentation (something to which 65.4% of women admitted), reasons offered included that they wanted to feel good and to appear neat, confident, beautiful, and modern. The notion that hairstyles or other consumer items produce a structure of "feeling" - or an intimate sense of "self" - is distinctively modern, especially as the women experiment with different such

structures of feeling. Conventional studies of hair in “traditional” societies have focused on how hair expresses, or is believed to express, a prior nature of the person - the attachment of child to mother (see Turner 1980), for example, or the death-nature that clings to a widow or close relative (Munn 1986), or the sexual or libidinous expressions of persons (Leach 1958). By contrast, these women do not expect their hair to be an “outgrowth” of an ordinary interior state, but hope that their hair itself will convert them into new forms of “feeling” - whether it is good, modern, confident, or beautiful.

They hope that with these new feelings, they will partake of the promises of new social spaces and arenas where they would now fit in. It is consistent with this desire to create a new self and new self-feeling that the forms of hair that women most identified with “modernity” and the “modern” were those that modified hair the most (as well as brought it into styles associated with the west and with globalised images of nonspecific Africanness). For, recall that one of the concomitants of modernity is not only a rejection of a “past” or “static tradition,” but the related sense of dissatisfaction with one’s current (or past) condition and the desire to “improve” it. Hence women identified as modern hair that was straightened and styled, modified with the use of artificial hair (in both plaits and wigs), colored, or simply modelled on media-disseminated role models. The criteria of one respondent brings together many of these new conditions of modernity :

A modern hairdo should comprise the use of “products;” your hair has to be relaxed and not only relaxed, but should enjoy the application of certain chemicals or oils in order to give the hair a good texture and prevent it from falling off. As such, your hair should be styled frequently in different patterns of your choice.

To achieve these modern textures and different patterns, a surprisingly large number of women used wigs - 70.9%. The nature of the wig wearers speaks to two things. On the one hand, many respondents to the survey commented that wigs and artificial hair were economical in terms of cost and time. By this they meant that in using wigs, they would not have to frequently visit a salon to renew a hairstyle. Eighty-six percent of the women surveyed said they frequently went to salons (4.5% to beauticians, and 9.1% to barbers); all of these sites are dynamic spaces in which the nature of modern life and the articulation of global styles with local desires are negotiated (see Weiss 2000 on barbershops in Tanzania).

But, as the women note, access to these sites is expensive, and so artificial hair, itself considered “modern” substitutes. The use of the hair substitutions or supplements, however, tells us much about the unequal relations of urban

women to the desires of modernity. Let us start with the notion that going to salons consumed time: to go repeatedly to a salon is, in Veblen's term (1899), a conspicuous consumption not only of money, but of leisure, and one must have both to do it. As Veblen argued, leisure time for working men was conspicuously displayed often through their wives and children, who profligately engaged in nonproductive activities. This is less the case in Cameroon, and yet the drive to earn and get ahead and "not be left behind" in the chase for modernity does make time a scarce thing for those in the race. Time itself is not, however, a secure status marker. Rural and "traditional" women across Africa, although certainly hard-working, also find large amounts of time to engage in leisure and beautifying activities. Indeed, the elegant hairstyles described in Ogunwale (1972) and Sagay (1983) are the products of women's "traditional" leisure. Hair that demonstrates extraordinary consumption of time does not distinguish itself exclusively as modern.

Therefore, the real issue with salons is money and, as we will note next, their "expertise" in fashion and knowledge of the circulating information of media images and local fashion-setting models. At a salon, a 3-step *banane* coiffure is a fairly expensive style (and, we noted above, one associated with mature, self-possessed "ladies"); simple waves or perms cost only 500 FCFA each. Here we can examine too the ways in which women wear wigs and false or supplemental hair, wigs that may free some from salons but that also measure how expense is connected with both the signs of and designs for modernity. Although we associated social class in Buea with a combination of income (whatever its source), educational level, and occupation or occupation of parents (for students), income was a dominant factor. People with monthly incomes below 50,000 FCFA and who were associated with prestigious occupations formed the upper stratum - about 26% of our sample. A middle stratum was formed by those with moderate incomes of 21,000-50,000 FCFA/month, high school or higher education, and a skilled occupations (about 42%). A lower stratum was made up by those with low incomes below 20,000 FCFA and associated (themselves or through parents) with occupations of low prestige (32%). Although all classes made use of wigs, a larger percentage did in the higher class; the lowest stratum was more likely to use plaits than wigs, which are somewhat cheaper. Eighty-three percent of the higher stratum women spent over 25,000 FCFA annually on wigs - and on wigs of markedly higher quality. Human hair⁵ costs between 10,000-15,000 FCFA, as opposed to "Nina" artificial hair. Wig consumption, through the cost difference, establishes the human hair consumer at a higher prestige level than the Nina-monger.

Although income is strongly associated with status in Cameroon, for women whose connections with both income and different forms of status are somewhat different from men, knowledge of fashion and media images is also important. Salons, as we hinted above, for all their expenses in time and money, are an important forum in which media images are checked and double-checked. Here we see particularly marked the active imagination of the “romantic” consumer described by Campbell (1987), pursuing a “better” form of self but caught in the contradictions of the individualist and personalised idea of self, and the mass-mediated ways in which that pursuit is generated in consumer cultures. Sixty percent of our respondents indicated, when asked, that they imitated the styles of models from the media or other known fashion-conscious consumers. In contrast, only 7.3% said that they made their choices based on personal tastes and moods. This is particularly interesting in conjunction with the repeated assertion by some 61% of the sample that they wanted to distinguish and differentiate themselves from others, including their peers who were following the same fashion models.

Most respondents in the middle and upper strata (but, curiously, not many in the lowest one), were strongly concerned with distinguishing themselves through hairstyles. The desire for distinction goes well beyond that associated with class by Bourdieu, although there is little doubt that the women do wish to distinguish class affiliations and distance themselves both from lower classes and “traditional” practices associated in Cameroon with inferiority and lack of success⁶. Women are inspired by and attempt to copy styles they see in female magazines that explicitly market fashion as a mode of distinction and self-creation, such as *Amina*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Woman’s Own*, and *Ebony*. These magazines produce their messages of the self-fashionable woman not only through their articles but more emphatically through their advertisements. Haug (1994:70) has described ads as seductive illusions that lure consumers to “enjoy that which betrays them,” a series of images thrust upon the reader/observer “like mirrors, seeming empathetic and totally credible ... In these images, people are continually shown the unfulfilled aspects of their existence.” Repeating this image of people as sheep, passive receptors and faithful zombies of mediated products and symbols, a hairdresser at Check-Point Molyko claimed that after some hair styles were projected over CRTV in December 1997, many girls and women came rushing in for a reproduction of these styles. Copying such styles performs a double service: it both communicates participation in a circulation of knowledge, and it attempts to remake the self. The circulation of knowledge is particularly important in Cameroon. We have already noted that education is highly prized; but knowledge of what’s what and who’s who is critical for the pursuit of success, because political favors shift and networks break apart and

reform. The following statement by one of the interview subjects illustrates the importance of this :

Today, we tend to believe in such people, they really know the fashion, they're versed with fashion, like copying from Naomi Campbell, especially her coupe, she usually has a nice coupe; there is Janet Jackson also. There are even some hairstyles called Chantal Biya [wife of Cameroon's president], which are in imitation of her styles.

At the same time, such means of creating a new form of self, a sense of being "smart," "knowledgeable," "confident" and "modern" is betrayed by the very media through which fashion is transmitted. Modernity is associated with the new, and in Cameroon with the imported new – although, for many, access to such is through locally-produced imitations or reconditioned substitutes (clothing, furnishings), it is the new and imported that is prized most. As one member of a focus group said, "Modernity entails the consumption of novelty, what is new, what is brought from the west⁷." But hair that is refashioned after a popstar is palpably imitation; furthermore when it is fashioned after *someone else's* reproduction of Naomi Campbell or Whitney Houston, it is most decidedly second-hand. For as we have been arguing, the crux of modernity is not so much the struggle to situate oneself in a group with others identified as progressive and modern and of high status (joining groups has been a feature of many societies and characterises the transformations between "modern" and "traditional" statuses negotiated by high-achieving men and women) but to create a new sense of self that can be created and modified and *imagined and imaginatively fashioned* through the fantasies of lifestyles and their associated consumer goods. But, insofar as this involves a new self (one "confident" or "smart" or "responsible" or even "crazy"), it sets up a conundrum by the apparently contradictory statements of our informants. One said, for example, that I like Whitney Houston, I believe she is a real role model for me;

I like her styles, the way she makes her hair, always pulling it behind, short and cute, it makes her look smart. Movies do influence us also, like most of these Nigerian films; "Glamour Girls" for example. I watch them and I'm usually attracted to them and once in a while I like doing their styles like that of this girl Jane in "Glamour Girls," I sometimes do her styles⁸.

At the same time, a full 45.5% of people interviewed on media and fashion overtly disapproved of the role of the media in determining or influencing their choices, and 40% claimed that they did not copy styles from stars, but let their personal tastes dominate. The problem, then, with imitating styles seen on stars, other media figures, or learned through common avenues of fashion communication, is that it does not devise something "personal" and uniquely define a

“self.” Instead, as one informant said,

It is very difficult to distinguish or differentiate yourself from your hairdo because you might like a hairdo from, say, watching TV or looking through catalogues and magazines. You are not the only person doing that. Some other person eventually may look and be interested in the very style. Your friend may even copy from you. Even here in Buea, you may do a style and you come to school and many others have the same style⁹.

We must note, first, that this informant stresses the individual nature of choosing hairstyles - it is not, in her account, done with the advice and in the company of others, but as a singular consumer in a world of possibilities. The least approved way, in her scenario, of claiming distinction is performed by the friend, who “may even copy from you.” Although copying is tolerable if problematic from the likes of Whitney Houston or Naomi Campbell (whose status as a fashion model - designed to be copied - and a “star” - unique personality - situates her neatly within the dilemma felt by the informant just quoted), it is compromised entirely when copying from a copy, and from someone with whom one is engaged in *ordinary* day-to-day interactions. Think how very unlike this is the sense of success described by Rowlands for high-achieving men of the Grassfields area, for whom success (an attribute, not a status) is adequately realised only when redistributed. The success that women seek with their hair, however, is most fully achieved when it isolates them - marks them out as unique and special personalities from their close associates. What makes Janet Jackson, Whitney Houston, or Chantal Biya acceptable is their status as *unique personalities*: consumption was not only about joining a club of people who were “modern” but was also about the daily recasting of the ordinary into the extraordinary, a characterising feature, some say, of modern life. And yet such daily recasting fails; it fails through the process of second-hand distributions and imitations that guarantee that one is only another instance of a common type, it fails in its promise to enchant all the other commonalities of one’s life - the struggle for survival, grades, to keep the car running or the house clean. And so women will seek new enchantments with new styles for their hair.

Conclusion

We have argued here that women’s hair is a revealing instance of the ways in which Africans and African popular culture enter the globalised market. It is revealing in the specificity of women’s experience, in the ways in which consuming subjectivities reveal the double play of global/capitalist modernities and local modernities, in the ways in which inequalities both between areas of the

world and within local economies structure the encounter.

Hair styles in Africa have always taken on many forms. This statement is even more true of women's hairstyles in the late 20th century, when many of the *nouvelles modernes* have adopted popular relaxed, straightened, and at times bleached hair among their options. Indeed, modern hair in contemporary Africa is undoubtedly intensely inspired by western fashions and dependent on western products - from an apparently inexhaustible supply of hair lotions, shampoos, to a proliferation of imported wigs and artificial hair, to the straightened and curled styles themselves. African hair starts to appear as a mere mimicking of western forms, helplessly replicating anything foreign in a massive rejection of an apparently unworthy past, weak in the face of western commercial and cultural hegemony, embracing styles whose forms and implements denigrate the nature of African hair.

Yet the dominance of western forms does not itself betray entire zombification by western popular culture. There is always room for creativity, for a certain kind of agency - and indeed, the entrance of women into a globalised marketplace signals exactly the exercise of choice and also indications of independence, autonomy, and creativity that belie the notion of Africans as zombies. African women are taking on new ways of negotiating the variety of cultural options that surround them. These new ways situate them between the too-easy opposition of dependence and independence of either their past or the lure of the west. It is here, in the space of interdependences, that women also deconstruct victimhood, empowering those who might seem to be disempowered by the giant compressors of global capitalism. We see this restructured interdependence in the exercise of varied choices by women - women who are now claiming the right to design themselves through hair and lifestyles, striving against their marginal positions in a global market and against the impossibility of becoming "western" or anything entirely they fancy. We see it in the upsurge of neotraditionalist African styles.

Hair is an apt subject for the study of globalisation and the uneven engagements in it of Africa. Globalisation presupposes an intensification of consciousness of the world as a single space and within that space of material flows and interdependence. Entering the global village, African women have not only capitulated to the lure of the west as a sign of modernity, they have also sought to domesticate modernity and locate Africa within the global space. Whether protesting western domination, or celebrating Africa's contributions to the global village, women in Cameroon, as elsewhere in Africa, have reinvented African

(and diaspora African) styles. *Braids, rastas, corn rows, gondron, and bananes* - all of these are the results of imaginative responses to styles that fashion the consumer herself into a new image. These styles are conspicuously different from the western hair and yet are clearly modern, for the ways that they are entered into the choices presented in a broad space of stylistic options and for the ways in which women who opt for them do so as an act of self-definition and self-invention.

Hair in Cameroon and Africa must be read as a case of interdependence, of interconnectedness and conviviality, which is often much more difficult to discern than globalisation's other outcomes - dependence or resistant independence. Modern African hair style should be seen as more than a conventional hybridity of forms of cultural expression and should be appreciated as not so much a marriage of global and local influences as the offspring of the same marriage. Those who look at African hair to find the authentically African or a wholly westernised style will not be satisfied without distorting reality. Women in the context of this African modernity, within a specific period of time, will pick and choose from a range of styles that make them "crazy" or "smart" or western-looking or African-looking or something of both, insofar as time and money permit. Women as individual persons or social categories are never entirely under external influences although they must and do engage with them, be they influences from within or from outside local society. Poverty and dependence may mitigate her exercise of choice, freedom, and indeed rationality, but it cannot eliminate it.

We therefore agree with those who argue that while the expansion of capitalism may be producing some amount of globalised homogenisation, it has, in fact, failed to occasion a conversion of styles. Modernity is, of course, taking its toll on many unique civilisations in Africa, as it has everywhere. But the same modernity, by means of the consumer goods it places on the market and the reformulation of the consumer through them, provides Africans with the means to create for themselves individual and social identities whose variety and diversity leave little hope for a homogenised synthesis in the foreseeable future.

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Notes

¹See Durham 2000 for a critique of the current popularity of “ imagination ”.

²Indeed, Lipovetsky argues that the development of modern “ fashion ” or style is at the heart of the development of democratic culture. In that case, the wide variety of hair fashions and women’s shifting consumption of them are a heartening sign of democracy in Cameroon. But, as our paper goes on to show, Lipovetsky’s model fails to accommodate class and other inequalities in shaping individual “ choice ”.

³Seventy-five of the sample were administered questionnaires, and another 35 were interviewed. The sample was stratified according to income, levels of education, occupation, and residential area (highly correlated with status in urban Cameroon). The sample was composed primarily of students at the University of Buea, students in secondary schools, civil servants with income levels above 50,000 F CFA, businesswomen, and hair dressers. These women/girls had hair that was relaxed or straightened, plaited or punked; some used artificial hair as extensions, hairpieces, or wigs, and various western hair products. Analysis of the survey results was done by simply frequency counts and univariate analysis.

Problems encountered included the difficulties of conducting a large number of interviews by a small research team (Nyamnjoh and Fokwang) with informants who sometimes failed to show up, and who were sometimes too busy for focused attention; the usual problems of unreturned questionnaires; and the fact that some informants found the subject of study “ very funny ” and were reluctant or shy to answer questions.

⁴We do not intend to suggest a “ postmodern ” aesthetic of selfhood as entirely fluid and unstable, fluctuating with situation, the ironic plays of ludic selfhood put forward by actors, and the multiplicity of interpretations rescuable from any situation. Instead, we want to claim that these experiments with selfhood are distinctly modernist, insofar as they are directed at the recapturing (impossible as noted above) of an “ authentic ”, genuinely “ felt,” if novel self.

⁵Human hair, contrary to what the name purports to represent, is another type of artificial hair, but almost similar to real human hair.

⁶“Consuming modernity, as you can see is like a race for fashion : nobody wants to be left behind ” said one informant, mobilising well the sense of competition, but also the overlay of progress/backwardness that class distinction takes on in Cameroon.

⁷Focus group interviewed at the Bermuda Hostel, Molyko, 12 April 1998, We’d like to note that “ modern ” styles and fashions include those that have drawn heavily upon African and Afro-Caribbean inspiration as well, including *rasta*, *banane*, and other types of plaits; these circulate with western goods as “ new ” and “fashionable ” styles.

⁸Interview at the Arts Lobby, Faculty of Arts, University of Buea, 15 April 1998.

⁹Interview at the Residence Hall, University of Buea 20 April 1998.

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