

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Goldsmiths, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 22: Anthropology and Development Studies		
Title of case study: Promoting Social Awareness and Religious Literacy through Hair		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Emma Tarlo	Professor	2007-2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Emma Tarlo's research on the global trade in human hair spread knowledge and public reflection about a highly secretive unregulated billion-dollar global industry. It has generated impact by stimulating widespread public debate in local and international media; educating interested publics and companies regarding hair provenance and ethics; improving public understanding of the stigma and social pressures surrounding hair and hair loss; and promoting religious literacy and inter-faith awareness. Most notably, it provided expert evidence which shaped orthodox Jewish legal rulings concerning the use of Indian hair in wigs with far reaching social, emotional and economic benefits for Jewish wig wearers and traders.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Tarlo's research on hair grows out of her long term interest in how the anthropology of dress, material culture and the body might promote greater understanding of cultural and religious diversity and encourage inter cultural dialogue. This was a theme addressed in Tarlo's Impact Case Study REF2014 which focused on modest fashion.</p> <p>Whilst working as a co-investigator on the AHRC funded project, <i>Mediating Modesty</i> (2010-11) Tarlo became interested in the parallels between Islamic hair covering practices and those of Orthodox Jewish married women who covered using wigs. This raised questions about how human hair was sourced and alerted Tarlo to the many largely undocumented social, economic and religious tensions embodied in the hair trade. From 2013-2016, Tarlo held a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship to investigate these issues (Project title: <i>Head to Head: untangling the Global trade in Human Hair</i>), conducting multi sited ethnographic research in India, China and Myanmar where hair is sourced and in Senegal, the USA and Europe where it is purchased and worn. Her book, <i>Entanglement: The Secret Lives of Hair</i> (R1) is the first book to trace the choreography of this largely hidden trade and to document the lives of hair sellers, donators, collectors, wig makers, factory workers, exporters and hair users engaged in and connected through the hair trade. Published as an experimental work in anthropological non-fiction, the book attracted attention for its content and form, winning the <i>2017 Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing</i>, (American Association of Anthropologists).</p> <p>Tarlo has published several articles on hair in scholarly journals addressing issues of racialisation, religious law, psychology and fashion (R2, R3, R6). She has further curated three multi-media exhibitions based on collaborative practice-based research. In particular the exhibition, <i>Hair! Human Stories</i> (R5) was produced through collaboration with artists, designers, hairdressers and members of the public. It used visual media (photography, film, art works, historic and contemporary artefacts and hair pieces) to explore the emotive power</p>		

of hair, the relationship between human and animal hair and hair's many unexpected uses including its potential for recycling.

Key Insights and Findings: (a) the human hair trade is highly specialised and segmented with substantial markets targeted at particular groups including people with medical hair loss, orthodox Jewish women and women of African and Caribbean heritage; (b) beyond preoccupations with fashion, hair figures strongly in experiences of social stigma and concerns about identity, social acceptability and self-esteem; (c) religious controversies over hair are linked to lack of religious literacy and inter-faith knowledge. For example, Hindu tonsure (ritual shaving) practices have been interpreted by some Torah-observant Jews as 'idolatrous,' resulting in bans on the use of Indian hair; (d) the hair trade is highly secretive and unregulated. Widespread mistrust exists regarding hair provenance and many products are given fictive identities which obscure their actual origins, exacerbate anxieties and pose major ethical problems; (e) the research exposes the glaring and enduring inequalities in the hair trade and reveals how Western hair fashions have relied on imports of hair from Asian countries for over a century; (f) it also highlights the many diverse uses to which hair has been put in different cultural and historic contexts and documents its potential for recycling.

3. References to the research

R1. Tarlo, Emma (2016) *Entanglement: The Secret Lives of Hair* (London: Oneworld) [Book] pp. 407. ISBN 978-1-78074-992 (Winner of the Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing 2017, Chinese translated edition, SDX Publishing Company 2020). [Submitted to REF 2]

R2. Tarlo, Emma (2016) Jewish Wigs and Islamic Sportswear: Negotiating Regulations of Religion and Fashion, *Critical Studies of Fashion and Beauty*, 7(1), pp. 69-87 [Journal Article] DOI: [10.1386/csfb.7.1.69](https://doi.org/10.1386/csfb.7.1.69) 1, ISSN 2040-4417. [Available on request]

R3. Tarlo, Emma (2018) Great Expectations: The role of the wig stylist in orthodox Jewish salons. *Fashion Theory: Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, Special issue on Hair, 22(6), pp.569-591 [Journal Article] DOI: [10.1080/1362704X.2018.1533334](https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2018.1533334), ISSN 1362-704X. [Available on request]

R4. Tarlo, Emma and Jefferies, Janis (2018) *Material Contemplations in Cloth and Hair*, Constance Howard Gallery, London, 7 - 26th June 2018 [Exhibition] [Available on Request]

R5. Tarlo, Emma (2018) *Hair! Human Stories*, The Library Space, Battersea, 7th- 26th June [Exhibition, [Website](#)] [Available online/on request].

R6. Tarlo, Emma (2019) Racial Hair: The Persistence and Resistance of a Category. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 25(2), pp. 324-348 [Journal Article] DOI: [10.1111/1467-9655.13028](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13028), ISSN 1359-0987. [Full text available/on request]

4. Details of the impact

Tarlo's research generated a broad range of different types of impact:

1. Changing Public Perceptions of hair through engagement with artists, designers, museums and readers

Tarlo's research has played a significant role in changing public perceptions of hair. Her book, *Entanglement* (R1) prompted widespread debate about the global hair trade across the UK, EU, Asia and Africa and was reviewed in over 20 prominent international media outlets and popular blogs, including *The New Statesman*, *TLS*, *The New York Times*, *Elle USA*, *The Oldie*, *Literary Review*, *The Australian*, *Sanlian Lifeweek (Beijing)*, *Grazia South Africa*, *Bookriot*, *Goodreads*, *the Pool* and *Flavorwire* and industry-specific news channels, such as *Hairisodes*, *Style Yetu*, *Tangled* and *therighthairstyles.com*. Reviewers commented on their new understanding of hair and the hair trade: "It's not often that a book gives you

new eyes for your everyday world” (The Oldie); “Warning - you will never look at a trip the hairdressers in the same way again” (the Pool); “gives a fascinating insight into the business and the trade of hair which I was completely unaware of” (John Naylor. Goodreads); “I will never think of hair the same way again” (Valerie Steele, Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology); “Hair is really, really complicated, and I didn't realise just how much until I read this book” (Chocolategoddess, Goodreads); “This book answered questions I didn't even know I had” (Rachel, Goodreads).

The exhibition, *Hair! Human Stories* (2018) (R5) has further encouraged the cross fertilization of ideas between artists, designers, museum curators and different publics regarding hair's multiple uses and its potential as an ecologically friendly material for recycling. It was accompanied by workshops for rope making, felting and embroidering using human hair, along with discussions on black hair politics and hair loss. Seventy-five percent of visitors who gave feedback at the events confirmed that their perception had been challenged: “Never before had I thought hair was so important to so many people in so many different ways”; “I will never see hair the same way again”; “This exhibition has opened my mind to what an extraordinary range of things we can learn through hair”; “This has been an incredible learning experience. I have worked in hair all my life but I learned so much...Wow!” [S1a]. Museum publics also engaged with Tarlo's research through public lectures and round table discussions at Musee de Quai Branly (Paris 2013), Museum Centraal (Utrecht 2016), Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford 2019), and Somerset House (London 2016). Tarlo extended understanding of the properties and potential of hair as material fibre through dialogue with designer Alix Bizet at the Design Museum (London 2016), participation in the R&D salon on Hair at MOMA (New York, 2019) and an online interview at the Lebenhaus Museum (Munich, 2020) and her expertise in the field was acknowledged in a series of radio interviews [S1], including *BBC Radio London (20 mins)* and *Think* (Texas, 48 mins), BBC Radio 4's *Thinking Allowed*, (29 mins), *The Moncrief Show* (Dublin), *Word of Mouth* (New Hampshire, 20 mins), *The World* (Boston 4 mins), *Tout un Monde* (Switzerland, 6 mins), *Woman's Hour* (London), *BBC World Service Business Daily* and *Late Night Woman's Hour* (28 mins with 60 mins podcast) [S1b].

2. Informing the development of improved ethical standards through education and engagement with the hair industry

Tarlo's research highlights the lack of regulation in the hair industry and has stimulated awareness about hair provenance and ethical concerns amongst hairdressers, suppliers and wearers. The book *Entanglement* was launched through public debate in a hair salon (Ena salon, Covent Garden). Goodreads reviewer and hair extensions specialist, Jenn, writes “this book really amazed me... Even as someone who has made a large percentage of their living as ‘a hair dealer’ I had no idea that hair had such a complex, valuable or mystical quality” [S2a]. Citing Tarlo's findings, journalist and writer, Krista Diamond writes in *Business Insider*, “My Hair extensions were a big part of my identity. But after learning how exploitative they are, I'm giving them up for ever.” The media attention to lack of ethical standards in the hair trade led Nigerian-born London-based hair importer, Christina Adesina, to consult Tarlo by telephone in October 2017 before she established her company *Fair Care Hair*, which campaigns for and promotes industry standards in the hair extensions sector [S2b]. The exhibition *Hair! Human Stories* (2018) (R5) and associated public events were hosted by INFRINGE and involved collaboration with stylists and clients from Hacketts salon as well as coverage in hair journals, national news outlets including *The Financial Times*, *Le Monde* and *BBC World Service*. Radio discussion on *Late Night Woman's Hour* between Tarlo, hairdresser Alex Brownsell and Chidera Eggerue aka the Slum Flower, a young black motivational blogger on social issues, helped to further public debate [S2]. Stimulated by coverage of the book and exhibition and his subsequent interview with Tarlo, Manuel Silva who works for *IMPACTT – Making what's good for workers work for business* writes that his research for a UK-based hair supplier on how to mitigate ethical risks in the industry was “particularly enhanced” by Tarlo's ‘vast knowledge on the subject’ [S2c].

3. Promotion of Religious Literacy and Tolerance

By directly engaging with Jewish communities through Jewish Book Week and through interviews and coverage in conservative and liberal Jewish Media including *Ami-Living* and *Jewish Digest*, Tarlo has applied her research findings on religious controversies associated with hair to help promote inter-faith and intra-faith understanding. Rabbi, Aaron Goldstein refers to Tarlo's research as "enlightening", commenting in 2017, "Through my reading of 'Entanglement' ... I realise that I need to do far more listening to Muslim women who wear a hijab and Orthodox Jewish women who wear a shaitel [wig] before coming to opinions" [S3a]. Tarlo participated alongside three orthodox rabbis in an emission of *Headlines*, a New York-based radio show and podcast specialised in Contemporary religious issues and *Halakha* (Jewish religious Law). In this 90-minute emission devoted to the sheitel (wig) controversy, she explained Hindu hair practices to orthodox Jewish audiences, challenging common misconceptions and prejudices in what is commonly perceived as a 'closed and difficult to reach' milieu [S3b]. The podcast received 7,544 downloads and the debates it generated resulted in a second podcast emission on the topic.

4. Contribution to rabbinical over-ruling of the ban on use of Indian hair for Jewish wigs

In 2004 observant Jewish women were banned from wearing wigs made from Indian hair on the grounds that it was considered idolatrous. In 2017 four rabbis in Israel who wanted observant women to replace wigs with headscarves, campaigned to get all human hair wigs banned, making the false claim that 98% of hair on the global market came from Hindu temples. Tarlo responded to numerous anxious phone calls and emails from members of the Jewish public seeking clarification on hair provenance. In November 2017 she was requested by the head of kosher certification for the Chief Rabbi of Bnei Brak in Israel to write a report on Hindu tonsure practices at Tirumala temple in India to help the Chief Rabbi reassess whether 'temple hair' really was idolatrous according to Jewish Law. After writing the report Tarlo received an email from the head of kosher certification, thanking her for the "in depth and informative report" and concluding: "Based partly on the information you shared with me, Rabbi Landa [the Chief Rabbi] was able to deduce that using Indian hair in wigs to be worn by religious Jewish women, does not in any way transgress Jewish Law Therefore, all those who supply the hair, produce the wigs and wear them are permitted to do so according to Jewish law" [S6]. This ruling has major social, emotional and economic impacts, bringing relief to wig wearers, safeguarding the jobs of wig makers and traders and effecting supply chains involving India, China, Brazil, Russia and Ukraine.

5. Combating the social stigma of hair loss

Tarlo's work opens up debate around the social issues surrounding the taboo topic of hair loss through a short animated film, 'Its Only Hair,' made in collaboration with Stacy Bias, and through workshops with school children (*The Big Wig Project*, Hereford), hair loss sufferers, charities and hair loss professionals [S5]. The animation features on the websites of *Alopecia UK* and *The British Skin Foundation* as well as on Vimeo where it has 5717 views, and was used by health care professionals to introduce the Psychology session at the conference, *Get Ahead with Hairloss*, (Royal Society of Medicine 2018) [S5a]. Dermatologist and organiser of the conference, Dr Sharon Wong and Psychologist Kerry Montgomery were impressed by its educational effectiveness, whilst Marketing Director of Philip Kingsley, Emma Poole, writes that "the video addresses this issue in an impactful, yet sensitive way and helps to educate and remove barriers/taboo we know are associated with people trying to cope with the condition." Australian journalist, Kellie Scott, who has an Instagram page, @hairlossboss with 19k followers, wrote "I bloody love this video! It's really rare to find relatable content like this for women with hair loss".

The *Big Wig Project* was a Heritage Lottery funded, Rural Media orchestrated partnership between the *Little Princess Trust* and the Hereford Museum, involving Year 8 Children in Hereford, designed to explore and tackle issues of gender stereotypes and social stigma through learning about the social and historic importance of wigs. Wendy Tarplee-Morris, co-founder of the *Little Princess Trust*, a charity which since their launch in 2005 have provided thousands of real hair wigs to children with cancer free of charge, writes of Tarlo's involvement in the *Big Wig Project*: "On a personal note it was a thrill to meet academic, Emma Tarlo on

her visit to the Museum Resource and Learning Centre in Hereford. I am a huge fan of her work and research so to listen to her presentation and then talk about wigs with such an expert was an informative and rewarding experience” [S5b].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Changing public perceptions of hair through knowledge exchange with museums and collaboration with designers: a) Visitor feedback from exhibition, *Hair! Human Stories* 2018 (available in chart form; original feedback cards on request) [Testimony]; b) Selected examples of Public Debates in the Media: *Thinking Allowed: The Secret Life of Hair*, BBC Radio 4, 13 July 2017 [Radio]; *Late Night Woman's Hour: Hair*, BBC Radio 4, 24 November 2017 [Radio]; *Woman's Hour: The Secret Lives of Hair*, BBC Radio 4, 10 October 2016 [Radio]; *Rebecca Front, Paul Gorman, Emma Tarlo and Nick Lowe*, 10 June 2016, BBC Radio London [Radio]; *The Secret Life Of Hair*, *Think* (KERA, Texas), 22 November 2016 [Web article]; *Salon 33: Hair*, 2 October 2019, Research and Development (Museum of Modern Art, New York) [Web article]. [Grouped source]

S2. Informing the development of ethical standards in the Hair Industry: a) Online review, Jenn (2017), *Entanglement The Secret Lives of Hair*, 27 March, Goodreads [Book review]; b) Simon Pitman (2017) *Fair Hair Care stamp targets ethical hair extensions*, 18 August, Cosmetics Design [Web article]; c) Email letter to Emma Tarlo from the company *IMPACTT– Making what's good for workers work for business*, [Testimony - available on request]. [Grouped source]

S3. Evidence of promotion of religious literacy and increased inter-faith understanding: a) Rabbi Aaron Goldstein, *Tetzaveh 5777: International Women's Day*, 11 March 2017 [Opinion piece]; b) Show 167, *The Return of the Shaitel Controversy*, *Headlines*, 21 April 2018 [Podcast]. [Grouped source]

S4. Correspondence with orthodox rabbis in Israel over the status of Indian hair: Email letter from Rabbi Moti Hasofer to Emma Tarlo in response to her report, communicating the chief Rabbi's ruling 27 November 2017. [Testimony]

S5. Combatting Social Stigma: a) Emma Tarlo and Stacy Bias (2018), *Its only Hair*, Vimeo [Website, animation] (5619 views on Vimeo, 27 July 2020, also embedded on websites of Alopecia UK and British Skin Foundation); b) *The Big Wig Project*, Hereford [Website]. [Grouped source]