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In the last two decades, beauty salons catering only to women have burgeoned across Karachi, offering scores of women an employment option they never had before. The demand for beauty parlors is on the rise as more and more middle class women enter the paid workforce and have access to a surplus income. There is an abundant supply of beauty workers as women are especially keen to work in salons because they value the all-female and ‘respectable’ nature of beauty salons (as opposed to factory and domestic work), the highly advantageous income opportunities and the lack of any educational or vocational training prerequisites. I am interested in exploring these salons as a site of intimate labor and a unique place of cross-class interaction between women in Karachi outside domestic spaces. These interactions are often prolonged, regular and centered on affective or intimate labor (Boris 2010) which has only recently become commodified in this professionalized manner.

Focusing on this interplay between class, commodification and intimacy I will investigate two broad themes. First, what is the trajectory of the commodification of intimate practices, especially around bodily care, in South Asia? Beauty workers may work at salons as wage laborers, in home spaces as self-employed women, and performs beauty services for friends or family as unpaid ‘gifts’ or ‘obligations’ and on occasion, for people who cannot afford to pay the full cost, as ‘charity.’ How does this types of work diverge from and converge with the logic of market exchange and what does that reveal about the heterogeneous landscape of the ‘economy’ (Gibson-Graham 2006)? Secondly, what new types of social relations are made possible in this *zenana* space of the salon among the beauty workers and between workers and customers? While men in Pakistan have access to a wider range of interactions because they move freely in the public sphere, women’s interactions beyond the family and across class are more restricted (the site of domestic labor being one other exception). What types of friendships and relations do these beauty workers form between themselves that are not based on familial ties and what meanings do these relations hold for them? How can these workers use their relations with customers to leverage their position in the worker-manager-customer power triangle? (Kang 1997, 2010; Lopez 2010). This dynamic is crucially affected by the intimate nature of the services beauty workers provide to customers and I wish to explore it in order to understand its implications for relations between labor and capital in Pakistan.

I plan on conducting three months of participant observation by working at beauty salons and enrolling in a course for aspiring beauticians at Memon Foundation in Karachi. For the first six weeks I plan on working part-time (while I take the course) at the Meena Bazaar in the salon of a beautician who I was able to establish contact with last summer. Meena Bazaar is a historically popular, all-female market for beauty services and attracts women from a wide range of areas and backgrounds. For the next six weeks I intend to work in a high-end beauty salon so I can focus on class dynamics in an upscale setting. By enrolling in this course I will not only learn the necessary skills required to work in salons, but will also be able to conduct fieldwork in this vocational training institute where many working-class women have taken beauty classes for a low fee.

By undertaking an ethnography of the lives of these working class beauty workers I wish to contribute to the literature on the commodification of intimate practices and the construction of the ‘economy’ and ‘markets’ by focusing on all-female workplace. In addition, I hope to be able to study and bring forward the terms in which these working-class women live their lives in order to understand how their desires and experiences might differ from that of middle and upper middle class women, and what that might mean for imagining an inclusive feminist politics in Pakistan.

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