

THE MODERN GIRL AROUND THE WORLD

Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization

The Modern Girl
Around the World Research Group

ALYS EVE WEINBAUM, LYNN M. THOMAS,
PRITI RAMAMURTHY, UTA G. POIGER,
MADELEINE YUE DONG, and
TANI E. BARLOW, editors



The Modern Girl Around the World

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and Globalization

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In memory of MIRIAM SILVERBERG



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1

The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device

Collaboration, Connective Comparison,
Multidirectional Citation



MODERN GIRL AROUND THE WORLD
RESEARCH GROUP (ALYS EVE WEINBAUM,
LYNN M. THOMAS, PRITI RAMAMURTHY,
UTA G. POIGER, MADELEINE Y. DONG,
and TANI E. BARLOW)

The Modern Girl emerged quite literally around the world in the first half of the twentieth century. In cities from Beijing to Bombay, Tokyo to Berlin, Johannesburg to New York, the Modern Girl made her sometimes flashy, always fashionable appearance. What identified Modern Girls was their use of specific commodities and their explicit eroticism. Modern Girls were known by a variety of names including flappers, *garçonnes*, *moga*, *modeng xiaojie*, schoolgirls, *kallege ladki*, vamps, and *neue Frauen*. Adorned in provocative fashions, in pursuit of romantic love, Modern Girls appeared to disregard roles of dutiful daughter, wife, and mother. Contemporary journalists, politicians, social scientists, and the general public debated whether Modern Girls were looking for sexual, economic, or political emancipation. They also raised the possibility that the Modern Girl was little more

than an image, a hollow product of clever advertising campaigns in the new commodity culture.

The signal contribution of our collaboration has been the discovery of the Modern Girl as a global phenomenon in the 1920s and 1930s. Our group, which has engaged in collaborative research and writing for seven years, is composed of faculty members at the University of Washington trained in literary criticism, history, cultural and feminist studies, and political economy and possesses regional expertise in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. This volume contains our efforts — in this introduction, in a case study that appears as chapter 2, and in individual chapters — to trace the Modern Girl’s various colonial and national incarnations and to reveal linkages among the many geographic locations in which she appeared. This volume also includes chapters by scholars whose work on gender, modernity, and consumption has influenced our own, and with whom we have been in dialogue. We invited these scholars to consider, or to reconsider, their research in light of our group’s two central questions: How was the Modern Girl global? And what made her so?

The first section of this introduction elaborates two techniques our group developed for answering these questions and entering debates about gender and globalization.¹ These are the *Modern Girl as heuristic device* and the *method of connective comparison*.² Subsequent sections discuss chapters in this volume in relation to six thematics that repeatedly emerge in our work and in that of other volume contributors: the modern, the girl, visual economies, nationalisms, commodities, and consumption.

The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device and the Method of Connective Comparison

We intentionally elected, at the outset, to employ the Modern Girl as a heuristic device. The adjective “heuristic” means “serving to find out or discover.” A heuristic device cannot be taken as given a priori; rather, it emerges in and through the research process and possesses a future orientation. Visual representations of the Modern Girl allowed us to track her across the globe. Numerous iconic visual elements including bobbed hair, painted lips, provocative clothing, elongated body, and open, easy smile enabled us to locate the Modern Girl around the world in approximately the same years between World War I and World War II. These visual elements also allowed us to discern the linkages shaping specific phenomena across geographic and political boundaries. Our ability to call upon each other’s regional expertise promoted recognition of underlying structures of commonality and difference specific to various nation-



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- 1.1 Ad in the South African newspaper *Bantu World* (1933) that depicts a Modern Girl with an elongated body and promotes products manufactured by an African American-owned cosmetics company.

states, to different colonial and semicolonial regimes, and to diverse national and international corporate strategies.

Equally important, using the Modern Girl as a heuristic device allowed us to capitalize on unexpected research findings. In tracking corporate deployments of the Modern Girl in Indian and South African advertising campaigns, for example, Priti Ramamurthy and Lynn M. Thomas discovered the existence of Indian, black, and mixed-race Modern Girls in the late 1920s and early 1930s, more than a decade earlier than previous scholarship had suggested. This discovery of the near simultaneous appearance of Modern Girls around the world complicates widely accepted histories of commercial capitalism, consumption, and visual culture that presume the dissemination of “modernity” from Europe and North America to the rest of the world in the post-World War II period.

In using the Modern Girl as a heuristic device we were able to learn from each other about economic and political processes in geographic locales other than those in which we individually conducted research, and, consequently, we were able to develop the method we label connective comparison.³ Connective comparison avoids recourse to abstract types and instead focuses on how specific local processes condition each other. It scrutinizes the idea of discrete



1.2 Ad in the Indian newspaper *The Statesman* (1930) for the perfume company Ven-Yusa that depicts a Modern Girl with stylized features.

Hindi, and Swahili, have thus together employed the method of connective comparison. In turn, this enabled us to track the Modern Girl's specific manifestations and also to demonstrate the simultaneity of modernist aesthetics and aspirations without turning the simultaneity discovered into either sameness or equivalence.

Among our most important findings is that in any given geopolitical location, above all else, the Modern Girl was distinguished from other female figures and representations by her continual incorporation of local elements with those drawn from elsewhere. We have termed such incorporation *multi-directional citation*. We define it as the mutual, though asymmetrical, influences and circuits of exchange that produce common figurations and practices in multiple locations. In our usage, multidirectional citation pertains to both

temporal and geographic locations by positioning specific local developments *in conversation with* those occurring elsewhere in the world. In so doing, it highlights the inchoate manner in which things previously understood to be local come into being through complex global dynamics. Connective comparison is, thus, a method that neither reads peculiar phenomena as deviations from an abstracted "norm" nor one that measures such developments against those postulated by theories of inevitable modernization. Rather, it puts into practice Johannes Fabian's insight that the time of modernity is lateral and simultaneous, not evolutionary or stagist.⁴ Connective comparison avoids establishing temporal priority in a manner that privileges linear causality.⁵

Notably, working in collaboration facilitated the method of connective comparison. Only in very rare instances can one person handle the multiple languages and historical contexts that such research demands. To pay more than lip service to the diversity and commonality that characterize globalization, regional and disciplinary specialists must agree, as we have, to bring individual expertise to bear on a shared set of questions. Members of our group, who work in Chinese, English, French, German,

actual Modern Girls, historical agents who produced and performed new appearances and subjectivities by incorporating elements from disparate locations, and to *representations* of these new appearances and subjectivities. Figures 1.1 through 1.5 in this introduction are examples of such representations. In chapter 2, our collaborative case study on cosmetics advertising, we illustrate our method of connective comparison and the existence of multidirectional citation by locating the circulation, interaction, and entanglement of images and ideas of the Modern Girl within and across specific colonial, national, and international hierarchies.

Taken together, the Modern Girl as a heuristic device, the method of connective comparison, and the associated concept of multidirectional citation have enabled us to engage current debates about globalization. In most recent scholarship globalization describes processes of economic and cultural integration specific to the second half of the twentieth century. By contrast, this volume provides a study of globalization before the invention of the term. Though some scholars have argued that economic globalization is as old as capitalism,⁶ we are less interested in identifying its origins than in providing a nuanced analysis of how global commodity and cultural flows shaped modern femininity across geopolitical locations. To this end, and in contrast to previous studies of *moga*, *garçonnnes*, *modeng xiaojie*, *neue Frauen*, and flappers that focus on one nation or, at best, bilateral relations between a nation and its formal colonies,⁷ we examine the Modern Girl's global emergence through economic structures and cultural flows stretching beyond such discrete and circumscribed boundaries. In our case study of cosmetics advertising and in individual chapters, U.S. corporations emerge as a major source and as the most important international distributor of imagery associated with the Modern Girl, especially because of U.S. preeminence in the international distribution of advertising and film. However, we suggest that processes of Americanization were not uniform and should instead be understood in relation to British, European, and Japanese colonialism and the international circuits through which corporations, cultural workers, and image makers operated.⁸ On this point our analysis resonates with Richard Wilk's argument that globalization comprises a series of social and economic processes through which commonalities are expressed differentially — as what he calls “structures of common difference.”⁹ For us, the multidirectional citations that shaped the Modern Girl reveal such “structures of common difference.”

Our group arrived at a shared set of questions about the Modern Girl through our prior individual research on gender, political economy, and cultures of consumption in twentieth-century Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. Over the course of our collaboration we have disagreed on numerous



1.3 Ad in an elite Chinese magazine, *Young Companion* (1937) for “Odorono,” a deodorant licensed around the world by a U.S. company.

1.4 Ad in the German magazine *Leipziger Illustrirte Zeitung* (1928) for the U.S.-licensed deodorant “Odorono,” highlighting abstracted facial features and exposed body parts.

issues about how to ask and answer questions. At times, our divergent disciplinary frameworks have proven difficult to reconcile. These differences are evident in our individual chapters. And, yet, it is our sense — more vivid now in retrospect — that these differences have also constituted an invaluable asset. Sharing area and disciplinary expertise as well as our individual research findings with one another, each of us was continually reminded that no one place or single process can stand as the “model” or the determinative force in making the Modern Girl global. Such sharing prompted us to develop a methodology that refuses temporal progression as the basis of comparison.

Once formed in 2000, our Seattle-based research group organized a multi-year speakers’ series, inviting scholars from other institutions to the University of Washington to engage with our questions and findings. Miriam Silverberg was the first scholar whom we invited, as her pioneering essay on the Modern Girl in interwar Japan had inspired our initial work.¹⁰ Her comments, along with those by Timothy Burke and Kathy Peiss, conclude this volume. Chapters by other scholars who shared their work with us follow this introduction. In 2001, Tani Barlow spent six months at the Institute for Gender Studies at Ochanomizu Women’s University in Tokyo, where she worked with Ruri Ito to form a Tokyo-based sister research group, “The Modern Girl and Colonial

Modernity in East Asia.” In September 2004, our two groups cosponsored a workshop at Ochanomizu at which several of the chapters collected in this volume were first presented.¹¹ What you are reading may aptly be described as a retrospective account of our journey: an introduction by way of conclusion.

The Modern

The Modern Girl as heuristic device opens up an obvious, if difficult, question: What made her “modern”? In answering this question, volume contributors examine how the Modern Girl was singled out as a marker of “modernity”—a concept that scholars in the humanities and social sciences have long sought to limn and define. Earlier conflation of “modern” and “Western” has been challenged by those who have sought to emphasize how academic and popular discussions of modernity inevitably create hierarchies that posit some societies as “ahead” and others as “catching up.”¹² Others have treated the problem of fascist modernity and its relationship to capitalism and liberal democracy.¹³ Still others have challenged the notion of a singular modernity, arguing that modernity ought to be understood as “multiple”—as composed of “alternative” or “parallel” forms forged through the complex interplay of imperial and indigenous social formations and politics.¹⁴ Some scholars working in regional Asia have put forward “colonial modernity,” a concept that stresses the colonial roots of revolutionary modernization and the markets and civic institutions that linked “semicolonial” areas, including parts of China, to the larger capitalist world system.¹⁵ Others remind us that those living in areas of Africa that have experienced profound economic decline in recent decades often feel “cheated” out of modernity’s promises.¹⁶

This volume intervenes in discussions that decenter the idea of Western modernity through treatment of the multifaceted linkages—ideological, aesthetic, and material—among the locales in which the Modern Girl emerged. It pays attention to how people in different contexts understood the Modern Girl as *modern*. And it



1.5 Ad in U.S. *Vogue* (1928) for Marie Earle cosmetics, featuring a Modern Girl with a svelte, elongated body who wears a “skyscraper frock” and holds the world in her hands.

explores how dominant modernist ideologies—such as those of individual autonomy, scientific racism, and social reform—conditioned the Modern Girl’s global emergence. This volume also pays particularly close attention to how modernist aesthetics emanating from multiple contexts shaped and were shaped by what we refer to as “the Modern Girl look”: the Modern Girl’s surface or image and its representation. Indeed, most contributors to this volume examine how a Modern Girl—either an actual historical actor or a representational strategy—became recognizable, consumable, and locally intelligible. For, ultimately, this volume argues that debates over the Modern Girl always relied upon and reworked notions of modernity and femininity (and, consequently, also ideas of masculinity) in specific locales. For contemporaries the Modern Girl was a harbinger of both the possibilities and dangers of modern life.¹⁷

The volume’s focus, the turbulent period between World War I and World War II, is marked by two contradictory forces: increasing global economic interdependence, and ascendance of forms of political nationalism that often challenged such interdependence. From 1919 to 1939 manufacture of consumer products was further industrialized and new markets for domestic and foreign working classes were created. Interdependency also led in the United States to the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression, and a cascade of uneven effects on global employment and economic restructuring. Germany and the United Kingdom, for instance, responded with high tariffs as a measure of protection from outside influences. Japan, and later Germany, undertook aggressive territorial expansion to increase access to raw materials and markets and to effect a racist reordering of populations. In the British colony of India and in the British dominion of South Africa, the shift to grow domestic markets benefited local entrepreneurs. The political nationalism that emerged in this period took various forms: Fascism in Italy, Germany, and Japan; Stalinism in the Soviet Union; and racial nationalism in the United States, Australia, and South Africa. Movements for self-determination, often led by bourgeoisies in Asia and Africa, also ascribed to various political nationalisms, but these were aligned against colonial and semicolonial forces, not with them. As this volume demonstrates, the Modern Girl’s emergence reflected major economic trends and the rise of modern nationalisms; however, her emergence was not always synchronic with the development of nationalism, nor did it necessarily coincide with the development of bourgeoisies.

The Girl

The first product of our collaboration was a presentation titled “The Modern Girl Around the World.” Instructively, each time we gave it, our use of the term

“girl” was challenged from the floor. On one occasion we also noticed that “girl” had been struck from several posters advertising the presentation and replaced with “woman.” And yet, it is precisely the troublesomeness of “girl” that has attracted us. “Girl” signifies the contested status of young women, no longer children, and their unstable and sometimes subversive relationship to social norms relating to heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood. An easily identifiable figure of feminine adolescence emerged during the Victorian period, encompassing the mid- to late nineteenth century. By the 1880s the term “girl” came into popular usage in England, where it referred to working-class and middle-class unmarried women who occupied an ephemeral free space between childhood and adulthood.¹⁸ Our research has shown that during the 1920s and 1930s “girl” and its equivalent translations appeared around the globe. In these decades, “girl” denoted young women with the wherewithal and desire to define themselves in excess of conventional female roles and as transgressive of national, imperial, and racial boundaries. Indeed, our research strongly suggests the historical emergence of “girl” as a modern social and representational category and as a style of self-expression largely delinked from biological age.

Sometimes contemporaries picked up “girl” wholesale. In Germany, critics frequently used the English word “girl” interchangeably with “*neue Frau*” (literally New Woman) when referring to fashionable women who involved themselves in the emergent media culture as shop girls, film fans, and cabaret entertainers. In the United States, the phrase “It Girl,” closely identified with the silent screen star Clara Bow, became a common euphemism for flapper. In the Anglophone black African press, “modern girl” referred to schoolgirls or graduates with panache for fashion and for choosing their own lovers. In Japan, the term “modern girl” was reworked into *modan garu* through a process of phonetic translation and then shortened to *moga*. In China, where *modeng xiaojie* (modern young lady) and India where *kallege ladki* (college girl) were used, preexisting terms for unmarried young women were modified through affiliation with modernity or with the institution of schooling. In all cases, these monikers denoted an up-to-date and youthful femininity, provocative and unseemly in its intimacy with foreign aesthetic and commodity influences.

Queries about our use of “girl” have often turned into questions about the distinction between the Modern Girl and the so-called New Woman. In answering these, we note that the New Woman is frequently figured as the mother of the Modern Girl: contemporaries identified the New Woman with reform and with social and political advocacy and associated her daughter with the “frivolous” pursuits of consumption, romance, and fashion. While our research suggests a close association between the Modern Girl and commodity

capitalism in all contexts, it also questions hard and fast distinctions that align New Women with political activism and Modern Girls with consumption. New Women were often avid consumers and passionate advocates of “free love,” and Modern Girls embraced a variety of political projects including socialism and nationalism. Women as politically diverse as the Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl and the West African author of antiracist plays Mabel Dove used Modern Girl commodities and styles in their artistic production and their self-presentation.¹⁹

Both New Women and Modern Girls found political inspiration in popular female performance and spectacle. As Mary Louise Roberts’s chapter explains, the French New Woman (as personified by the *éclairceuse* Marguerite Durand) and *garçonne*, though distinct, shared enthusiasm for mass, consumer culture and a “distinctly feminine glamour.” In particular, Durand challenged French stereotypes of New Women as Anglo-Saxon, unattractive, and threatening by mobilizing an “aesthetic politics” aimed at middle-class audiences of mass print media and theater. These developments had parallels elsewhere. New Women and suffragists in the United States—the very same women whom French contemporaries dismissed as embittered “prudes” and “plain-Janes”—embraced advertising and consumer culture in their efforts to popularize their political causes.²⁰

Several chapters in this volume further illuminate how often it was women themselves who intertwined the New Woman and the Modern Girl. Young women labeled and dismissed as Modern Girls responded by claiming to be New Women. In semicolonial and colonial contexts in which these two figures surfaced simultaneously in the interwar period, entanglement of the Modern Girl and New Woman was exacerbated.²¹ As Ruri Ito’s chapter demonstrates, in the Japanese colony of Okinawa young women students, teachers, and journalists who were referred to as New Women sympathized with Japanese feminist literary magazines. Together with Okinawan migration to and from the Japanese metropole, an intensified interest in female literacy and education created a productive matrix for Okinawan women, compelling them to exhibit a keen interest in modern fashion and self-portrayal. The multiplicity of mobilizations and engagements of the Modern Girl reveals how important it is to avoid measuring each against predetermined ideals or types, such as the feminist or emancipated woman antagonistic to consumer culture, or the respectable national citizen aspiring to motherhood or education. Indeed, the method of connective comparison reveals that by the interwar period the Modern Girl was an effect of globe-straddling multidirectional citation practices, which included the travel of iconography, commodities, and ideas. In turn, these practices were reworked as they were locally deployed.

In many instances “girl” functioned as a racialized category. In those contexts structured by eugenics, racial segregation, and colonial rule, the Modern Girl could not be envisioned apart from hierarchical racial formations. Chapters by Liz Conor and Alys Eve Weinbaum demonstrate how dominant white culture in both Australia and the United States presumed the Modern Girl to be white. In Australia, Conor argues, the Modern Girl’s whiteness was established through distancing her from Aboriginal women. Racist cartoons portrayed white Australian flappers as superior to Aboriginal women whose “uncivilized” blackness rendered them allegedly incapable of “proper” display of modern fashion and style. In the United States, the white Modern Girl secured her designation as “modern” through a process that Weinbaum terms “racial masquerade,” a performance of the self that involved both putting on and taking off the superficial markers of racial “otherness” made available through the new consumer culture. In particular, the white American Modern Girl’s play with “Oriental” or “primitive” clothing and makeup allowed her to underscore her robust possession of whiteness, national belonging, and the status of “modern.” By contrast, Weinbaum argues, African American women and women recently immigrated from Asia — those whose full participation in commodity culture was circumscribed by poverty and racism — most often could not make recourse to “racial masquerade” as a means of securing racial prestige or “modernity.”

“Girl” was racialized in other ways as well. As a diminutive of woman, “girl,” like “boy,” was evoked as a racial insult in Jim Crow United States and in colonial and white minority-ruled Africa. In his chapter on black U.S. beauty culture, Davarian Baldwin argues that African American women sought to resist “racist taxonomies of girlhood,” while creating a gendered politics of “Black re-creation” through their participation in commercial leisure culture. Out of respect for the spirit of this politics of re-creation, Baldwin refrains from using the term “girl” in his discussion of the African American entrepreneur Madam C. J. Walker’s “makeover” of “Black womanhood.” By contrast, other chapters employ “girl” in recognition of its historic and ongoing usage by people of color, and in appreciation of its analytical potential in racist contexts. Chapters by Ramamurthy, Weinbaum, and Thomas reveal Anglo-Indian film stars, African and Asian Americans, and black school graduates in South Africa engaging “girlness” to challenge racist ideas of “primitive,” “backward,” and “uncivilized” femininity, and to claim a fashionable, “respectable” modernity. Although “woman” is the ideologically “correct” choice within much contemporary feminist scholarship, we elect “girl” because of the fresh political possibilities it offers for rethinking race and femininity in the twentieth century.

The Modern Girl needs to be examined in her manifestation as a style, an

icon, and a performance. It is in these guises that “modern girlness” was appropriated by married as well as unmarried women, and as easily invoked in advertisements for anti-bed bug remedies as in those for cosmetics. Tani Barlow’s chapter on advertising in Shanghai focuses on what she terms “the other scene of use value.” Out of fantasies that illuminated the new logic of capitalist commodification in visual form, the Shanghai advertising industry developed an immediately identifiable “sexy Modern Girl icon” and placed it in scenes that modeled the emotional life imputed to moderns who used commodities. Banalization of this icon in the Shanghai-based commercial press spread the iconic image far and wide. The trite visual language of “the sexy Modern Girl icon” was consequently applied to an array of commodities ranging from fertilizer to real estate and food products. Madeleine Dong’s chapter, also on China, argues that the Modern Girl emerged as an archetypal figure marking the unprecedented public visibility of young women in the early twentieth century. As Dong explains, a “Modern Girl look” was singled out by commentators as a key mechanism that allowed women to disrupt class boundaries and to challenge established gender relations. In elite and popular publications, class and gender anxieties were interwoven: the Modern Girl threatened male authority, the elite’s privileged claim to “being modern,” and she polluted the elite marriage market. Overall, the Modern Girl’s “girlness” could work to trouble or shore up social conventions and raced and gendered hierarchies.

Visual Economies

For both sociological and technological reasons, the preponderance of evidence for our claim that the Modern Girl was a global phenomenon is visual in nature. Sociologically, Modern Girls were women who became visible as urban migrants, factory and domestic workers, waitresses, cinema stars, citizens, freedom fighters, revolutionaries, consumers, and leisure seekers in new public realms—city streets, train stations, factories, offices, department stores, ballrooms, film studios, theaters, clubs, cafes, beaches, and tennis courts. Being seen was a quintessential feature of the Modern Girl. By the 1920s, lithography, photography, and cinema together enabled the easy reproduction of visual representations. These durable and cheap technologies were the *sine qua non* of the Modern Girls’ near-simultaneity since everywhere she became visible in and through these common media. Multinational corporations, film industries, international reporting and artistic circuits, and the distribution of illustrated magazines from metropolises to colonies, and from urban centers to remote locations, facilitated the circulation of a Modern Girl iconography. In particular, the graphic designs circulated on posters and in illustrated magazines

and design journals were adopted across contexts, as such visual (as opposed to literary) representations were accessible to those lacking literacy or foreign linguistic expertise. For similar reasons, films, especially silent films, circulated widely. Many more representations of the Modern Girl were locally produced and consumed, including the photographs of South African, Indian, and Okinawan women that chapters by Thomas, Ramamurthy, and Ito discuss (see especially figures 5.3 and 7.4). By the 1930s visual representations of women with bobbed hair, cloche hats, elongated bodies, and open, easy smiles could be found on all five continents in a range of visual media.

Visuality was important to the self-representation of all women (and men) who considered themselves “modern.” Since the nineteenth century, women had used photography along with older media such as painting, drawing, and literary representations of female spectacle and performance to stage the self. As numerous chapters document, visual means of portrayal were a component of the New Woman and the Modern Girl when she emerged in the United States, Europe, Japan, and various colonies. As has already been noted, Roberts found the French *éclairseuse*, Durand, using her newspaper as a vehicle to portray the New Woman as independent and beautiful; and Dong shows the Modern Girl emerging through cartoons as both an object of the gaze and as herself in possession of the gaze and thus as capable of objectifying those who would objectify her.

As exciting as is the recognition of the visual ubiquity of the Modern Girl, it raises thorny conceptual questions. Over the last three decades, scholars of visual culture have carefully attended to “scopic regimes,” “visual regimes,” and “visual economies” and have questioned the universal intelligibility of



1.6 Ad run in the German magazines *Die Dame* and *Leipziger Illustrierte Zeitung* (1931) for the U.S. toothpaste Pepsodent featuring a Modern Girl with an open, easy smile.

visual representations.²² Aided by the method of connective comparison, we have engaged this scholarship and have added to it by situating visual representations of the Modern Girl in specific circuits of production, distribution, and reception. We have found that uneven power relations shaped representations of the Modern Girl differently across contexts, influencing her image in a variety of genres including newspapers, illustrated magazines, studio photographs, films, cartoons, novels, and sociological commentary. Barbara Sato, in her chapter on the Japanese Modern Girl, argues that it was her visual representation in popular women's magazines that made it possible for less privileged and rural women to partake in her appeal.

Even as these representations literally made the Modern Girl visible to contemporaries everywhere, the conditions of her visibility varied dramatically. Gorsuch's chapter on the Soviet Union suggests that political paintings critical of the bourgeois lifestyle and ads for commodities such as shoes surreptitiously featured the Modern Girl, while "Bolshevik moralists" attacked her as incompatible with Communism. Through recovery of the culture of the Indian starlet (*sitara*) in the interwar years, Ramamurthy's chapter illustrates the past existence of a local style of Modern Girl, especially in the few extant film stills. These images feature languidly posed women with bobbed hair, "kiss curls," plucked eyebrows, and painted lips. As Ramamurthy explains, the fact that these often racially ambiguous and erotic images were dropped from nationalist historiography indicates nationalist hostility to this imagery and demonstrates the importance of redeeming the Modern Girl for an alternative feminist historiography — one that includes the now vanished film culture of female self-invention. Similarly, Thomas finds evidence of the Modern Girl in 1930s photographs that South African women sent to the black newspaper *Bantu World*, which asked readers to participate in a beauty competition for "African ladies." The top-place finisher distinguished herself from other competitors by wearing a cloche hat and drop neckline and sporting a teeth-revealing smile, thus creating an image resonant with movie star stills and toothpaste ads then in international circulation.

While the method of connective comparison reveals continuities in the visual representation of the Modern Girl across contexts, our research suggests that similar visuals did not always carry similar meanings. In our discussion of cosmetics advertising in chapter 2, for example, we examine adjustments in advertising copy made by multinational companies in order to present nearly identical visuals to audiences in disparate regions. Efforts to identify the specific grammar of local representation clearly requires attention to multiple genres of visual representation and to the interplay between written word and visual text, as well as careful (re)construction of the context of reception.

The visual coding of race in representations of the Modern Girl in the 1920s and 1930s highlights these general points. As we suggest in the next chapter, graphic artists created representations of women with highly abstract facial and bodily features in a broad range of contexts. Some of these images, for example in the U.S. and German presses and in the Indian and South African presses that catered to white colonial populations, presented Modern Girls with stylized, possibly “East Asian” eyes. Our group has hotly debated these “Asianized” images. They are clearly part of a larger art deco trend that abstracts the human form.²³ And yet, this does not entirely explain the manner in which such otherwise abstract representations traded in racially coded visual signifiers that were both local and global (see figure 1.2). In order to explore these images and the production of this specific bodily, sartorial, and design aesthetic in cosmetics ads from many parts of the world, chapter 2 introduces the term “Asianization.” Despite the complexities involved in using the term to demarcate aesthetic features (for further discussion see chapter 2), some of us have found the term useful in describing the efforts of companies and designers to produce and sell an exoticized Asian aesthetic as “modern.” As has already been noted, Weinbaum’s chapter on the U.S. Modern Girl explores “Asianization” as a form of “racial masquerade.” Uta Poiger’s chapter on the international frameworks that produced cosmetics advertising in Weimar and Nazi Germany also elaborates on these issues. Poiger describes what she calls the “cosmopolitan aesthetic” that characterizes imagery combining a range of racial markers, including blond hair, brown skin, and stylized eyes. This aesthetic became attractive to export-oriented cosmetics advertisers in the United States, Germany, and elsewhere in the 1920s as part of an international business logic that imagined a convergence of lifestyles and looks from around the world. In Germany, Poiger explains, the cosmopolitan aesthetic marked a departure from earlier racist conventions; it was also an aesthetic that largely disappeared with the onset of the Great Depression and the rise of National Socialism.

Nationalisms

The Modern Girl was an object of nationalist scrutiny and thus provoked a full range of nationalist desires. In all national contexts in which she appeared she was a contested figure and image, either an object of celebration or of attempted control. Her sexual adventurousness was viewed as inextricable from her implication in commodity culture and often both were seen as threatening to national sovereignty. To contemporaries, Modern Girls appeared to challenge “proper” female commitments to the nation — be it as active participants

in nationalist struggles for liberation; as mothers, the biological reproducers of national subjects and populations; as transmitters of national culture; as upholders of the boundaries of nations through restrictions on sexual behavior and the circumscription of “marriage” within clearly defined ethnic and racial groups; or as symbols and signifiers of nations.²⁴ In particular, the Modern Girl’s supposed sexual transgressions — her expression of sexuality as such, her interest in same-sex or interracial sexuality and in sexuality outside marriage — made the Modern Girl into a body in need of policing by nation-states, social reformers, and missionaries as well as national bourgeoisies.²⁵ The chapters of this volume principally treat the heterosexual modern girl whose sexual transgressions involved the sheer act of being sexual in public and actively choosing her male partners. While scholars who focus on literary and psychoanalytic texts, including “underground” publications, have begun to investigate same-sex desire in the interwar years, most chapters in this volume cover dominant media cultures, which rarely depicted same-sex or interracial intimacy. Historiography on the New Woman has treated her lesbianism and her often androgynous self-expression. Further scholarship on the lesbian Modern Girl, distinct from the figure whom Carroll Smith-Rosenberg famously labeled the “androgyn,” remains to be done, as does work on the Modern Girl and interracial sex.²⁶

In general, policing of the Modern Girl was carried out as a representational project, and sometimes also as a governmental or juridical one. In the various representations of the Modern Girl treated in this volume, whether textual or visual, we see pitched contestation over the Modern Girl’s sexuality and public display, its representation in a variety of media and genres, and its imbrication within commodity culture. Indeed, both policing of actual Modern Girls and of representations of Modern Girls characterized modern nationalism worldwide in the 1920s and 1930s. In order to ensure their continuous production and consolidation, hegemonic nationalisms seem to have required control over Modern Girls as historical agents and as images — thus the vigilant containment of the Modern Girl’s sexuality, consumption, and not least her representation in the variety of cultural texts, including literature, film, advertising, and social theory, analyzed in this volume.

While everywhere there was a response to the presence and representation of the Modern Girl, the political dimensions of this response varied widely. In some instances, Modern Girl iconography was used to cement nationalist ideals. Conversely, in others, nationalism was expressed through denigration of the Modern Girl as agent and image of antinationalist subjectivity. As individual volume chapters attest, this variation depended on a range of factors, including the presence or absence of social revolution, colonialism, indigenous

nationalist and anticolonial struggles, and alternative models and icons of femininity. Where the Modern Girl was condemned or censored she was most often regarded and represented as a threat to national cohesion and social control. In the Soviet Union, China, and South Africa, for instance, the Modern Girl was frequently represented as in need of discipline. As Gorsuch argues in her chapter on Soviet flappers who emerged in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution, their “playful attitude” toward style and fashion was associated with American decadence; consequently, they represented a threat to “a healthy communist body politic.” Bolshevik moralists sought to transform the youth culture to which flappers belonged, but even they found it necessary, at least during the New Economic Policy of the 1920s, to support the relative freedoms, such as access to commodities and expressive dance styles, that ran counter to the more sober collectivist ideals. Similarly, Dong’s chapter shows that in China in the same period, the ample space granted to cartoons condemning Modern Girls indicated an abiding mainstream interest in the Modern Girl alongside, and perhaps despite, vocal condemnation of her.

Frequently, public condemnation of the Modern Girl was aimed not only at controlling her social interactions and public display but also at shaping the production of historical and thus nationalist memory. As Ramamurthy demonstrates, erasure of Indian Modern Girl culture from subsequent nationalist historiography powerfully reveals the manner in which hegemonic nationalism distanced itself from women’s participation in a Westernized culture of consumption. As Thomas argues, in South Africa the discourse of “racial respectability” that was used to police the African Modern Girl produced ambiguous political results. Black male journalists and intellectuals viewed black women’s use of white powder and red lipstick as a misguided imitation of white women, and thus as catering to segregationist rather than nationalist ideas. However, some black women appear to have regarded their own cosmetic use as necessary to crafting an urbane and “respectable” appearance, one partly inspired by African American role models.

Whereas anticolonial struggles tended to view the Modern Girl with suspicion, nationalist projects often mobilized the white Modern Girl as a signifier of “healthy” and “civilized” national femininity in the United States and Australia and, with much ambivalence, in Nazi Germany. In white-dominated contexts, various forms of racial nationalism were shored up through circulation of idealized representations of the white Modern Girl that contrasted her with her dark and thus “premodern” sister. While the Modern Girl’s instrumentalization by racial nationalists was most evident in white settler contexts (the United States and Australia) where being white was often viewed as tantamount to being a “proper” national subject, she was also instrumentalized by

nationalists in Europe, especially fascist Germany. As Poiger argues, the Great Depression and the rise of National Socialism in Germany coincided with a shift in cosmetics advertising from preference for a “cosmopolitan aesthetic” in depiction of the Modern Girl to embrace of a more decisively white-looking Modern Girl. While some of the latter images were of “Aryan” or “Nordic” types whose blond athleticism complied with the emergent fascist ideals of racial and national superiority, others were “vamp” or “girl” types against whom commentators from across the political spectrum had railed since the days of the Weimar Republic.

Although in the United States the Modern Girl icon was most often used to shore up racial nationalism, intellectuals and antiracist pundits who wished to critique ideas of nationalism predicated on white racial superiority created competing representations of the Modern Girl that critiqued her exclusive whiteness. As Weinbaum demonstrates through her reading of the work of the African American novelist Nella Larsen, black intellectuals in the 1920s used representations of black sartorial and beauty culture to contest white aesthetic and social supremacy. Larsen’s writings are also important in that they expose the class bias and hypocrisy of elite blacks whose “racial uplift” philosophy denigrated poor and working-class black cultural expression. Similarly, as Baldwin’s chapter on U.S. black beauty culture reveals, black beauty culturalists’ promotion of black beauty ideals functioned as an implicit critique of Jim Crow racial hierarchies, and thus of the forms of racism and nationalism pervasive in the United States in the same period.

Commodities

Early on, the Modern Girl research group recognized that a particular bundle of commodities including lipstick, nail polish, face creams and powders, skin lighteners, tanning lotions, shampoos, hair styling products, fancy soaps, perfumes, deodorants, toothpastes, cigarettes, high-heel shoes, cloche hats, and fashionable, sexy clothes was advertised globally. We also realized that such commodities were linked in each local context to the expression of modern femininity. We thus designated them “Modern Girl commodities.”

As is evident from the list of Modern Girl commodities, they are robustly corporeal. They literally changed how bodies appeared, how they were “worked on and through,” how they were fashioned, fragmented, abstracted, and calibrated to the seasons, or even, as some hoped, permanently transformed.²⁷ These commodities created new relationships to the body and enabled women to craft themselves as modern. In her influential book on U.S. beauty culture, Kathy Peiss argues that new commodities associated modernity, novelty, and

self-care with consciousness of bodily autonomy, freedom, and sexual desire.²⁸ This volume builds on these insights through discussion of the corporality and performativity of Modern Girl commodities in two ways. First, several chapters explore how such commodities fostered young women's yearnings for public life by outfitting them with faces and bodies that emboldened them to cross the domestic threshold into the public sphere. And second, several chapters examine how such commodities publicized women's everyday lives by putting private cares about the body and bodily functions on display.

What we have called multidirectional citation characterized the representation of Modern Girl commodities in advertisements found around the world. And yet, what gave these commodities, and through them the Modern Girl, an "internationalist" valence in the United States or South Africa, for example, was quite different from what gave them a "cosmopolitan" valence in Germany. In the former locations, as Baldwin and Thomas demonstrate, cosmetics could be used by African American and African consumers to express race pride and a sense of participation in a larger internationalist, African diaspora. By contrast, in pre-Depression Germany, the United States, and Japan cosmetics companies deployed the "cosmopolitan aesthetic" that Poiger discusses — an aesthetic composed of racial markers connoting exoticism and, in some instances, worldliness.

Not only did Modern Girl commodities traffic in ideas about gender, race, and modernity; trade flows enabled them to materially connect different parts of the world. As marketed and exchanged goods with monetary values, their spread and sale was driven by the capitalist logic of supply, demand, and profitability. From the beginning, in collaborative and individual work, we have sought to situate Modern Girl commodities in the context of the broad transformations in political economy in the 1920s and 1930s, including increasing interdependency of markets and the global impact of the Great Depression. This volume demonstrates that Modern Girl commodities appeared not only in the capitalist core but also in communist and fascist states, and in imperial domains. In the Soviet Union, as Gorsuch shows, and in fascist Germany, as Poiger reveals, state domination of commercial processes was attempted in the interest of generating a politically palatable gendered modernity. In general, we find that during periods of economic and political upheaval, in these nations and others, demands for national sovereignty were carefully balanced with those of mass consumption.

Around the world the production of a new form of femininity centered on purchased products for the body created enormous social anxiety, much of which was targeted at consumption. In Conor's chapter, racist cartoons depict the consumption of Modern Girl commodities by Australian Aboriginal

Modern Girls as unbecoming, comical, and anxiety making for white settler women. As Dong's treatment of satirical Modern Girl cartoons and magazine stories shows, the Chinese public was fixated on the spousal tensions caused by the wife's consumption of commodities, including cosmetics. For Dong, this fixation was symptomatic of a crisis in the Chinese family as it shifted from being principally defined as a unit of production to one of consumption.

Several chapters address the use of the Modern Girl icon and advertising's solicitation of the Modern Girl consumer in the development of national markets and industries in metropole and colony. Our method of connective comparison establishes that advertising agencies played a central role as mediator of Modern Girl culture and global flows of Modern Girl commodities. In chapter 2 we discuss J. Walter Thompson as an example of one such agency with international reach. Because, in most instances, the emergence of commodity capitalism and nationalism were tightly bound, there was a necessary but at once ambivalent embrace of the Modern Girl as an advertising icon. Especially in those contexts in which Modern Girls were viewed as less than respectable, this complicity of capitalism and economic development produced tension. In her chapter on India, Ramamurthy demonstrates that by the 1930s it was only "cultured" Modern Girl cinema stars possessing respectable paritelines whose images were used to sell products to an emerging Indian national market.

Consumption and the Question of Agency

Notwithstanding the overarching calculations of corporations and the regulatory functions of states, many volume chapters attest to the fact that Modern Girls exercised agency as consumers and social actors. In recent years, social scientists have debated and explored consumption as an important site of individual agency, some arguing that consumption allows people to be creative actors, meaningfully presenting and defining themselves through purchase and use. Others, usually Marxist, argue that commodities attach people to economic structures that create deprivation and dependency.²⁹ Although not all contributors to this volume are sanguine about the liberatory potential of consumer culture, most concur that Modern Girl commodities were involved in fashioning both individual and social bodies (see figure 1.8).

Often the question of Modern Girl consumer agency was related to her participation, implicit or explicit, in racial politics. As chapters by Thomas, Weinbaum, and Baldwin show, albeit in divergent ways, the Modern Girl used consumption as a means to participate in hegemonic racial identity and, in some instances, to contest it. Faced with the question of whether consumption



1.7 Ad for facial cream in *Times of India* (1940) that was marketed by British multinational Burroughs Wellcome and features an Indian Modern Girl with short hair and exposed arms.

1.8 An act of self-creation? A Chinese consumer applies “Sparrow Face Powder” in an ad from *Young Companion* (1940).

of Modern Girl commodities by black women in South Africa was racial mimicry or an alternative cultural politics, Thomas refuses an either/or conclusion through exploration of the contested story of “racial respectability.” Baldwin tracks how use of Modern Girl commodities enabled working-class black women in the United States to explore the possibilities of “re-creation.” Black women’s consumption of cosmetics was, Baldwin argues, both part of the capitalist economy and simultaneously liberatory in that it allowed consumers to separate leisure from work and to develop systemic health. In contrast to Baldwin, Weinbaum explores the existence of an emergent critique of U.S. consumer capitalism across a variety of sociological and literary texts from the 1920s. As she demonstrates, early race theorists and U.S. women of color, including African American and Asian American women, were acutely aware of the limitations of recourse to consumption as a liberatory practice. After all, commodities were not equally accessible to all women and the transformation of bodily surfaces that they enabled was only possible in certain contexts and within certain racial formations.

In other chapters the Modern Girl’s consumer agency is treated in relation to class politics. In her chapter on Soviet flappers, Gorsuch underscores that these

Modern Girls were working girls, “factory youth” for whom the silk stockings and red lipstick signified that the consumer of these goods was “modern,” though not necessarily Western or bourgeois. Sato’s chapter on the Japanese Modern Girl similarly positions her as a consumer whose participation in commodity culture opened the possibility of social and cultural redefinition. In making this argument Sato challenges assertions by other scholars who have argued that Japanese Modern Girls were urban and upper-class women who indulged in glamorous consumption. As she demonstrates, less privileged and rural women also partook in consumerism — albeit a less conspicuous form of consumerism grounded in everyday life — by buying, looking at, and reading women’s magazines.

Through the course of our project, we have found that an alternative approach to the Modern Girl’s agency involves forgoing the desire to decide unequivocally whether Modern Girls were dupes or resisters of consumer capitalism and instead asking how Modern Girl commodities functioned pedagogically and as technologies of the self. Such an approach involves an exploration of commodity advertising as a key technique for schooling consumers in the “cultural practices of modernity.”³⁰ It resists assessment of consumption as positive or negative, oppressive or liberatory, and instead emphasizes how commodity advertising and consumption were productive of the Modern Girl as both representational strategy and social agent formed in and through early processes of gendered globalization. The implications of these processes with regard to social stratification, political emancipation, and consolidation or contestation of national political regimes defy easy generalization as they necessarily vary from context to context and over time. This volume explores these issues of consumption, representation, and social and political agency through a variety of approaches. Our hope is that the chapters collected here will inspire others to engage the Modern Girl as a heuristic device, to employ the method of connective comparison, and to recognize multidirectional citation as a useful tool in the study of gendered modernity in a global frame.

Notes

- All authors contributed equally to this chapter, chapter 2, and the editing of the volume.
1. The group’s first publication of these ideas is in *Modern Girl Around the World* Research Group (Tani E. Barlow, Madeleine Yue Dong, Uta G. Poiger, Priti Ramamurthy, Lynn M. Thomas, and Alys Eve Weinbaum), “The Modern Girl around the World.”
 2. Tani E. Barlow prefers her own conceptual framework in dealing with this question. See Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, Barlow, “History and the Border,” and Barlow, “‘What Is a Poem?’”

3. Our method resonates with Gillian Hart's method of "relational comparisons" and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's formulation of "friction." See Hart, "Denaturalizing Dispossession," and Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction*.
4. Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
5. Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Comments on the Modern Girl as Heuristic: Collaboration, Connective Comparison, Multidirectional Citation," remarks presented at "The Modern Girl Around the World" symposium, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, 16 March 2007.
6. Bairoch, "Globalization Myths and Realities," Cooper, "What Is the Concept of Globalization Good For?"
7. For Japan, see Silverberg, "The Modern Girl as Militant" and "The Café Waitress Serving Modern Japan"; Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*; and Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*. For the United States, see Peiss, *Cheap Amusements* and *Hope in a Jar*; Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld Girl*; Latham, *Posing a Threat*; and Glenn, *Female Spectacle*. For China, see Shih, "Gender, Race and Semicolonialism." For Africa, see Glazier Schuster, *New Women of Lusaka*. For India, see Mohan, *Of Wayward Girls and Wicked Women*. For Europe, see Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*; Chadwick and Latimer, eds., *The Modern Woman Revisited*; Grossmann, "Girlkultur, or Thoroughly Rationalized Female?"; von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis*; Søland, *Becoming Modern*.
8. On "Americanization" and "globalization," see Fehrenbach and Poiger, eds., *Trans-actions, Transgressions, Transformations*; and Weinbaum and Edwards, "On Critical Globality."
9. Wilk, "The Local and the Global in the Political Economy of Beauty."
10. See Silverberg, "The Café Waitress Serving Modern Japan."
11. The Tokyo-based group's edited volume is forthcoming in Japanese: Ruri Ito, Hiroko Sakamoto, and Tani Barlow, eds., *The Modern Girl and Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten).
12. See, for example, Fabian, *Time and the Other*, and Donham, *Marxist Modern*.
13. See, for example, Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*; Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*; and Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*.
14. See, for example, Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Comaroff and Comaroff, eds., *Modernity and Its Malcontents*; Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities"; Larkin, "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers"; Rofel, *Other Modernities*; Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal, "Regional Modernities in Stories and Practices of Development"; and essays collected in Knauff, ed., *Critically Modern*.
15. See Barlow, ed., *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* and Barlow, "Eugenic Woman, Semi-Colonialism and Colonial Modernity as Problems for Postcolonial Theory"; and Jones, *Yellow Music*.
16. See Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*.
17. Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*; Rofel, *Other Modernities*; Wardlow, "'Hands-Up'-ing Buses and Harvesting Cheese-Pops."
18. Mitchell, *The New Girl*, 3. On girlhood, also see Driscoll, *Girls*; and Maynes, Søland, and Benninghaus, eds., *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills*.

19. Trimborn, *Leni Riefenstahl*; Newell, "An Incident of Colonial Intertextuality"; Newell, "White Cargoes/Black Cargoes on the West Coast of Africa."
20. Also see Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage*; Glenn, *Female Spectacle*.
21. On the distinction between New Woman and Modern Girl in China, see Stevens, "Figuring Modernity."
22. See Brennan and Jay, eds., *Vision in Context*; Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity*; Landau and Kaspin, *Images and Empires*; Wexler, *Tender Violence*; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*; and Mitchell, *Picture Theory*.
23. See Fischer, *Designing Women*; and Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*.
24. See Yuval Davis and Anthias, Introduction.
25. On the nationalist policing of interracial sexuality, see Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions*; and Stevens, *Reproducing the State*.
26. See Doan, *Fashioning Sapphism*; Dean, *The Frail Social Body*; Chadwick and Latimer, eds., *The Modern Woman Revisited*; Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*; and Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*.
27. Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 4.
28. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*.
29. See Wilk, "Consumer Goods as Dialogue about Development," 83; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 4; and the commentary by Timothy Burke in this volume.
30. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

2

The Modern Girl Around the World

Cosmetics Advertising
and the Politics of Race and Style



MODERN GIRL AROUND THE WORLD
RESEARCH GROUP (ALYS EVE WEINBAUM,
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Advertising was one of the primary means through which a distinct Modern Girl style simultaneously appeared around the globe in the 1920s and 1930s. With large advertising budgets, multinational and local cosmetics companies created and transmitted this Modern Girl style in the print media, portraying Modern Girls with carefully made-up faces, bobbed hair, exposed arms and backs, and bodies clad in the latest fashions. Cosmetics ads placed Modern Girls in new social situations—romancing in public, playing sports, posing as film stars, or caring for the self in the bathroom—and, frequently, represented them using a unique aesthetic that emphasized an elongated body and abstracted facial features. Such ads also frequently depicted Modern Girls as involved in efforts to alter their skin color through use of makeup, whitening, coloring, and tanning products. It is in this way

that cosmetics presented the Modern Girl's various acts of self-fashioning and public display as tightly knit into national as well as transnational processes of racial formation.

The richness of Modern Girl cosmetics ads, their depiction of Modern Girl style and aesthetics, and, not least, their participation in racial formation encouraged our research group to track the Modern Girl as a global phenomenon in and through them. Over the last several years we have created a diverse collection of advertisements spanning four continents, multiple languages, and a range of print media. In this chapter we explore the global prevalence of the Modern Girl in cosmetics ads and suggest ways that capitalist enterprises created and transmitted representations of femininity and race. The visual nature of these ads was especially useful in that it enabled us to work together using a method we call connective comparison — a method of reading texts that allows us to identify connections among disparate locales and to explore the overlap and distinction among Modern Girl representations, as discussed in chapter 1. Overall, we have relied on two research strategies: first, we have simultaneously examined multinational and local companies that marketed Modern Girl cosmetics; and second, we have tracked imagery associated with select categories of cosmetics, those designed to alter skin color. As we will see, in depicting processes of cleansing, coloring, and transforming facial and bodily surfaces, cosmetics ads indexed new, modern technologies of the self and revealed a set of newly emergent social practices.¹

Our method of connective comparison has also allowed us to pay close attention to the peculiarities of local manifestations of the Modern Girl style and aesthetic and to discern the repeated citation of specific styles and aesthetics across contexts. As this chapter argues, local understandings of skin color and their relationship to national racial formations shaped Modern Girl style and aesthetics and at once contributed to the global Modern Girl phenomenon. Put differently, the chapter illustrates the phenomenon that we term *multidirectional citation*: the mutual, though nonequivalent influences and circuits of exchange that actively connected disparate parts of the globe, shaping and transforming the representation and enactment of the Modern Girl around the world.

Modern Girl Cosmetics and Toiletry Advertising

Although multinational and local companies in all locales drew on Modern Girl imagery to market cosmetics and toiletry products, she was not equally visible everywhere. In the United States, Germany, and China, advertisements featuring the Modern Girl were more frequent than in Africa and South Asia. During the 1920s, U.S. companies were at the forefront of these developments

as they consciously employed advertising to create new markets abroad.² Ads appearing in newspapers and magazines around the world featured U.S. more often than German, British, or other European products. In the periodicals that we examined, we found no evidence that cosmetics companies based outside the United States, Europe, and Japan were able to market their products abroad before World War II. The United States, by the 1920s, moreover, was the biggest producer of magazines and print advertising.

We have principally drawn ads from three American publications catering to middle-class and upper-class readers, *Vogue*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *Cosmopolitan*, and from two publications specifically targeted at black readers, *The Crisis*, the journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that was edited during the 1920s by W. E. B. Du Bois, and the more populist weekly newspaper, the *Baltimore Afro-American*.³ For Germany, we have collected ads from four illustrated magazines directed at middle-class and upper-class audiences, the *Leipziger Illustrirte Zeitung*, *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, *Die Woche*, and the women's magazine *Die Dame*. For China, the cosmetics and toiletry ads we have collected are from treaty-port newspapers including *North China Daily News* and *South China Morning Post*, both of which were published in English as well as Chinese, and from the illustrated Chinese-language magazines *Ladies' Journal* (*Funü zazhi*) and *Young Companion* (*Liang Yu*), which addressed an upper-class and middle-class audience. Lower-class and communist tabloids, such as the German *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (*Illustrated Worker Press*), or the Chinese *Luobinhan* (*Robin Hood*) and *Fuermosi* (*Sherlock Holmes*) rarely contained cosmetics ads, either because of leftist hostilities toward such luxury products or because workers were not seen as cosmetics consumers.

By comparison with the U.S., German, and Chinese contexts, we have found that in Africa and India, cosmetics and toiletry ads featuring the Modern Girl were not as commonplace in the 1920s. For Africa in the 1920s and 1930s, we collected ads from the *Cape Times* (Cape Town), a newspaper catering to the white and, to a lesser extent, "coloured" populations in the British dominion of South Africa.⁴ The *Cape Times* often carried ads featuring white Modern Girls similar to those that appeared in the U.S., German, and Chinese press. For the early 1930s onward, we focused on the black newspapers *Bantu World* (Johannesburg), *Bantu Mirror* (Salisbury), and the *Times of West Africa* (Accra), which carried some ads for facial creams that featured the black Modern Girl. Finally, we gathered ads from *Drum* (Johannesburg and, later, Lagos, Accra, and Nairobi), a monthly magazine established in 1951, in which the black Modern Girl became widely visible. For India, we collected ads from the *Statesman* (Calcutta) and the *Times of India* (Bombay), major English-language pan-subcontinental dailies catering to British colonials and Indian elites. In these

papers, advertisements mainly featured the white Modern Girl until 1930, after which time some ads for toiletry and cosmetics products began to feature the Indian Modern Girl. We also drew ads from the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (Bombay), one of the first English-language magazines to publish ads explicitly targeted at elite Indian women. Here, the Indian Modern Girl appeared more frequently in the late 1930s, becoming commonplace by the 1940s.⁵

Modern Girl advertising varied in kind. Some multinational companies simply recycled the same ad in a number of national and colonial contexts. One vivid example is the ubiquitous advertising for Pepsodent toothpaste, a product made by a U.S.-based company of the same name. In three ads that appeared in the Shanghai-based Chinese language magazine *Funü zazhi* (*Ladies' Journal*), the *Times of India* newspaper, and U.S. *Vogue* between 1926 and 1931, the image of the Modern Girl varies little (see figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3). In fact, apart from translation into Chinese, these three Pepsodent ads are nearly identical. All feature a young white woman with bobbed hair (while two of these ads also feature an older man resembling future U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt). All proclaim that Pepsodent removes the “dingy film” from teeth and encourage readers to send away for a free sample with the clip-out coupon provided. Advertisers used such coupons to track the effectiveness of their campaigns. Similar ads, featuring a lone white Modern Girl appeared in the *Times of West Africa* in 1934 and in the German press around the same time. In each, a young woman with bobbed hair flashes her bright teeth thanks to Pepsodent (see figure 1.6). The Modern Girl in all of these Pepsodent ads exhibits an aesthetic that evokes “Americanness”: a wide smile, big white teeth, and a body that is noticeably athletic, sensual, relaxed, at leisure.

By contrast, other ads that we have found indicate that international companies adjusted advertisements—images and copy—in order to appeal to specific colonial and national markets. For example, from the 1920s to the 1950s the U.S.-based Pond's Extract Company (after 1955, Chesebrough-Pond's) adapted advertisements for its so-called vanishing cream to a wide array of local contexts. The Pond's campaigns were designed by the New York-based advertising agency J. Walter Thompson (JWT), which, by 1950, had offices in at least twenty-five foreign locations, including Bombay and Johannesburg. Pond's was, in fact, JWT's oldest client, dating back to 1886. Once JWT went global they used the Pond's account to showcase the value of working with an agency whose international offices could tailor a company's message for local markets. Instructively, an ad from a 1925 issue of the Chinese *Ladies' Journal* renames the product as Pond's White Jade Cream and explains how the cream can be applied underneath powder to “keep your makeup in place for the day.” While one side of the cream bottle featured in the ad carries an English trademark, the



2.4 Ad for the U.S. product Pond's Cream in the Chinese magazine *Fimn Zazhi* (Ladies' Journal, 1925) featuring contemporary fashions and a long braid.

2.5 Ad in *Illustrated Weekly of India* (1942) for Pond's, featuring an Indian Modern Girl with *bindi*, stylish hair, and sari.

other side offers explanations in Chinese of the virtues of the product. The same ad also evokes verses from a famous fourteenth-century drama to allude to the beauty achievable through use of Pond's (see figure 2.4). In Germany JWT and Pond's told magazine readers in ads in 1930 that "trendsetting women" in fifty countries depended on Pond's cold cream and vanishing cream to make their skin "smooth."⁶ Another Pond's ad from a 1942 issue of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* proclaims that "Beauty needs no adornment—real beauty does not depend on fine silks." According to this ad, Pond's enables women to achieve "real beauty" regardless of their class and caste (see figure 2.5). A fourth Pond's ad that appeared in 1955 in *Bantu Mirror*, a Southern Rhodesia weekly, targeted black readers and consumers. In contrast to the other Pond's ads, this one focuses on skin color, proclaiming that Pond's Vanishing Cream will make skin "lighter, smoother, softer."⁷

The crucial observation to take away from comparison of these ads is that Pond's and JWT attached different Modern Girl images and attributes to the same product depending on where it was marketed. Whereas Pepsodent apparently tried to create a new "American" standard of white teeth across the globe, JWT marketed Pond's facial creams by appealing to existing standards of beauty among local elites, while at times also stressing the global reach of its

products. In all our contexts, we found Modern Girl ads for cosmetics that were produced and marketed by local companies exclusively for national or subnational consumption. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, women with bobbed or short hair, a telltale sign of the Modern Girl, could be seen in ads for an Indian lightening “emollient,” Afghan Snow, and a South African product called Keppels Face Powder (see figure 2.6). Such examples suggest the overlap and intersection among the advertising strategies of multinational and local companies.

The Modern Girl and Technologies of the Self

Comparison of ads produced by both international and local companies has allowed us to discern a Modern Girl aesthetic that cuts across national and imperial boundaries. In the 1920s and into the 1930s, the Modern Girl usually possessed an elongated, wiry, and svelte body. The form first appeared before World War I in cigarette and car advertisements in the United States and Europe, where it signified the attractions and dangers of androgyny and sexuality outside reproduction (see figure 1.5).⁸ The Modern Girl’s body is also depicted as excessively refined; individual female body parts are elegantly polished, carefully scrubbed, meticulously sprayed, or, in an astounding variety of ways, cleaned and covered so that lips, teeth, mouth, hair, skin, armpits, legs, and vagina are all stylishly produced. Moreover, the Modern Girl’s beauty and youthfulness are often linked to scientific hygiene.

In a series of ads for Odorono, a humorously named antiperspirant and deodorant introduced by a U.S. company and widely distributed in the United States, China, South Africa, India, and Germany, many of these bodily characteristics are evident. In all Odorono ads copy specifies that by applying the product to the armpits, the young, active, trim, and glamorous Modern Girl can prevent unpleasant odors and ensure that social interactions, especially romantic ones, are unspoiled. With references to “sanitary sponge applica-



2.6 Ad from the black South African newspaper *Bantu World* (1939) featuring the products of Keppels, one of the first white-owned South African cosmetics companies to target black consumers.

tors,” a “quick-drying formula,” and the “doctor” who invented the product and supervised its production, these ads evoke scientific hygiene in rendering an unseemly topic legitimate (see figures 1.3, 1.4, and 2.7). Like many other cosmetics and toiletry ads from the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Odorono ads frequently feature angular drawings of women with long necks and limbs that connote elegance. Graphic designers of ads appearing in all research contexts frequently emphasized diagonal lines to create dynamic images. Often, the proportions used in such drawings suggest “real” women seven or eight feet tall. Heavily indebted to the international art deco movement, such aesthetic exaggeration was employed by international and local companies.⁹

Modern Girl image designers took advantage of the most advanced visual technology available. In the United States, China, Germany, and India, the format of many Modern Girl ads changed from line drawings to lithographic watercolors in the 1920s, and to photographs (often featuring film stars, well-known performers, or socialites) in the late 1920s. In many African periodicals, the shift to photos took place later, during the 1930s and 1940s. Over the decades, influenced by developments in photographic technology and techniques such as the close-up shot in filmmaking, Modern Girl ads in all locales demonstrated changes in the method of representing the female figure, shifting from locating her in the middle of a landscape or room to showing only the portrait of her head, highlighting her hair, eyebrows, eyes, cheeks, lips, or teeth. Occasionally a particular facial feature was emphasized by depicting the Modern Girl’s hand touching or caressing it.

Another aesthetic in the U.S. and German cosmetics ads and the early Indian and South African ads that targeted white colonials is what we cautiously describe as the “Asianization” of the Modern Girl. While the term has a negative valence in some contexts, especially those in which ideas of “Asianization” have been used to euphemize the dissemination of Japanese political and military power, we have found the term useful in our exploration of racialized aesthetics. In cosmetic ads that are focused on the body or face, we have found that Asianization involved creation of caricatured, elongated, often slanted eyes. This is especially the case in those ads that employ a modernist art deco style. This stylization is evident in an ad for De Kama facial cream that appeared in 1924 in U.S. *Vogue*, in an ad for Ven-Yusa face cream that appeared in 1930 in the Indian *Statesman*, and in a 1929 German poster for F. Wolff and Sohn’s advertising *Vogue* Perfume (figures 1.2, 2.8, and 14.2). The women drawn in these ads are not clearly identifiable as Caucasian, black, or East Asian, though their eyes are expressly Asianized. In Europe and in the United States, where Orientalism was a venerable tradition and advertising cultures were predisposed to racist graphics, so-called slanted eyes probably denoted Asianness especially during the interwar years, when things “Oriental” gained

NOW

ODO-RO-DO

*A Super-Fast deodorant
More satisfying...*

ODO-RO-NO Cream

A PERFECTED FORMULA

Look for this new, excitingly different idea in deodorants. Ask for the new super-fast Odoorono Cream deodorant... Stops perspiration troubles faster than you can slip on your slip. Works better because it contains science's most effective perspiration stopper. On every count it meets the highest standards in the entire deodorant field.

Affords other greatly needed blessings too: will not irritate your skin... or harm fine fabrics... or turn gritty in the jar. And really protects up to three days.

No other deodorant equals it. Change to the new Odoorono Cream Deodorant... it's super-fast... super-modern... excitingly different... it's the best! Use Odoorono Cream!

ODO-RO-DO
Cream

BUY THE LARGE JAR AND ECONOMIZE

2.7 Ad from *Illustrated Weekly of India* (1947) advertising Odoorono, a deodorant licensed by a U.S. company that was marketed around the globe.

It is a fact proven by medical science that within our bodies there are many glands which secrete certain substances—hormones—into the blood stream. These secretions are of such drastic importance that they absolutely govern our growth, development, vitality, and even our emotions.

It was, therefore, only logical to incorporate these vital and beneficial elements in the form of a facial cream which would produce the desired results upon the skin.

Dr. Kama, a scientist, after years of study and research, was the first to discover the importance of hormones in the preservation of a youthful complexion and was the first to develop them for plastic surgeons for their work in rebuilding depleted facial tissues.

Results were so amazing that he introduced the same extracts in his original hormone facial preparations—to be used easily by every woman in the finest cosmetics available! The active hormone elements—extracted by Dr. Kama's own scientific laboratory—were made available to other cosmetic professionals and cannot be duplicated.

Dr. Kama's preparations represent the first basic improvement in cosmetic development and are different from all other creams in principle, composition, and effect upon the skin.

For quick and best results use in conjunction Dr. Kama's Creams: Creams 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100.

DE KAMA

Among stores carrying Dr. Kama products are the following:

Boston: Mrs. Plummer's Fine Cosmetics	San Francisco: Mrs. Plummer's Fine Cosmetics
Chicago: The Chicago Store	Seattle: The Seattle Store
Denver: The Denver Store	St. Louis: The St. Louis Store
Detroit: The Detroit Store	Washington: The Washington Store
Los Angeles: The Los Angeles Store	Wichita: The Wichita Store
London: The London Store	Yonkers: The Yonkers Store
Manila: The Manila Store	
Montreal: The Montreal Store	
New York: The New York Store	
Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Store	
Pittsburgh: The Pittsburgh Store	
Portland: The Portland Store	
San Antonio: The San Antonio Store	
San Diego: The San Diego Store	
San Jose: The San Jose Store	
St. Paul: The St. Paul Store	
Tampa: The Tampa Store	
Wash. D.C.: The Wash. D.C. Store	

If not obtainable in your locality, write direct to Dr. Kama Sales, 3402 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills, California.

2.8 An art deco ad from U.S. *Vogue* (1924) for De Kama face cream, featuring abstract “Asianized” eyes.

particular cachet as part of the spread of a worldwide art deco aesthetic that incorporated both chinoiserie and japonisme into its stylized depictions of bodies and faces. Whereas Orientalism is a concept that is typically used to explain the production of the “Orient” and “Oriental” as mysterious, feminine, and unchanging, as well as the consequent construction of the Occidental’s superiority and prowess, Asianization, at least for Americans and Europeans, may have expressed an ambition to make the self more “exotic,” if only temporarily, and if only from a position of relative privilege.¹⁰

In addition to the commonalities of body and facial aesthetics, the Modern



2.9 Ad in the *Times of India* (1939) for Palmolive soap featuring the film star Devika Rani.

Girl is most frequently depicted in one of four specific activities or venues: she is figured as a film star; she is represented as an outdoor and sports enthusiast; she is depicted in romantic or intimate poses; and, she is found making up or admiring herself in front of her vanity or in a handheld mirror. Each of these activities or venues suggests a cluster of values and attitudes that contemporaries associated with the Modern Girl.

It appears that the Modern Girl image, in part, reflects observation and adaptation of female bodily practices performed on the silver screen. We know from previous research on *moga* in Japan, flappers in the United States, *modeng xiaojie* in China, and *neue Frauen* in Germany that film watching was a leisure activity routinely associated with the Modern Girl. Contemporaries often viewed Modern Girl postures, hand gestures, and ways of walking and talking as mimicking the movies.¹¹ Beginning in the late 1920s, in each of our locations, well-known actresses were

used to promote products; many ads for cosmetics therefore feature film stars. In a 1939 ad for Palmolive soap in the *Times of India*, for example, the film star Devika Rani is prominently portrayed (see figure 2.9). In linking the Modern Girl and movie watching, this ad enables a British company to capitalize on the glamour and fame of a local celebrity to create nationalist appeal, and also to cast its “beauty soap” as possessing global reach. As the copy explains: Palmolive is used by “millions of women in England, France, Germany, America and 67 other countries.” It also specifies that Palmolive “contains no animal fats,” thus assuaging potential alarm among Hindu and Muslim consumers. Devika Rani, a globe-trotting local star, ties together the international consumer of Palmolive and the Indian everywoman.

Ads depicting the Modern Girl engaged in outdoor activities invariably valorize her physicality. This trend is apparent in toiletry and cigarette ads from those locales in which the Modern Girl—particularly the white European and American Modern Girl and the Chinese Modern Girl—is depicted swimming, sunbathing, golfing, and, especially, playing tennis (see figures 1.4 and 2.10). By the early 1930s, Indian newspapers and ads also featured the Indian Mod-