



# Contributing to overcoming exploitation in Global Supply Chains

OR

## How I became a thing follower...

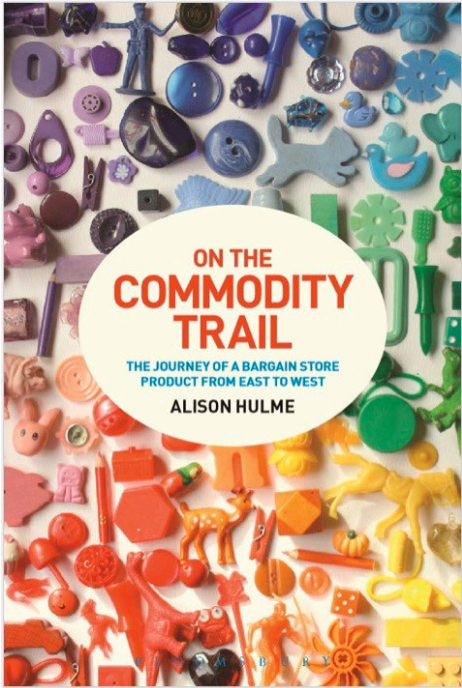
# 'Thing-following' as a method

- A more anthropological and politicised take on commodity chains...
- A combination of influences:
  - David Harvey – 'unveiling the fetish'/revealing reliance on unseen 'others' across the globe
  - George Marcus – multi-sited feildwork
  - Igor Kopytoff/Arjun Appadurai – 'career' or lifecycle of the product
  - Anthropology's embarrassment with studying 'Other' people

# 'Thing-following' examples

- Sidney Mintz – Sugar (1986)
- Pietra Rivoli – T-shirts (2006)
- Caroline Knowles – flip-flops (2009)
- Ian Cook – hot pepper sauces (2007)
- Even celebrities got in on the game... Jamelia tracing her hair extensions

# Following £1 products





**Key challenges to preventing  
responsibility  
OR  
The unfollowability of the  
thing...**

# Recognising the gaps...

- The more I followed them, the more I found that the chains were somehow mutable and disposable. For example, while many of the key places along the chains were very established and historically ensconced in the chain (e.g. container ports, shipping routes, freight train lines), others seemed to be in constant flux...
- Areas of certain cities suddenly and quickly became collection and sorting areas for raw materials; waste peddlers trading in them returned to rural provinces; factory owners switched production and many went in and out of business, containers fell from ships; bargain store owners changed suppliers, new bargain stores cropped up; and consumers shopped tactically in unpredictable ways.
- **Telling the story of *why* something becomes unfollowable, ought to be an equally valid methodological stance as accurately charting followable paths.**

# Parasitical capitalism

- This is a call to follow the collateral damage of capitalistic commodity chains; what happens when things fall apart, as it is precisely these fragmentations that enable the chain as a whole to be successful. Capitalism requires failure, collateral damage, aberration.
- Often these elements exist in the 'slow' parts of the chain, the older, clunkier mechanisms backing up the mouseclicking efficiencies of speedy capitalism at the front of house.
- In my case, that was the grinding rust of the container ports, with their spilled contents, breakages, illicit cargos (sometimes of people), and industrial accidents. It was also the hand-to-mouth life of the waste peddlers, most of whom did not 'exist' in terms of having any rights or protection. In each of these situations 'things' were lost, changed, dropped, deemed worthless, and their presence in the chain was like a torch blinking on and off
- This method does not aim to 'study' the gaps as it were (it is not simply a study even deeper 'down'); rather, it hopes to analyse what the gaps bring to the operation of the entire chain. Who or what becomes disposable in calculations that too comfortably allow for collateral damage? Exposing the gaps sees some capitalistic chains as polarised trajectories where fast capitalism is engaged in a parasitic relationship with clunky capitalism.