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THE MODERN GIRL AND RACIAL RESPECTABILITY IN 1930s SOUTH AFRICA[1]

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ABSTRACT: This essay rethinks the gender history and historiography of interwar sub-Saharan Africa by deploying the heuristic device of the 'modern girl' to consider how global circuits of representation and commerce informed this period of gender tumult. This device has been developed by a research group at the University of Washington to understand the global emergence during the 1920s and 1930s of female figures identified by their cosmopolitan look, their explicit eroticism and their use of specific commodities. Previous scholarship has suggested that a black modern girl imbricated in international circuits of images, ideologies and commodities only became visible in southern Africa in the post-Second World War period. Yet, analysis of the black newspaper *Bantu World* reveals the emergence of such a figure by the early 1930s. The modern girl heuristic helps to situate race as a key category of analysis in scholarship on women and gender in interwar Africa as contemporaries consistently debated her in racial terms. In South Africa, some social observers saw African young women's school education, professional careers and cosmopolitan look as contributing to 'racial uplift'. Others accused the African modern girl of 'prostituting' her sex and race by imitating white, coloured or Indian women, and by delaying or avoiding marriage, dressing provocatively and engaging in premarital and inter-racial sex. Cosmetics use was one of the most contentious issues surrounding the black modern girl because it drew attention to the phenotypic dimensions of racial distinctions. By analysing a beauty contest in *Bantu World* together with articles and letters on, and advertisements for, cosmetics, this essay demonstrates how, in white-dominated segregationist South Africa, the modern girl emerged through and posed challenges to categories of race and respectability.

KEY WORDS: race, gender, identity, press, South Africa.

IN recent decades, historians of sub-Saharan Africa have discerned the 1920s and 1930s as a period of significant struggle over gender practices and

[1] Earlier versions of this article were presented at the International Workshop on Gender and Visuality at the University of the Western Cape, the University of Stellenbosch, the International Symposium on 'Modern Girl, Asia and Beyond' at Ochanomizu University, the 2004 African Studies Association meetings, Rutgers University, Yale University, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the University of Chicago and the University of Washington. I thank the participants in these forums, other colleagues, and the anonymous *Journal of African History* reviewers who provided insightful commentary on those many versions. A Charles A. Ryskamp Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies; a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship; and the Walter C. Simpson Center for the Humanities, the Graduate School and the History Department at the University of Washington generously provided funding for research and writing. Finally, I thank my undergraduate and graduate student research assistants at the University of Washington who collected some of the sources for this article.

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ideologies. From the 'Women's War' in Nigeria to the 'female circumcision controversy' in Kenya, African women and men, colonial officials and missionaries debated the position of women under colonial regimes, and asked if and how gender relations should be remade. Historians have seen the immediate impetus for these debates in the elaboration of colonial institutions, and reformers' heightened desire to improve the 'status' of African women. They have also illuminated how social transformations fueled by increases in cash crop production, labor migrancy and African urban populations altered gender relations. In segregationist South Africa, the geographic focus of this essay, the interwar period witnessed rural women's beer protests, the dramatic influx of African and poor white women into cities, and political and religious leaders' vocal concern about gendered 'social ills' including inter-racial sex, prostitution and premarital pregnancy.

This essay seeks to rethink this history and its historiography by deploying the heuristic device of the 'modern girl' to consider how international circuits of media and commerce also informed this period of gender tumult. This device has been developed by a research group at the University of Washington, of which I am a member. Through the modern girl, we seek to understand the global emergence during the 1920s and 1930s of female figures identified by their cosmopolitan look, their explicit eroticism and their use of specific commodities. Our own research and that of others has tracked the modern girl's appearance from Tokyo to New York, Bombay to Shanghai, and Berlin to Johannesburg. Whether known as flappers, *moga*, *garçonnes*, *modeng xiaojie*, *neue Frauen* or, simply, modern girls, these figures appeared to reject the roles of dutiful daughter, wife and mother through their engagement of international commodity cultures, mass media and political discourses.[2] The commitment

[2] Modern Girl 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', *Gender and History*, 17 (August 2005), 245–94; http://depts.washington.edu/its/moderngirl.htm. The work of a number of other scholars on modern girl-related topics has been crucial to our development of this heuristic device. This scholarship includes: for Brazil, S. Caulfield, *In Defense of Honor: Sexual Morality, Modernity, and Nation in Early-Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Durham, 2000); for China, S. Shih, 'Gender, Race and Semicolonialism: Liu Na'Ou's Urban Shanghai Landscape', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55 (1996), 934–56; for France, M. Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (Chicago, 1994); for Germany, A. Grossmann, 'Girlkultur, or Thoroughly Rationalized Female?' in J. Friedlander (ed.), *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of Change* (Bloomington, 1986), 62–80, and K. von Ankum (ed.), *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley, 1997); for India, R. Mohan, *Of Wayward Girls and Wicked Women: Women in Indian Silent Feature Films* (Mumbai, 1996); for Japan, M. Silverberg, 'The Modern Girl As Militant', in G. Bernstein (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945* (Berkeley, 1991), 239–66, and M. Silverberg, 'The Cafe Waitress Serving Modern Japan', in S. Vlastos (ed.), *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 1998), 208–25, as well as H. D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, 2000), and B. Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, 2003); for the United States, K. Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia, 1986), and K. Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York, 1998), as well as L. Mizejewski, *Ziegfeld*

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of historians of interwar Africa to elucidating the complexities of local contexts together with our reliance on state and missionary archives for documentary sources has meant that we have largely ignored how new gender practices and ideologies were disseminated – in diffuse yet influential ways – through the circulation of films, advertisements, magazines, newspapers and commodities. Paying attention to such circuits within and between colonies, empires and nations opens new lines of historical inquiry in the areas of visual representation, self-fashioning and consumption. It also illuminates how twentieth-century gender transformations in Africa are both linked to and distinct from those that occurred elsewhere in the world.

Moreover, the modern girl heuristic speaks to the recent outpouring of scholarship on 'youth' in Africa. The more historically minded of these studies have highlighted the fluidity of youth as a social category as well as how twentieth-century processes of schooling, labor migrancy and urbanization enhanced young people's autonomy from senior kin while embedding them in new colonial and postcolonial hierarchies.[3] The modern girl heuristic enriches this largely male-focused literature by elucidating how young women's involvement in these processes and international circuits of media and commerce became the catalyst for wide-ranging debates over femininity and masculinity. 'Girl', according to Sally Mitchell, was first stretched beyond its reference to female children in 1880s England where it popularly denoted working-class and middle-class unmarried young women who seemingly occupied 'a provisional free space'.[4] It was this contingent independence from conventional female roles that people in Africa and elsewhere evoked during the 1920s and 1930s when they deployed 'girl' or variants of it to reference young women. In the Anglophone black press in West and southern Africa, writers commonly used 'modern girl' to describe young women, often with some schooling, who had a panache for fashion and choosing their own

Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema (Durham, 1999), A. Latham, *Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s* (Hanover NH, 2000), and S. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge, 2000); and for Zimbabwe, T. Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, & Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (Durham, 1996).

[3] For example, see B. Carton, *Blood from Your Children: The Colonial Origins of Generational Conflict in South Africa* (Charlottesville, 2000); A. Stambach, *Lessons from Kilimanjaro: Schooling, Community, and Gender in East Africa* (New York, 2000); 'Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 73 (2000); M. McKittrick, *To Dwell Secure: Generation, Christianity, and Colonialism in Ovamboland* (Portsmouth, 2002); L. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley, 2003); J. Cole, 'Fresh Contact in Tamatave, Madagascar: Sex, Money, and Intergenerational Transformation', *American Ethnologist*, 31 (2004), 573–88; J. Abbink and I. van Kessel (eds.), *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth Politics and Conflict in Africa* (Leiden, 2005); J. Burgess (guest ed.), *Africa Today* (Special Issue: Youth and Citizenship in East Africa) 51 (2005); *Journal of African History* (Special Section: Youth and its Discontents) 47 (2006).

[4] S. Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England, 1880–1915* (New York, 1995), 3.

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lovers.[5] Whites' use of 'girl' and 'boy' to refer to African adults in these colonial and segregationist contexts, as in the Jim Crow United States, was a racial insult. But when black writers prefaced 'girl' with 'modern', they signaled something unsettlingly progressive rather than decidedly pejorative. Their writings and related visual representations reveal the modern girl as a social category and performative style, a style that could be adopted by married and unmarried women alike, and interpreted as anything from disreputable to respectable.[6]

The modern girl heuristic also situates race as a key category of analysis in scholarship on women and gender in interwar Africa. Too often Africanist historians have assumed racial categories and racist ideologies as the backdrop for studies of women's agency or gender politics without exploring their everyday manifestations. In their volume on 'culture studies' in South Africa, Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael argue that, to develop more nuanced understandings of 'how race works', we need to explore intimate realms of action.[7] Examination of the modern girl enables such exploration, as contemporaries discussed her in racial terms and considered her behavior in minute detail. In South Africa, some viewed African young women's schooling, professional careers or cosmopolitan appearances as contributing to 'racial uplift'. Others accused the African modern girl of 'prostituting' her sex and race by imitating white, colored or Indian women, and by avoiding marriage, dressing provocatively or engaging in extra-marital and inter-racial sex. Cosmetics use was one of the most contentious issues surrounding the black modern girl because it drew attention to the phenotypic dimensions of racial distinctions.

This essay explores such debates in the newspaper *Bantu World*. Previous scholarship has suggested that a black modern girl imbricated in international circuits of images, ideologies and commodities only became visible in southern Africa in the post-Second World War period.[8] Yet, analysis of a *Bantu World*

[5] I have found the most extensive use of 'modern girl' in the papers *Bantu World* (Johannesburg) and *Times of West Accra* (Accra). For an insightful analysis of the 'modern woman' in the Nigerian press during the 1930s, see LaRay Denzer, 'Emancipation and the Modern Woman in Lagos (Nigeria)' (unpublished paper presented at the conference, 'Youth Policy and the Policies of Youth in Africa', Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, 10–11 May 2002). In reference to South Africa, I use 'black' as an umbrella term to refer to people who thought of themselves or were viewed by others, particularly state institutions, as non-white, coloured, African, Malay or Indian.

[6] Modern Girl research group, 'The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device: Collaboration, Connective Comparison, Multidirectional Citation', in the Modern Girl research group (eds.), *The Modern Girl Around the World* (forthcoming).

[7] S. Nuttall and C. Michael, 'Introduction: Imagining the Past', in S. Nuttall and C. Michael (eds.), *Senses of Culture: South African Culture Studies* (Oxford, 2000), 11–12. See J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (2 vols.), vol. II (Chicago, 1997), esp. 29–35, for a broader argument about the importance of 'the everyday' for understanding social change and political life in southern Africa since the nineteenth century.

[8] Burke's path-breaking history of consumption in Zimbabwe (*Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*) implies that modern girl figures emerged in the 1950s and 1960s with the expanded marketing of consumer goods to Africans. Modern girls in the form of cover girls, beauty-pageant winners and lovelorn letter-writers proliferated in the pages of the

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beauty contest together with articles and letters on, and advertisements for, cosmetics reveals the emergence of such a figure by the early 1930s. It also demonstrates how, in segregationist South Africa, the modern girl emerged through and posed challenges to categories of race and respectability.

BANTU WORLD AND 'AMARESPECTABLES'

Bantu World was the first newspaper targeting black South Africans to offer women's pages, and to feature representations and discussion of the modern girl. Bertram Paver, a white advertising salesman, founded *Bantu World* in Johannesburg in 1932. In the midst of the Great Depression, Paver sought to expand the market for white companies by establishing a black newspaper with extensive advertisements and a nationwide circulation. In contrast to papers like *Ilanga lase Natal* (published in Zulu and English) and *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Xhosa and English), *Bantu World* sought to reach a wider audience by publishing portions in Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana and English, and, to a lesser extent, Venda, Tsonga and Afrikaans. *Bantu World* distinguished itself from *Umteteli wa Bantu*, the Chamber of Mines paper also published in several languages, by having a looser editorial policy. Moderate African nationalists like R. V. Selope Thema edited and staffed *Bantu World*, and held considerable sway in determining its content. According to Les Switzer, *Bantu World* quickly became 'the arbiter of taste in urban African politics and culture and by far the most important medium of mass communication for the literate African community'. Although this literate community only comprised 12 per cent of the total African population of 6·6 million in 1936, it was a vocal and visible group.[9]

popular magazine *Drum*, founded in Johannesburg in 1951. See the rapidly growing scholarship on *Drum* including: D. Driver, 'Drum Magazine (1951–9) and the Spatial Configurations in Gender', in K. Darian-Smith, L. Gunner and S. Nuttall (eds.), *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia* (London, 1996), 231–42; R. Neville Choonoo, 'The Sophiatown Generation: Black Literary Journalism during the 1950s', in L. Switzer (ed.), *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s–1960s* (Cambridge, 1997), 252–65; C. Ballantine, 'Gender, Migrancy, and South African Popular Music in the Late 1940s and the 1950s', *Ethnomusicology*, 44 (2000), 376–407; K. Mutongi, '"Dear Dolly's" Advice: Representations of Youth, Courtship, and Sexualities in Africa, 1960–1980', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33 (2000), 1–23; L. Clowes, '"Are You going to be MISS (or MR) Africa?" Contesting Masculinity in Drum Magazine 1951–1953', *Gender & History*, 13 (2001), 1–20; and Clowes, 'A Modernised Man? Changing Constructions of Masculinity in *Drum* Magazine, 1951–1984' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 2002).

[9] L. Switzer, '*Bantu World* and the Origins of a Captive African Commercial Press', in L. Switzer (ed.), *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880s–1960s* (Cambridge, 1997), 189–212, quotes from 190–1; T. Couzens, 'A Short History of "World" (and other Black SA Newspapers)', *Inspan Journal*, 1 (1978), 69–92; South African Institute of Race Relations papers, University of Witwatersrand (hereafter SAIRR) AD843 RJ Aa3.3.2 1, Correspondence on the Black Press, J. D. Rheinallt Jones's Letter on Native Newspapers to R. Muir, 16 Sept. 1931. Although Paver had high expectations for *Bantu World*'s advertising potential, its news–advertising ratio of 28–72 per cent during the 1930s was less than that of both militant and moderate black papers during the 1920s. L. Switzer, '*Bantu World* and the Origins of a Captive African

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Bantu World embodied the concerns of mission-educated African Christians who worked as clerks, teachers, domestic servants, nurses and clergy, and who struggled, under increasingly difficult circumstances, to achieve middle-class status. Amid the competing ideologies that shaped interwar black politics, *Bantu World* advocated a 'progressive yet moderate' agenda.[10] This agenda insisted, in the face of white racism, on the importance of school-educated blacks to South Africa's future. At times, others referred, somewhat derisively, to such Africans as the *AmaRespectables* (respectable people) for their fervent embrace of mission Christianity and their elite ambitions. The English root of the Xhosa term *AmaRespectables* suggests the importance of notions of respectability. But what counted as respectable behavior for black South Africans living amid the harsh political realities and shifting cultural terrain of the 1930s was the subject of significant debate. *Bantu World* and particularly its women's pages provide rich material for discerning this debate's gendered dimensions.

Most historians have traced South African notions of respectability back to British colonialism. Vivian Bickford-Smith has argued that respectability emerged as an ideological force in South Africa during the 1870s and 1880s when Cape colonists began to identify the Victorian virtues of 'thrift, the sanctity of property, deference to superiors, belief in the moralising efficacy of hard work and cleanliness' with English ethnicity.[11] Black elites from Cape Town to Kimberley soon claimed this ideology as their own, abiding by its tenets and deploying it to counter white racism and promote race pride.[12] John Iliffe has pointed to boarding schools as the key institution through which Africans reworked older 'notions of honour ... [with] their emphasis on rank and prowess' into an ideology of respectability that stressed 'virtue and duty'.[13] By the 1930s, according to David Goodhew, opportunities for class mobility were so scarce in Johannesburg's townships and respectability (defined as faith in Christianity, schooling, and law and order) was so widespread that it had become a black working-class ideology.[14] Considering gender politics, Shula Marks has shown how interwar African

Commercial Press in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 14 (1988), 366–7.

[10] Switzer, '*Bantu World*', in *South Africa's Alternative Press*, quote from 198. For subtle discussion of this group's ideology, see T. Couzens, *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H. I. E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg, 1985); B. Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries & African Intellectuals* (Johannesburg, 2000); and Peterson, 'The Bantu World and the World of the Book: Reading, Writing, and "Enlightenment"', in K. Barber (ed.), *Social Histories of Reading in Africa* (Bloomington, forthcoming in 2006).

[11] V. Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town* (Cambridge, 1995), 39.

[12] B. Willan, *Sol Plaatje: South African Nationalist 1876–1932* (Berkeley, 1984); Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride*, 203; V. Bickford-Smith, E. van Heyningen and N. Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century* (Cape Town, 1999), 43.

[13] J. Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge, 2005), 246.

[14] D. Goodhew, 'Working-Class Respectability: The Example of the Western Areas of Johannesburg, 1930–55', *Journal of African History*, 41 (2000), 241–66; Goodhew, *Respectability and Resistance: A History of Sophiatown* (Westport, 2004). M. Wilson and A. Mafeje (*Langa: A Study of Social Groups in an African Township* [London, 1963]) similarly argue that notions of respectability were widely diffuse, if subtly differentiated, in Cape Town's Langa during the 1950s.

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nationalists and the state deployed respectability to reassert control over unruly women.[15]

This essay builds on that scholarship by developing the notion of 'racial respectability' to explain why the black modern girl's cosmopolitan look and use of cosmetics generated both admiration and condemnation among *Bantu World* writers. Racial respectability refers to people's desires and efforts to claim positive recognition in contexts powerfully structured by racism, contexts in which respectability was framed through racial categories, and appearances were of the gravest importance. This notion of racial respectability is inspired by African Americanist scholarship that has revealed respectability as a highly malleable ideology. For example, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has demonstrated how middle-class Baptist women reworked dominant norms of 'temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals' to 'counter racist images and structures' that cast black women as immoral and unkempt, and to condemn aspects of black working-class life.[16] African Americanist scholarship also reveals how debates over respectability peaked during the interwar years when large numbers of blacks migrated to northern cities where public appearance took on even greater significance, and respectability's emphasis on morals and manners ran headlong into the new consumerism.[17] As we shall see, these African American developments both paralleled and influenced processes in interwar South Africa.

CULTIVATING WOMEN READER-CONSUMERS AND CONCEIVING FEMININE BEAUTY

Bantu World viewed feminine beauty as key to attracting readers and increasing its early circulation figure of 6,000 copies per week.[18] Six months after its launch, *Bantu World* introduced women's pages. These pages – like the front page and some other sections – appeared in English to ensure an audience that better cut across ethnolinguistic divides. Rolfes Robert Reginald (R.R.R.) Dhlomo, one of the period's most important black male writers, soon became the 'editress' of the women's pages.[19] Although some female writers featured on the women's pages, Dhlomo and a handful of male contributors framed most of the

[15] S. Marks, 'Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity: Natal and the Politics of Zulu Ethnic Consciousness', in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (Berkeley, 1991), 215–40; Marks, 'Introduction', in S. Marks (ed.), *Not Either an Experimental Doll: The Separate Worlds of Three South African Women* (Bloomington, 1987), 1–55.

[16] E. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, 1993), quotes from 14 and 187.

[17] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 209–10; V. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 1–10. Also see K. Gaines, *Uplifting The Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1996).

[18] *Bantu World*'s early circulation figures were double those of contemporary African papers including *Imvo Zabantsundu* and *Ilanga lase Natal*: Couzens, 'A Short History of "World"', 77. By 1946, *Bantu World* circulation figures had climbed to 24,000 per week.

[19] Switzer, '*Bantu World*', in *South Africa's Alternative Press*, 190.

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discussion.[20] Together, they promoted an *AmaRespectable* urban femininity that would distinguish their daughters and wives from the disreputable female figures of the prostitute and skokian queen that black leaders had long associated with South Africa's towns.

R. R. R. Dhlomo's early life provides insight into the social background of these men. Born in Pietermaritzburg in 1901, he attended mission schools. In 1912, the Dhlomo family moved to Johannesburg where his father worked as a medical dresser on the mines and his mother washed white customers' laundry out of their home. After further schooling, R. R. R. worked as a mine clerk and, in the late 1920s, turned his full attention to writing. Given his expansive commentary on gender relations as *Bantu World*'s 'editress', it is significant to note that he and his younger brother Herbert, also an accomplished writer, were very close to their mother, Sardinia Mbune Caluza Dhlomo. In his biography of Herbert, Tim Couzens describes how she dominated the Dhlomo household with her storytelling, her Victorian and Christian values, and her keen attention to 'appearances'.[21]

On its inaugural women's pages, *Bantu World* announced a beauty competition, inviting 'All African Ladies' to submit their 'best photos', and promising cash prizes. 'The Son of Africa', likely editor Thema, justified the paper's new attention to women by stating 'no nation can rise above its womenfolk', an axiom common to contemporary nationalist discourses. He then explained the multiple motivations behind the beauty competition: to prove that 'there are beautiful women and girls in Africa', to promote 'diligent perusal of enterprising Bantu newspapers' and to encourage 'careless or lazy [ladies] to give a little more attention to their toilet'.[22] According to this logic, the competition would foster race pride, a female readership and conscientious consumption.

Bantu World's competition relied on readers rather than 'experts' to select the winner. Beneath each photo entry, the paper printed the name of the town or mission station from which it hailed. Personal names only appeared when the winners were announced. The paper instructed readers to 'cut out the three [photos] you think are the best, number them 1, 2, 3, and post them to us'.[23] At a time when *Bantu World* was protesting Prime Minister Barry

[20] For women's complaints about too many male letter-writers on the women's pages, see *Bantu World* (9 Nov. 1935), 16; (23 Nov. 1935), 12; and (21 Dec. 1935), 12. The paper did not publish any explicit criticism of a man serving as 'editress'.

[21] Couzens, *The New African*, 42–81.

[22] 'The Son of Africa', 'Great Progress! The Bantu World Calls to the Women of the Race' and 'Competition', *Bantu World* (22 Oct. 1932), 10.

[23] 'Bantu World Beauty Competition Entrants', *Bantu World* (18 Feb. 1933), 10. Later beauty contests in the popular magazines *Zonk!* and *Drum* relied, at least in part, on a panel of 'experts'. On South African beauty contests from the 1950s to the present, see P. Johnson, '"Talking the Talk and Walking the Walk": The Spring Queen Festival and the Eroding Family Cult in the Western Cape Garment Industry' (unpublished paper presented to the Oral History Project Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 7 Oct. 1993); R. Barnard, 'Contesting Beauty', in Nuttall and Michael (eds.), *Senses of Culture*, 344–62; Clowes, '"Are You Going to be MISS Africa?"', 1–20; J. Kennedy, *Cinderella of the Cape Flats*, video (Johannesburg, Film Resource Unit, 2004); and A. Ashforth, 'Weighing Manhood in Soweto', *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3 and 4 (1999), 56–7.

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Hertzog's ultimately successful campaign to abolish African men's limited voting rights in the Cape Province, the paper invited all readers to elect 'Miss Africa'. This beauty competition, like others the world over,[24] drew disparate entrants and reader–voters into new circuits of citizenship by granting voting rights to all consumers and by insisting that what one looked like mattered more than who one was.

Feminine beauty was a long-valued attribute in southern Africa, as in other parts of the continent and world. Nineteenth-century white travelers' and traders' accounts mention that Africans considered 'stout' young women with gleaming skin to be the most beautiful. Groups of such women attended the compounds of senior chiefs, demonstrating the chief's wealth and sexual prowess.[25] Zulu-speakers interviewed by James Stuart around the turn of the twentieth century testified that Shaka, in particular, amassed large numbers of 'good-looking girl[s]' through tribute. When such women 'got old and flabby in the cheeks', according to Ndukwana ka Mbengwana, they were married off. Other informants explained how earlier generations made themselves attractive and protected their skin by smearing it with animal fat; they also adorned themselves with beaded ornaments, brass rings, blankets, and skirts and belts made from animal skins. Stuart's informants often described individuals as having particular skin colors including 'light-brown', 'dark but not black' or 'black'. Their testimony, however, does not attach explicit and consistent aesthetic preferences to such color distinctions.[26]

In their accounts of Tswana and Xhosa conceptions of beauty from the 1930s, anthropologists Isaac Schapera and Monica Hunter emphasized the importance of bodily over facial attributes. They noted the appeal of young women with 'somewhat heavy build[s]' and prominent and firm breasts, buttocks, hips and calves. They also described a preference for 'light-skinned girl[s]' and those with 'thin lips, an aquiline nose, and light brown skin'. Unfortunately, Schapera and Hunter shed little light on whether such preferences were rooted in precolonial conceptions of beauty, a product of colonial racial hierarchies, or some entanglement of the two. Xhosa-speaking young men and women used animal fat, butter and, by this period, Vaseline to make their skin shine. They also enhanced their beauty through facial tattooing, washing daily, plaiting and applying red ochre to their hair, wearing sweet-smelling leaves and using love medicines.

[24] C. Cohen and R. Wilk with B. Stoeltje, 'Introduction: Beauty Queens on the Global Stage', in C. Cohen, R. Wilk and B. Stoeltje (eds.), *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power* (New York, 1996), 1–11.

[25] N. Isaacs, *Travels and Adventures in Eastern Africa*, ed. L. Herrmann and P. Kirby (Cape Town, 1970 [London, 1836]), 51, 56, 88, 107, 179, 190–1, 221, 265, 289 and 291; H. F. Fynn, *The Diary of Henry Francis Fynn*, ed. J. Stuart and D. M. Malcolm (Pietermaritzburg, 1950), 73, 164 and 293. On feminine beauty as an important aspect of wealth-in-people in precolonial West Africa, see J. Guyer and S. Belinga, 'Wealth in People as Wealth in Knowledge: Accumulation and Composition in Equatorial Africa', *Journal of African History*, 36 (1995), 115–16.

[26] C. de ь. Webb and J. B. Wright, ed. and trans., *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*, vols. I–V (Pietermaritzburg, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1986 and 2001). Quotes from vol. III, 151–2, and vol. IV, 339.

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As school-educated Christians abandoned some of these practices, they adopted beauty and hygienic regimes involving store-bought soaps and creams, and the wearing of 'smart' clothing.[27] Recent scholarship has elucidated how these new bodily routines, most often initiated by Christian missionaries, were an integral part of the cultural and economic colonization of southern Africa.[28]

The advent of beauty contests in South Africa recast such displays and criteria of feminine beauty by linking them to genres of performance rooted in photography, illustrated magazines, newspapers and film. American showman P. T. Barnum inaugurated photo-based beauty contests in the 1850s after realizing that 'respectable' women would not parade before judges but would submit daguerreotypes. By the end of the century, newspapers throughout the United States had picked up his idea.[29] In other parts of the world, including South Africa, illustrated magazines pioneered beauty contests. According to the German sociologist Siegfried Kracauer, such magazines ranked among the most disorienting media of the interwar period. As part of their effort to reproduce 'the world accessible to the photographic apparatus', Kracauer wrote, illustrated magazines filled their pages with film divas and 'beautiful girls'.[30] Although South African magazines targeted white audiences, the intimacy of the country's racial geographies meant that they were perused and sometimes purchased by blacks. White South Africans documented, often with alarm, how blacks enjoyed foreign magazines like *Modern Romances*, and hung photos of film stars on their walls.[31]

By the early 1920s, South African magazines reported on beauty contests in Britain and the United States to 'find' film stars.[32] In 1923, the English-language weekly *South African Pictorial: Stage & Cinema* announced its own contest 'open to any girl, woman or child (girls only) residing in Africa

[27] I. Schapera, *Married Life in an African Tribe* (New York, 1941), 46–8; M. Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (London, 1936), 222–6.

[28] K. Hansen, *African Encounters with Domesticity* (New Brunswick, 1992); Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*; J. Comaroff, 'The Empire's Old Clothes: Fashioning the Colonial Subject', in D. Howes (ed.), *Cross-Cultural Consumption: Global Markets, Local Realities* (New York, 1996), 19–38; J. and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. II.

[29] C. Cohen *et al.*, 'Introduction', 3–4. For other histories of beauty contests outside of South Africa, see F. Deford, *There She Is: The Life and Times of Miss America* (New York, 1971); L. Banner, *American Beauty* (New York, 1983); and L. Conor, 'The Beauty Contestant in the Photographic Scene', in *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington, 2004), 131–74.

[30] S. Kracauer, 'Photography', in S. Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans., ed. and intro. T. Levin (Cambridge, 1995), 57–8. At the time of *Bantu World*'s founding, J. D. Rheinallt Jones (SAIRR, AD843 RJ Aa3.3.2 1, letter to R. Muir, 16 Sept. 1931) noted the need for a 'magazine for Natives'. Illustrated magazines for Africans only took off in the post-Second World War period with the likes of *Zonk!* and *Drum*.

[31] E. Hellmann, 'Native Life in a Johannesburg Slum Yard', *Africa*, 8 (Jan. 1935), 40; R. Phillips, *The Bantu in the City: A Study of Cultural Adjustment on the Witwatersrand* (Lovedale, 1938), 105; W. Sachs, *Black Hamlet* (Baltimore, 1996 [1937]), 148–50.

[32] *South African Pictorial: Stage & Cinema*: 'Found in a Beauty Contest', 10, 239 (5 March 1920), 5; 'Searching for "Stars"', 10 (24 April 1920), 4; '"Beauty and Talent" Contest', 10, 250 (15 May 1920), 5.

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south of the Equator'. Although this expansive announcement may have caught the attention of some black women and girls, all of the published photos were of entrants who appear white. These carefully crafted studio portraits featured demure young women.[33] By the early 1930s, white beauty contests featured photos of scantily clad bathing beauties, signaling a significant shift in white notions of acceptable female display.[34] *Bantu World*'s 1932–3 competition, however, shared the sensibility of the earlier white contests. In a racist context where most whites and many mission-educated Africans associated black women's partially clothed bodies with 'barbarity', *Bantu World*'s staff likely imagined photos of black women in bathing suits as threatening racial respectability. Not until the 1950s did black periodicals publish such photos.

Bantu World's editors also seem to have drawn inspiration for their beauty competition from the African American press. From its defense of black womanhood to its title of 'Miss Africa', their competition suggests trans-Atlantic connections. Black journalists in interwar South Africa were deeply influenced by the works of Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois, and discussions of the 'New Negro'.[35] They were also familiar with the African American press. Since the mid-1920s, copies of Garvey's *Negro World* and Du Bois's *The Crisis* circulated in South Africa and occasionally *Bantu World* reprinted articles from them.[36] Black American newspapers had sponsored photo-based beauty contests since the 1890s to boost circulation. What distinguished these contests and *Bantu World*'s from their white counterparts was the additional desire to combat racist denigrations. As this racism entailed disparaging black women's appearances, demonstrating that there were beautiful women in Africa or black America was an anti-racist retort.[37] The influence of black American thought can also be seen in *Bantu World*'s decision to crown

[33] 'Are You Beautiful?', *South African Pictorial: Stage & Cinema*, 15 (23 June 1923). During its six-month run, this contest proved popular, attracting nearly 5,000 entries, prize contributions from dozens of individuals and businesses, and the services of several studio photographers. The *South African Lady's Pictorial and Home Journal* ran a similar contest for 'the woman of greatest charm' in 1924–5.

[34] See *Cape Times* (13 Dec. 1931 and 25 July 1933, supplement); and *The South African Annual Pictorial: A Review of 1933 in Pictures* (Durban, 1934).

[35] T. Couzens, '"Moralizing Leisure Time": The Transatlantic Connection and Black Johannesburg (1918–1936)', in S. Marks and R. Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (New York, 1982), 314–37; J. Campbell, 'T. D. Mweli Skota and the Making and Unmaking of a Black Elite' (unpublished paper presented to the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, 9–14 February 1987); R. Edgar, *An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 September 1937–1 January 1938* (Athens GA,1992); A. Kemp, '"Up from Slavery" and Other Narratives: Black South African Performances of the American Negro (1920–1943)' (Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1997); A. Kemp and R. Vinson, '"Poking Holes in the Sky": Professor James Thaele, American Negroes, and Modernity in 1920s Segregationist South Africa', *African Studies Review*, 44 (2000), 141–59.

[36] Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (hereafter CAD) NTS 1681, file 2/276 vol. I, Protector of Natives at Kimberley to Secretary for Native Affairs, 24 Sept. 1924; CAD, NTS 1877, file 75/278, Magistrate at Butterworth to Chief Magistrate at Umtata, 6 June 1928.

[37] M. Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford, 2002), 46–55.

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the winner 'Miss *Africa*' as opposed to 'Miss Bantu' or 'Miss Native', the latter being terms more widely used in this period for South Africa's indigenous populations. According to James Campbell, black South African writers' use of 'Africa' drew on Garveyite notions that linked the term with 'an heroic past, an undifferentiated racial identity, an essentially unitary culture'.[38] The men behind *Bantu World* viewed attractive and carefully groomed women as contributing to a project of racial uplift that would connect a 'heroic past' to a politically progressive and commercially vibrant future.

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE BEAUTY COMPETITION WINNER

The nearly fifty entries published as part of *Bantu World*'s competition constitute a unique archive of interwar photographs of African young women. Scholars have demonstrated how most nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographers sought to frame African women as ethnographic and erotic subjects, often placing them in 'sexually suggestive poses'. White male photographers created such images for white audiences.[39] *Bantu World*'s beauty competition highlights another photographic tradition involving African women: their own commissioning and sharing of portraits. Some of the earliest extant examples in this vein date to the 1870s when Lovedale graduates Tause Soga and Martha Mzimbu had studio portraits taken while studying abroad in Scotland. These photos, given to a former Lovedale teacher, feature Soga and Mzimbu in high-collared Victorian dress, and with short parted hair and dignified countenances.[40]

Most of the entrants to *Bantu World*'s beauty contest resonate with these nineteenth-century figures in their fully clad dress and somber expressions. They wear blouses and dresses with modest necklines and serenely look towards the photographer without smiling (Fig. 1). These portraits draw attention to the face and away from bodily attributes that previously

[38] Campbell, 'T. D. Mweli Skota', 6. On debate in the contemporary African press over these terms, see Edgar, *An African American in South Africa*, 350, n. 22.

[39] Quote from M. Stevenson and M. Graham-Stewart, *Surviving the Lens: Photographic Studies of South and East African People, 1870–1920* (Vlaeberg, 2001), 19–21. Also see Helen Bradford, 'Framing African Women: Visionaries in Southern Africa and their Photographic Afterlife, 1850–2004', *Kronos*, 30 (2004), 70–93; and C. Williams, 'The Erotic Image is Naked and Dark', in D. Willis (ed.), *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York, 1994), 128–34.

[40] Waterston later contributed these photos to the 'album of racial types' of the George Grey Collection of the South African library, thereby converting what was likely a personal gift into evidence for 'scientific' racial theory. Even these studio portraits commissioned and given by African women could not escape dominant white modes of representing black women. K. Schoeman, *The Face of the Country: A South African Family Album, 1860–1910* (Cape Town, 1996), 68; National Library of South Africa, Special Collections, Grey Ethnological Album 167, INIL 14165 and 14210. On local appropriations of photography in colonial and postcolonial contexts, see P. Hayes and A. Bank (guest eds.), *Kronos* (Special Issue: Visual History) 27 (2001); P. Landau and D. Kaspin (eds.), *Images & Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley, 2002); and C. Pinney and N. Peterson (eds.), *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham, 2003).

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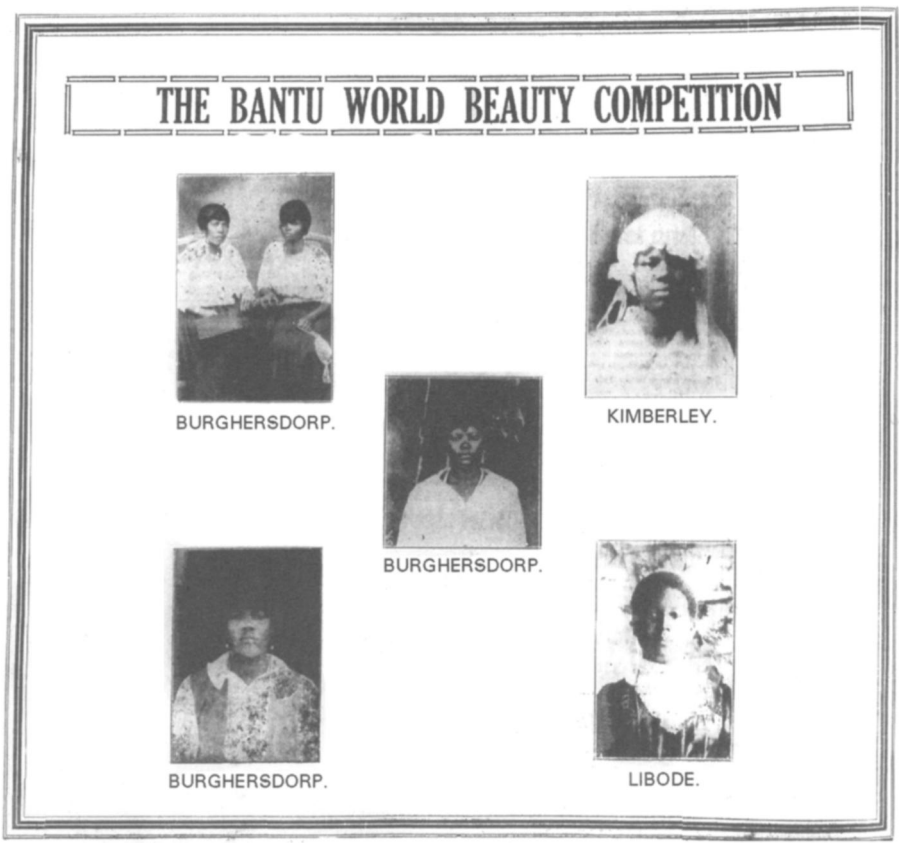


Fig. 1. Some entrants to *Bantu World*'s 1932–3 beauty competition in conservative dress and with somber countenances.

dominated some regional conceptions of feminine beauty. Like the photos of well-groomed African converts that often appeared in mission fundraising literature as proof of 'success' in the field,[41] these portraits situated their subjects as 'civilized'. In the 1930s, such photos of African women and men hung on the walls in black homes, were collected in family albums, and enclosed in love letters.[42] Portrait photos had become a medium for expressing and claiming black Christian respectability.

[41] P. Harries, 'Photography and the Rise of Anthropology: Henri-Alexandre Junod and the Thonga of Mozambique and South Africa', *Encounters with Photography*, www.museums.org.za/sam/conf/enc/harries.htm (10 Nov. 2001); I. Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of 'The Pilgrim's Progress'* (Princeton, 2004), 185.

[42] S. Mofokeng, 'The Black Photo Album', in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Paris, 1998), 68–75; Mofokeng, 'Trajectory of a Street-Photographer: South Africa 1973–1998', in *Democracy's Images: Photography and Visual Art After Apartheid* (Umeå, Sweden, 1998), 42–5. For examples of photos sent in letters, see J. D. Mweli Skota Correspondence, University of Witwatersrand AD2781, letters from Zilpah T. D. Skota to J. D. Mweli Skota, 10 Oct. 1936, 17 Apr. 1941 and 2 May 1941.

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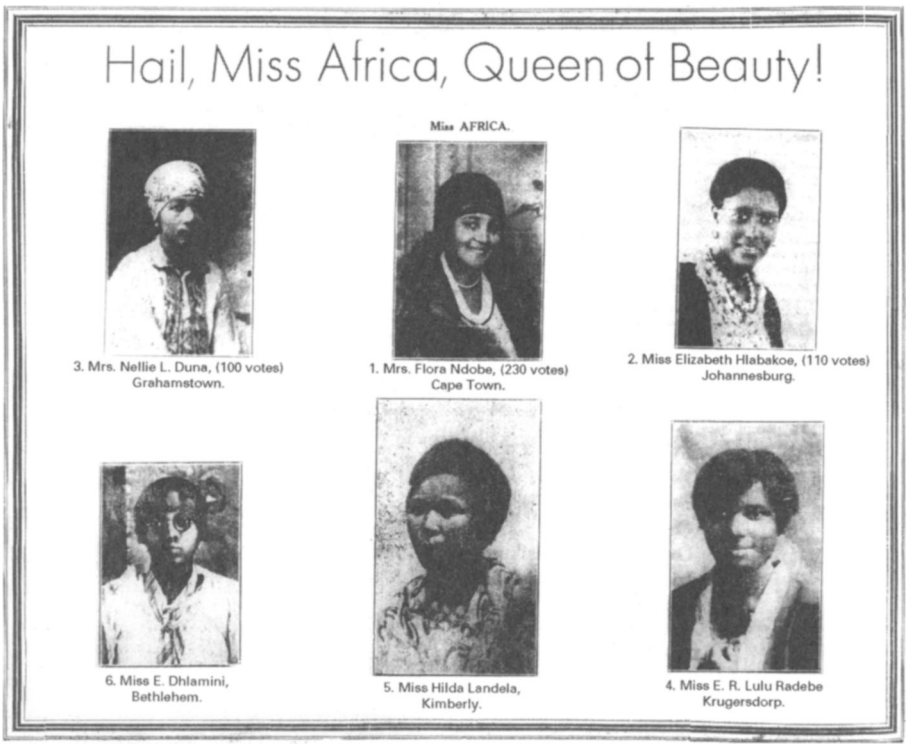


Fig. 2. Top six finishers in beauty competition.

What most readily distinguishes the beauty competition's top two finishers is their rejection of the somber countenance, long a convention of portrait photography. Mrs. Flora Ndobe of Cape Town, the first-place finisher, and Miss Elizabeth Hlabakoe of Johannesburg, the second-place finisher, sport teeth-revealing smiles (Fig. 2). The Modern Girl research group has identified this full-smile look as a defining feature of modern girl representations the world over. Interwar advertisements for toothpaste and other toiletries, and publicity photos of film stars, promoted this look.[43] In announcing the *Bantu World* competition, 'The Son of Africa' had, in fact, encouraged entrants to smile:

> Smile sweetly while the camera clicks and post the result to the Editor of this paper ... The trouble with some of our ladies is that they do not know how to smile. Yet what a glorious transformation a smile can give to your features! Practise it in front of your mirror every morning before or after meals it does not matter when.[44]

This editorial dismissed any notion that smiling was an immodest gesture for young women. It also linked smiling to another commonplace in modern girl

[43] Modern Girl research group, 'Modern Girl Around the World', esp. 251–4. See Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 201, for two 1930s photos contrasting a group of smiling American sorority sisters putting on a 'glamorous, made-up look' with a group of somber members of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

[44] 'The Son of Africa', 'Competition', *Bantu World* (22 Oct. 1932), 10.

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Fig. 3. Mrs. Flora Ndobe, winner of the beauty competition, posing with a teeth-revealing smile and in glamorous attire.

representations: mirror-gazing.[45] By encouraging entrants to smile before a mirror, 'The Son of Africa', like so many contemporary advertisements, claimed that young women could 'transform' themselves through careful attention to their appearance.

Contest winner Ndobe further pushed the boundaries of black portraiture and the beauty competition with her glamorous attire and married status. In her cloche hat, string of pearls, drop neckline and ostrich feather tippet (Fig. 3), Ndobe appears as a slightly darker version of the white film stars and socialites who featured in *South African Pictorial* and foreign magazines.[46] Her fashionable dress is also reminiscent of photos of African American women that circulated in South Africa through periodicals like *Negro World* and the *Crisis*. Ndobe's face with its light-colored skin, slender nose and narrow lips coincides with some of the beauty preferences documented by contemporary anthropologists. The fact that Ndobe garnered more than twice as many votes as her closest competitor suggests that her appearance strongly appealed to readers. *Bantu World*'s staff did not let Ndobe's designation of 'Mrs.' disqualify her from their 'Miss Africa' competition. For

[45] Modern Girl research group, 'Modern Girl Around the World', 265 and 267–8.

[46] It is possible that Ndobe's clothing, particularly the tippet, was a prop that belonged to the studio photographer. On props in African studio photography, see J. Pivin, 'The Icon and the Totem', in *Anthology of African and Indian Ocean Photography*, 28, and Mofokeng, 'The Black Photo Album', 69.

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readers who selected Ndobe from her photo, her married status may have even heightened her appeal. The photo reveals how married women could also perform a modern girl style.

Ndobe's cosmopolitan look may be attributable to her eclectic social circle in Cape Town. Flora was the wife of Bransby Ndobe, the prominent Independent African Native Congress (ANC) organizer in the Western Cape. Born Flora Motinya in the Orange Free State, she married Bransby by the age of 19 years. In October 1931, one year before Flora entered the competition, the South African government deemed Bransby an undesirable inhabitant' and deported him to Basutoland, his birth place. Bransby's left-wing activism in Cape Town brought him and possibly Flora into contact with diverse political figures including the black Garveyite James Thaele, fellow Independent ANC organizers Eliot Tonjeni and Arnoth Plaatjes, and white Communists Eddie Roux, Jack Simons and Ray Simons.[47] Such associations would have exposed Flora to an internationalist set of ideas and styles. *Bantu World* reader–voters likely appreciated the audacity of Ndobe's photo in enacting a cosmopolitan glamor. In South Africa, as in other contexts structured by white racism, the black modern girl caused excitement and anxiety by remaking dominant cultural styles as her own.

Bantu World's staff exhibited their own anxiety as the competition drew to a close. A few weeks before announcing the winners, the paper used the space usually devoted to displaying entries to nine photos of 'Leading Women of the Race', drawn from T. D. Mweli Skota's fascinating 'Who's Who' of black notables, *The African Yearly Register*. The women pictured in these photos shared the modest dress and somber countenances of most of the beauty competition entrants. Yet, they were to be valued for their contributions to 'the Race' rather than their beauty.[48] In the editorial that accompanied the competition results, Thema claimed that the competition's purpose had been to promote reading and, by extension, schooling for girls and women. He insisted that deeds were more important than appearances: '[While the] Bantu race is certainly proud of its beautiful women ... it will be more proud of women who take interest in the welfare of the people'.[49] What ongoing *Bantu World* discussions about the modern girl make clear is that the emergence of a group of school-educated young women committed to racial betterment could not be disentangled from the cultivation of new looks and consumptive practices.

[47] CAD, NTS 7725, file 180/333, Commissioner of Police to Sec. for Native Affairs, 25 Aug. 1931 and 25 Nov. 1931, and Sec. for Native Affairs to B. Ndobe, 23 Oct. 1931; E. Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison, 1964), x, 204 and 230–43; J. and R. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850–1950* (New York, 1969), 426–33; A. Drew, *Discordant Comrades: Identities and Loyalties on the South African Left* (Burlington, 2000), 105–6.

[48] *Bantu World* (25 Feb. 1933), 10. For more on Skota and *The African Yearly Register: Being an Illustrated National Biographical Dictionary (Who's Who) of Black Folks in Africa (Contributions by the Leading Native Ministers, Professors, Teachers, and Doctors)* (Johannesburg, 1930), see Couzens, *The New African*, 3–14; Campbell, 'T. D. Mweli Skota'; and V. Erlmann, *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West* (New York, 1999), 53–8.

[49] 'Bantu Women and the Community', *Bantu World* (25 March 1933), 4.

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The men behind *Bantu World* featured photos of beautiful women to promote race pride and to enhance the commercial success of their newspaper. But they also worried that excessive attention to appearance could lead to racial disrepute. It was this ambivalence that suffused their writings on the black modern girl. It also may have been this ambivalence that ensured that this was *Bantu World*'s first and last beauty competition.

DEBATING BLACK WOMEN'S USE OF WHITE FACE POWDER

In February 1933, as the beauty competition was winding down, a *Bantu World* headline playfully announced 'Daughters of Ham Take to Powdering their Faces'. The article's author 'Tommy' described how face powder caused him to mistake a young black woman in Cape Town for an Italian. It was not until she inquired in 'faultless vernacular' about the beauty competition that he recognized her as non-white.[50] This woman may have been Flora Ndobe. Her curiosity about the competition suggested to Tommy that she was an entrant, and Ndobe was one of only two from Cape Town. Moreover, the light-colored face in Ndobe's competition photo may have been powdered. As in other contexts, the rise of portrait photography and a desire to be photogenic may have promoted women's use of face powder.[51]

While Tommy found this woman's ambiguous racial status and powdered face to be charming, most *Bantu World* writers disapproved of black women wearing cosmetics. In his pioneering history of consumption and cleanliness in Zimbabwe, Timothy Burke discusses how African women who wore cosmetics in the 1950s often faced severe condemnation.[52] In South Africa, similar criticism dates back to twenty years earlier. In March 1933, a month after Tommy's article, 'editress' Dhlomo launched a campaign against white powder and, to a lesser extent, red lipstick. In many regards, Dhlomo was a strong proponent of women's 'advancement'. He celebrated black women's educational and professional achievements, and advocated companionate marriages. When it came to black women wearing make-up, however, Dhlomo saw nothing redeemable. Many letter writers, particularly men, supported Dhlomo in his anti-cosmetics campaign.

Their condemnation was part of widespread class concerns about natural versus artificial beauty. Many contemporaries elsewhere in the world would have shared L. T. Baleni's sentiments that 'the original meaning of the word "Beauty" ... [is] "Natural Beauty"' and not the 'modern meaning of "artificial beauty"' achieved through 'powders and paints'.[53] In her history of US beauty culture, Kathy Peiss examines how morally laden class concerns animated discussions of cosmetics from the nineteenth century onwards. 'Painted woman' was a common euphemism for prostitute as some used powder, rouge and eye make-up to advertise their trade. Critics of cosmetics associated their use with women's ability to deceive men and take

[50] 'Tommy', 'Pink-Cheeked Lady and Tom: Daughters of Ham Take to Powdering Their Faces', *Bantu World* (11 Feb. 1933), 3.

[51] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 45–7; Conor, 'The Beauty Contestant', 143.

[52] Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 193–202.

[53] L. T. Baleni, 'Unnecessary Expense Incurred by Women Striving for Beauty', *Bantu World* (30 Sept. 1933), 10.

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their money. Over the twentieth century, according to Peiss, cosmetics use underwent a remarkable transformation from being 'a sign of disrepute' to becoming 'the daily routine of millions'.[54] Most white South Africans, during the 1930s, approved of only modest cosmetics use. One marketing report found that white and colored women tended to use face powder, rouge and lipstick sparingly: 'its free use usually draws forth unfavourable comment'.[55] Such 'unfavourable' remarks likely impugned the woman's sexual morality and class standing. By the mid-1930s, such concerns had reached Fort Hare College, South Africa's premier institution of black higher learning, in the rural Eastern Cape. In her autobiography, Phyllis Ntantala describes how her boyfriend persuaded her to stop wearing make-up with a line from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: 'good wine needs no bush'.[56] Such condemnation of black women's use of cosmetics coincided with broader notions of middle-class respectability in South Africa, the United States and elsewhere.

In 1930s Johannesburg, where most Africans lived close to poverty, appearances were especially important in defining class differences and claiming respectability. Dhlomo castigated face powder and lipstick for giving 'the impression of cheapness'.[57] He did not tolerate divergent viewpoints. When S. H. D. Lee Mnyandu wrote that powder and paint made Johannesburg's ladies beautiful and 'suitable for marriage', Dhlomo dismissed his letter as naive by appending the following note: 'This writer has just arrived in the city from Natal'.[58] Dhlomo's concern about urban femininity is evident as early as 1920 when he published *An African Tragedy*, the first English-language novel by a black South African. Dhlomo's novel chronicles the destruction of a male labor migrant in Johannesburg at the hands of a prostitute, contrasting this domineering urban female figure with the migrant's obedient and Christian wife in rural Zululand.[59] In the decade following the publication of *An African Tragedy*, black urban populations across South Africa increased dramatically, with the number of Africans resident in Johannesburg nearly doubling. Some female migrants found employment as domestic workers while a few worked as teachers and nurses. In the face of such limited employment opportunities, many washed laundry and sold beer from their homes. Others earned money by providing domestic and sexual services.[60] Poorer women were, in many regards, black South

[54] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 4, 26–31 and 53–60.

[55] Duke University, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, J. Walter Thompson Collection, reel no. 225, Marketing Reports, South Africa, Port Elizabeth, J. Walter Thompson Co. (Pty.) Ltd., 'Report for Lehn & Fink' (Sept. 1931), 2 and 9. Also see, 'Correct Behavior for Business Girls', *South African Business Efficiency* (June 1935), 198.

[56] P. Ntantala, *A Life's Mosaic* (Berkeley, 1993), 74.

[57] The Editress, 'Disappointing Make-Ups', *Bantu World* (23 June 1934), 12; 'Over the Tea Cups: Arabelle and Isabel', *Bantu World* (3 April 1937), 9.

[58] S. H. D. Lee Mnyandu, 'Jo'burg Ladies', *Bantu World* (17 Sept. 1938), 12. Also see his 'Use of Cosmetics By Women', *Bantu World* (1 Oct. 1938), 11, and '"Basuto Ladies Are Smart"', *Bantu World* (2 Nov. 1938), 12.

[59] R. R. R. Dhlomo, *An African Tragedy* (Alice, 1920).

[60] E. Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue* (London, 1959); P. L. Bonner, '"Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women?" Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920–1945', in C. Walker (ed.), *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990), 221–50; B. Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness,*

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Africa's urban innovators. Social anthropologist Ellen Hellmann documented that young women living in Johannesburg's slums during the early 1930s regularly wore lipstick, rouge and powder.[61] It is possible that poor and working-class women were the first black women to wear make-up, thereby contributing to Dhlomo's unease about *AmaRespectable* cosmetics use.

Alongside differentiating women by class, Dhlomo's anti-cosmetics campaign resonated with interwar efforts by black male leaders to reassert patriarchal control. In the face of some women's increasing social and economic independence, these men promoted gendered policies and conduct that would bolster their authority as fathers and husbands.[62] In *Bantu World*, men charged women who wore make-up with multiple offenses: smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, speaking 'township languages', wearing trousers and fixating on 'romance'.[63] As in other modern girl contexts, such complaints centered on young women embracing masculine practices and neglecting feminine duties through self-indulgence.[64] Letter-writer Walter Nhlapo argued that such habits had turned the 'girl' into a 'she-man'.[65] Another critic wrote that African women would not achieve a 'modern and up-to-date' look by wearing powder and lipstick but only by 'behav[ing] in a lady like way'.[66] Such writers recognized that 'modern' conditions

Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900–1983 (Portsmouth NH, 1991); I. Berger, *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry* (Bloomington, 1992); S. Marks, *Divided Sisterhood: Race, Class, and Gender in the South African Nursing Profession* (New York, 1994); C. Burns, 'Reproductive Labors: The Politics of Women's Health in South Africa, 1900 to 1960' (Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1995); D. Coplan, 'You Have Left Me Wandering About: Basotho Women and the Culture of Mobility', in D. Hodgson and S. McCurdy (eds.), *'Wicked' Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa* (Portsmouth, 2001), 188–211.

[61] Hellmann, 'Native Life', 40; Hellman, *Rooiyard: A Sociological Survey of an Urban Native Slum Yard* (Cape Town, 1948), 78.

[62] P. Bonner, 'The Transvaal Native Congress, 1917–1929: The Radicalisation of the Black Petty Bourgeoisie on the Rand', in Marks and Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa*, 276–313; K. Eales, 'Patriarchs, Passes, and Privilege: Johannesburg's African Middle Classes and the Question of Night Passes for African Women, 1920–1932', in P. Bonner, I. Hofmeyr, D. James and T. Lodge (eds.), *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality, and Culture in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1989), 105–39; Marks, 'Patriotism, Patriarchy and Purity'; C. Ballantine, *Marabi Nights: Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville* (Braamfontein, 1993), 46–50 and 82–3; Kemp, '"Up from Slavery"', chs. 2–3; N. Erlank, 'Gender and Masculinity in South African Nationalist Discourse, 1912–1950', *Feminist Studies*, 29 (2003), 653–71.

[63] Miss Roamer, 'Beautiful Bantu Women Need No Lipstick or Powder to Aid Nature', *Bantu World* (4 March 1933), 10; R. R. R. D., 'True Beauty', *Bantu World* (29 Sept. 1934), 12; Israel Mhlambi, '"Behavior of Girls"', *Bantu World* (5 Oct. 1935), 12; The Editress, 'Weak Women', *Bantu World* (20 March 1937), 9; Dimbane, 'A Word in Season', *Bantu World* (27 March 1937), 12; 'Over the Tea Cups: Arabelle and Isabel', *Bantu World* (3 April 1937), 9; The Editress, 'A Terrible Sight!', *Bantu World* (29 Jan. 1938), 10.

[64] Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes*; Silverberg, 'The Modern Girl As Militant'; Sato, *The New Japanese Woman*; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Modern Girl research group, 'The Modern Girl Around the World'.

[65] Walter M. B. Nhlapo, 'Girls Despised By Men', *Bantu World* (14 Sept. 1935), 12.

[66] M.P., 'Powder and Lipstick for the Africans?', *Bantu World* (2 May 1936), 11.

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demanded new forms of black femininity. But they insisted that they nudge rather than topple the gender norms prevalent in black Christian homes.

Critics of cosmetics intertwined their complaints about class and gender transgression with charges of racial betrayal. As scholars of US beauty culture have argued, concerns about natural versus artificial beauty have taken on a unique salience when directed at black women living in racist contexts. More so than white women, black women's use of cosmetics has made them vulnerable to accusations of racial shame. Critics have accused black women who use make-up and hair straightening products of acquiescing to Eurocentric beauty standards.[67] In segregationist South Africa where racist policies privileged light-skinned people deemed of European descent and subjugated, with increasing harshness, those deemed of Indian, 'mixed' and African descent, black women's apparent attempts to lighten their faces provoked strong reactions. Dhlomo's condemnation of cosmetics centered, in fact, on racial unsightliness. He argued that powders and lipsticks did 'not suit dark skins'. Black women, Dhlomo wrote, should abandon their desire 'to turn themselves white', recognize 'the beauty of their natural coloring', and limit their use of cosmetics to moisturizing creams and hair lotions.[68]

Letter writers similarly accused make-up-wearing black women of foolishly copying white women. M. F. Phala singled out powder use as evidence of how 'Bantu people' were not 'proud' of their skin color.[69] Another writer noted that black women's 'imitative' habits were not reciprocated by 'European ladies' as they never wore *imbola*, the ochre used to redden skin, hair and blankets.[70] At other times, *Bantu World* with its moderate political agenda situated white women as appropriate role models. In announcing the beauty competition, 'The Son of Africa' had encouraged women to 'to emulate your white sisters in all that is noble, true and good'.[71]

[67] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 41–3; N. Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, 1996); I. Banks, *hair matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness* (New York, 2000); Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*

[68] Quotes from Miss Roamer, 'Beautiful Bantu Women Need No Lipstick or Powder to Aid Nature', *Bantu World* (4 March 1933), 10; R. R. R. D., 'True Beauty', *Bantu World* (29 Sept. 1934), 12; The Editress, 'Disappointing Make-Ups', *Bantu World* (23 June 1934), 12; 'Over the Tea Cups: Arabelle and Isabel', *Bantu World* (3 April 1937), 9. Also see 'What R. Roamer Hears About Town', *Bantu World* (23 Sept. 1933), 8; 'R. Roamer Talks to the People', *Bantu World* (19 May 1934), 6; The Editress, 'Weak Women', *Bantu World* (20 March 1937), 9; The Editress, 'A Terrible Sight!', *Bantu World* (29 Jan. 1938), 10; The Editress, 'Why Put That Stuff On Your Face?', *Bantu World* (18 June 1938), 9. On the racial politics of white men wearing blackface in southern Africa, see L. White, 'Precarious Conditions: A Note on Counter-Insurgency in Africa after 1945', *Gender & History*, 16 (2004), 603–25.

[69] M. F. Phala and O. F. S. Koffiefontein, 'The Bantu and Colour', *Bantu World* (29 Dec. 1934), 8. For other letters of complaint, see A. L. J. Rabotapi, 'Mr. R. Roamer Blunders Now: Some Women Behave Disgracefully in the Streets', *Bantu World* (21 Apr. 1934), 10; 'Mok Tedi', 'Ladies Must Choose Their Types', *Bantu World* (23 Apr. 1938), 10; A. A. Mgoblo, 'Ladies and Cosmetics', *Bantu World* (17 Sept. 1938), 12.

[70] Messrs. D. Mogoje and P.J.G.M., 'Swanee Should Be Supported: Powder and Lipsticks Disfigure Bantu Women', *Bantu World* (9 June 1934), 10. On *imbola*, see P. Pinnock, *Xhosa: A Cultural Grammar for Beginners* (Cape Town, 1994), 28.

[71] 'The Son of Africa', 'Great Progress!', *Bantu World* (22 Oct. 1932), 10.

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For Dhlomo and his allies, wearing make up was not 'noble'. Rather, it sullied racial respectability.

Although men authored most of *Bantu World*'s commentary, a few women voiced their opinions. At least one mother agreed that make-up was among the more disagreeable practices that young women had recently adopted.[72] A letter by Sarah Ngcobo of Durban voiced another, more annoyed, reaction to men's commentary. Ngcobo wrote that she was 'fed up' with reading articles that blamed 'women, particularly young girls, for everything ... [including] for powdering their faces, for going out at night, for snaring other women's husbands, for dressing expensively'.[73] Ngcobo's letter suggests how some young women viewed the cosmetics discussion as part of broader efforts to blame them for numerous social ills.

Twice in his weekly column, Dhlomo responded to letters that he had received from women who claimed that powder improved their appearances. Dhlomo gave their letters short shrift by not printing them and offering the shrill reply that he did not mind if they 'continue[d] to white wash' their faces as long as it was not near him.[74] These women seem to have been insisting that 'looking good' could be distinct from 'looking white'. In their study of African American expressive culture, Shane White and Graham White suggest that during the 1920s young black women wore powder, rouge and lipstick not to 'look white' but to 'draw attention to their faces' and distinguish themselves from 'the "natural" look of their mothers and grandmothers'.[75] Up through the mid-1930s, black South African women who wished to use face powder to even their skin texture, conceal blemishes or achieve a light brown (not white) complexion had little choice but to use a pale shade. Face powder existed in limited shades ranging from light beige to pink.[76] Cosmetics companies' narrow vision of what skin tones mattered did much to ensure that black women's use of powder was interpreted by some as emulating whites.

Two of the most elaborate female commentaries on cosmetics may have been written by Dhlomo himself. Their use of pseudonyms, together with

[72] L. N. Msimang, '"Girls Despised By Men"', *Bantu World* (5 Oct. 1935), 12.

[73] S. Ngcobo, 'Articles on Lipsticks Dance, Dresses and Love Become Boring', *Bantu World* (29 Sept. 1934), 15.

[74] 'R. Roamer Talks to the People', *Bantu World* (9 June 1934), 8, and (4 Aug. 1934), 8. The letters were authored by Miss I.R.E. of Maseru and S.W.Y. of Zeerust.

[75] S. White and G. White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, 1998), 188–91. A number of scholars of black beauty culture in the United States and South Africa have similarly argued that hair straightening, in particular, should not be reduced to 'the desire to be white': Maxine Craig, 'The Decline and Fall of the Conk; or, How to Read a Process', *Fashion Theory*, 1 (1997), 399–420; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 41; Banks, *hair matters*, 9–10; Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen?*, chs. 2 and 6; P. Russell, 'Styling Blackness: African American Hair Styling Practices in Late Twentieth Century America and the Phenomenology of Race' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 2002). In a recent essay, Zimitri Erasmus ('Hair Politics', in Nuttall and Michael (eds.), *Senses of Culture*, 380–92) recalls her own experience of hair straightening in 1970s and 1980s South Africa as partly about 'aspirations of whiteness in the coloured community in which I grew up' and partly a 'ritual of affirmation for me as a young black women'. For Erasmus, while black hairstyles are always 'mediated through racial imagery', they are not 'eternally trapped by "race"'.

[76] J. Walter Thompson Co. (Pty.) Ltd., 'Report for Lehn & Fink' (Sept. 1931), 10.

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their biting wit and literary sophistication, suggest the 'editress's' pen. In testimonial style, 'Swanee', a repentant cosmetics user, explained how a male friend had recently convinced her that wearing face powder and lipstick made her look like a 'guinea baboon'. By comparing herself to a monkey, 'Swanee' drew on racist insults that disparaged Africans as ape-like to chide others into abandoning make-up. She warned: 'Use a hundred powders and lip-sticks, you'll never change from black to white'.[77] 'Powdered Face' took a different stance. Expressing frustration with criticism of make-up, she noted that while previously African women wore *imbola*, smoked pipes and were only 'clothed from the waist downwards', today young women are admonished for using powder, smoking cigarettes and wearing even short sleeves.[78] By identifying African antecedents for a number of modern girl practices, 'Powdered Face' insinuated that criticism of them stemmed more from Christian than 'traditional' sensibilities. These commentaries raise the persistent challenge faced by *Bantu World* and its readers: how to craft 'modern' personas that maintained some fidelity to African practices, and did not become an unthinking and unsightly imitation of white ways. In seeking a solution, some turned to black people living on the other side of the Atlantic.

AFRICAN AMERICAN BEAUTY PRODUCTS AND SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS

The first make-up advertisements appeared in *Bantu World* in 1933 and featured products manufactured by an African-American-owned company, Apex. These were likely the earliest such ads in southern Africa to target black women.[79] Apex marketed a wide range of products including hair strengtheners and straighteners, a deodorant, a skin bleach and face powder in 'all shades'. In the early twentieth century, African American entrepreneur Anthony Overton tackled the problem of inappropriate make-up shades for black women by developing and successfully distributing High-Brown face powder.[80] By the 1920s, some of the largest and most profitable black-owned businesses in the United States manufactured and sold cosmetics. Several of these companies, including Madame C. J. Walker, Poro and Apex, were women-owned and marketed their products through

[77] 'Swanee', 'Women Should Not Use Lip-Sticks and Powders as Toilets', *Bantu World* (19 May 1934), 12.

[78] Powdered Face, 'Women Want Good Constructive Advice From Their Critics', *Bantu World* (28 June 1934), 10.

[79] Examination of other contemporary black South African newspapers including *Umteteli wa Bantu*, *Ilanga lase Natal* and *Imvo Zabantsundu* revealed no advertisements for make-up. *Bantu World* and other black newspapers had previously run ads for hair straighteners, possibly imported from the United States. These ads often featured photos of black men. Switzer ('*Bantu World*' in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 367–8) has calculated that cosmetics – defined to include soaps, dyes, toothpastes, shaving equipment, razors and razor blades, as well as hair and skin products – accounted for about 10 per cent of all items advertised in *Bantu World* during the 1930s. Health products and services dominated *Bantu World* advertising, accounting for just over 30 per cent of all items.

[80] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 108–9. For a nineteenth-century complaint about African American women wearing white face powder, see Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 37.

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female agents who sold door-to-door. These companies provided black women with one of their few employment opportunities outside of field, laundry or domestic work. As White and White have argued, the success of these companies embodied a desire for 'personal liberation' through self-improvement: 'to an even greater extent than was true of the white beauty industry, black cosmetics were associated with modernity and, most importantly, with progress'.[81] African American women's marketing of cosmetics generated wealth and controversy. Although publications like the *Crisis*, the *Afro-American* and *Negro World* received much of their revenue from advertising cosmetics, some black male leaders denounced the use of certain products, notably hair straighteners and skin bleaches, as racial self-loathing.[82] Among African Americans, the advent of powder in 'all shades' did not resolve the cosmetics controversy. It simply shifted the focus to other products.

One *Bantu World* ad declared Apex the first 'all Negro Company' in South Africa. While white American capital had been heavily invested in South Africa since the mineral revolution of the late nineteenth century, African-American-manufactured goods were a novelty.[83] Apex's agent in Johannesburg was a 'European' named 'Jolly Jack Barnard'.[84] Barnard likely learned of Apex from an American periodical or while traveling in the United States. As a white man, he was a significant departure from Apex's US marketing strategy of working through black female agents. Barnard, however, was in keeping with *Bantu World*'s founding mission of helping white businessmen to identify and exploit African markets. The fact that Apex's Johannesburg agent was white confirms just how marginalized black South Africans were from commercial opportunities, even ones premised in pan-African affiliations.

The Apex ads downplayed the involvement of a white capitalist by featuring drawings and photographs of black women. The drawings, probably taken from advertising material developed in the United States, were of young women with grey skin and relaxed hair. In one advertisement, the central figure appears in the classic modern girl pose, seated at her vanity and gazing into a handheld mirror (Fig. 4). Other advertisements included photos of Mrs. E. Garson, a light-skinned black woman with relaxed hair. They touted Garson as a 'regular user of and firm believer in Apex products' and displayed her photo as evidence of the products' efficacy. By providing Garson's name, photo and Johannesburg address, such advertisements cast these US-made products as accessible to South Africans. In a further attempt to localize their message, some advertisements provided product descriptions in Sesotho (Fig. 5).

Several months into this advertisement campaign, *Bantu World* ran a feature about the founder and president of Apex, Sara Washington. Such

[81] White and White, *Stylin'*, 189–90.

[82] Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 207–13.

[83] R. Hull, *American Enterprise in South Africa: Historical Dimensions of Engagement and Disengagement* (New York, 1990); J. Campbell, 'The Americanization of South Africa', in R. Wagnleitner and E. May (eds.), *'Here, There and Everywhere' : The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, 2000), 34–63.

[84] Apex ad, *Bantu World* (15 July 1933), 10; 'The Opening of Vast Unexplored Market', *Bantu World* (26 May 1934), 1.

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Fig. 4. A 1933 *Bantu World* advertisement for cosmetics manufactured by African American company Apex, featuring a modern girl gazing into a mirror.

features were a common publicity tool used by black beauty companies in the United States.[85] This article positioned Washington as an African American success story, discussing how Apex had created 'legitimate business' opportunities for many in the United States. It explained that the Company's arrival in South Africa meant that the 'Bantu race' could benefit from products 'manufactured for them by their brothers and sisters in America'.[86] According to the article's logic, cosmetics consumption enabled racial uplift. Such logic discounted criticism of certain beauty products as

[85] Rooks, *Hair Raising*, 81–5.

[86] 'Remarkable Business Acumen of Negro Woman Shown in Her Work', *Bantu World* (11 Nov. 1933), 10.

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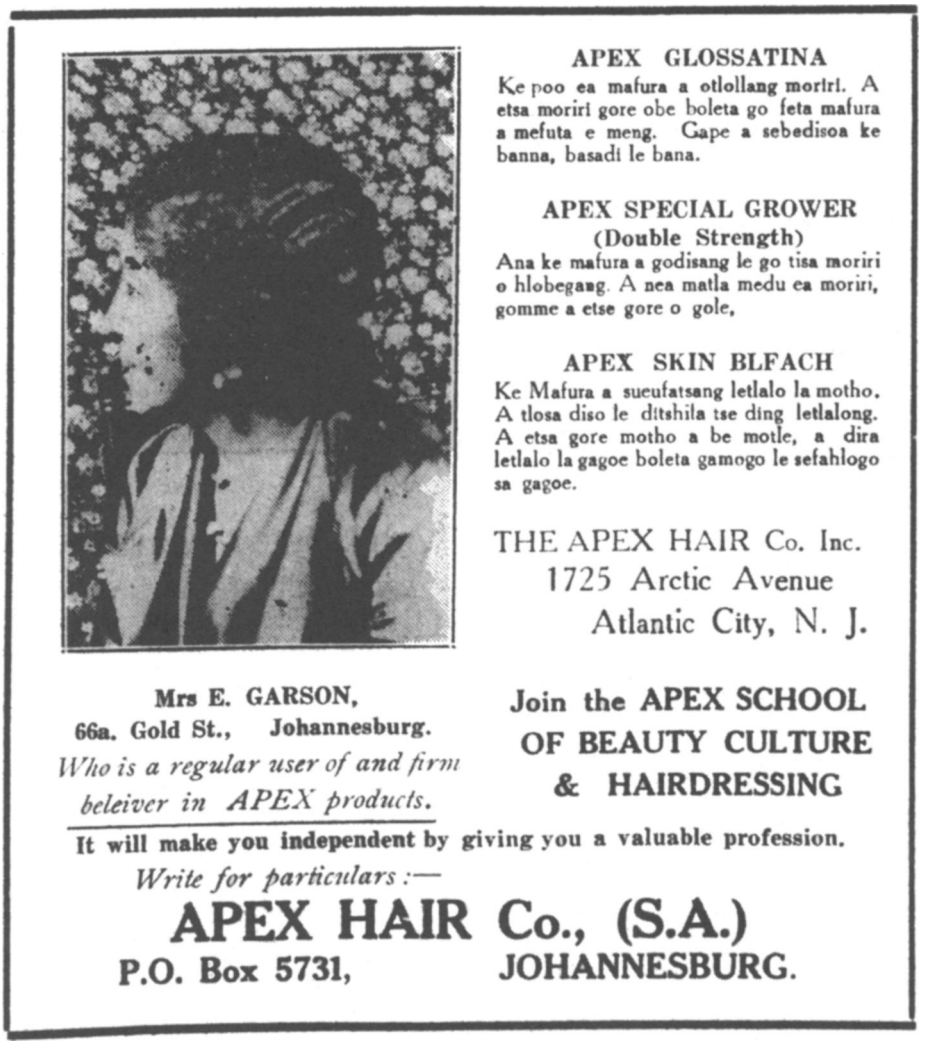


Fig. 5. Cosmetics advertisement that localized its message for black consumers by providing product descriptions in Sotho and featuring a Johannesburg user.

embodying racial self-loathing and ignored why black diasporic connections might require a white middleman.

Apex had a stall at the 'Bantu World Trade Exhibition' held in May 1935. Paver, *Bantu World*'s founder and managing director, envisioned this exhibition and others as facilitating the expansion of white capital and improving race relations: 'The European business man who participates in it will discover the fact that the Africans are a potential market for his commodities, and, therefore a useful citizen of South Africa … here the two races will meet not as masters and servants but as producers and consumers'.[87] Paver

[87] 'The Opening of Vast Unexplored Market', *Bantu World* (26 May 1934), 1.

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provided all *Bantu World* advertisers with a stall and an African translator.[88] As 'editress', Dhlomo urged women readers to attend the exhibition and purchase products from *Bantu World*'s advertisers.[89] Afterwards, Dhlomo noted that the cosmetics stall proved popular with women visitors. Recounting his own visit with his wife and child, Dhlomo described how 'sweet smelling fats and oils ... drew cries and cries of enthusiasm from our fair companions'. Such desires, according to Dhlomo, were difficult to fulfill for people like himself who were 'not paid a living wage'.[90] It was perhaps the expense of Apex products in relation to the meagerness of African earnings that caused Barnard to conclude his advertising campaign just a year after inaugurating it.

Although the Apex campaign was relatively short-lived, it introduced a new set of commercial images and commodities to black South Africans. Paver's multi-pronged marketing strategy ensured that the Apex advertisements with their modern girl representations reached an audience larger than *Bantu World* readers. In addition to providing advertisers with a stall at the exhibition, Paver gave them 5,000 leaflet-reprints of their ads. These same advertisements were compiled into a slide show that toured 4,000 miles across the country.[91] It is difficult to know how people interpreted these advertisements. Dhlomo's criticism of face powder often appeared on the same page as Apex advertisements. Yet, he never commented on them. While he may have welcomed the arrival of face powder in more diverse shades, he probably felt contempt towards Apex's skin bleach. As was the case with much of the African American press, the revenue to be gained from cosmetics advertising likely placed their products beyond reproach. Beginning in 1936, *Bantu World* advertised cosmetics manufactured by another African American company, Valmor Products.[92] During his 1938 trip to South Africa, Ralph Bunche, the African American scholar and activist, visited a dressmaking and hair shop in Sophiatown run by a Sotho woman who used Valmor products.[93] After the Second World War, white-owned southern African companies imported and manufactured cosmetics, particularly skin lighteners, on a large scale and aggressively marketed them through black magazines.[94] The history of the Apex campaign

[88] Couzens, 'A Short History of "World"', 77.

[89] The Editress, 'The Advertisements in Your Paper', *Bantu World* (5 May 1934), 11. For women's accounts of their visit to the exhibition, see 'Woman Visitor to Bantu World Show Writes About It', *Bantu World* (20 May 1933), 10; and 'A Woman Correspondent', 'Bantu World Trade Exhibition Promises to Surpass Last Year's', *Bantu World* (3 March 1934), 10.

[90] 'R. Roamer Talks to the People', *Bantu World* (2 June 1934), 8.

[91] Couzens, 'A Short History of "World"', 77.

[92] Valmor ad, *Bantu World* (22 Feb. 1936), 17. This same Valmor ad appeared in a 1935 issue of the *Gold Coast Independent*, a West African newspaper, suggesting a broader effort by the company to tap African markets.

[93] Suggesting that Bunche drew distinctions between Valmor and older black cosmetics companies like Madame C. J. Walker, Apex and Poro that appealed to race pride, he 'put her on to Poro': Edgar, *The Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche*, 177.

[94] Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*, 119, 158–61 and 180–202; Modern Girl research group, 'The Modern Girl Around the World', 275. In a future piece, I will examine the manufacturing and marketing of skin lighteners in the United States, South Africa and Kenya.

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reveals how more recent debates over skin lighteners in Africa stretch back to an interwar and trans-Atlantic traffic in cosmetics, visual representations and concerns about racial respectability.

At least one black South African woman traveled across the Atlantic during the 1930s and gained in-depth knowledge of African American beauty culture. In 1935, Rilda Marta of the Eastern Cape published a series of articles in *Bantu World*, describing her adventures in the United States. Marta explained that, while she had planned to study medicine or law, she ended up attending a beauty college. When she arrived in New York, she noticed to her surprise that the skin of 'the American Negro' was like that of the African – 'some are very light, and others are very dark in complexion'. Where Africans and African Americans differed, according to Marta, was in their hair: 'I was always proud to call myself as African ... [but] What really made me feel strange [was] nearly every girl and woman has long hair and I among them looked like a boy dressed in girl's clothes'.[95] Marta soon learned that their 'long and beautiful' hair was the work of a beautician and, within a year, she 'looked just like them'. To demonstrate her transformation, *Bantu World* published 'before' and 'after' photos (Fig. 6). In the before shot, Marta wears a simple white blouse and her hair is cut short. The after photo features a still somber Marta wearing more elaborate clothing and with her straightened hair pulled back.[96] US black beauty culture, these photos suggest, changed Marta from a plain schoolgirl into a sophisticated lady.

Marta added her voice to the ongoing cosmetics discussion. She urged 'African ladies' to take the advice of African American beauty culturist Madame C. J. Walker: 'The key to Happiness and Success is a good appearance. You are often judged by how you look'. Walker's dictum insisted that black women's attention to their appearance was crucial to achieving respectability in a racist society. Marta agreed that beauty products helped black women respect themselves, win the respect of their menfolk and contribute to building 'a clean, educated nation'. Noting that even white women used 'powder to make themselves lighter', Marta cautiously endorsed black women's use of make-up: 'I do not mean that you should go and use lipstick and rouge because our colour is different to theirs; but if you do want to use some, remember there is a way of doing

[95] During the 1930s, African American missionaries also noted how black South Africans admired their appearance and 'marveled at the curled and marcelled hair' of those featured in African American periodicals. Responding to such interest, Luella Graham White taught hair care to her female students at the Wilberforce Institute and even established a beauty salon. The result, according to White, was that 'Wilberforce girls were known wherever they went by their tidiness and attractive hair' and 'took greater pride in themselves': A. White and L. White, *Dawn in Bantuland: An African Experiment* (Boston, 1953), 79 and 198–9. Also see C. Wright, *Beneath the Southern Cross: The Story of an American Bishop's Wife in South Africa* (New York, 1955), 47–50.

[96] Quotes from Rilda Marta, 'Miss Rilda Marta's Trip to the United States Full of Excitement', *Bantu World* (29 June 1935), 12; 'Miss Rilda Marta's Trip to United States of America Full of Interest', *Bantu World* (6 July 1935), 12; 'Miss Rilda Marta's Trip to America', *Bantu World* (13 July 1935), 12. Also see Rilda Marta, 'My Experiences in America', *Bantu World* (28 Sept. 1935), 14. For letters from women readers thanking Marta for her contributions and requesting more, see Kathleen Khomphiri, 'Miss Rilda Marta', *Bantu World* (27 July 1935), 12; and Mrs. P. Melato, 'Play on the Game in the Home', *Bantu World* (17 Aug. 1935), 12.

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Miss Rilda Marta, after her return from America. Note the remarkable change in her appearance. Her interesting article will be continued next week.



Miss Rilda Marta, before her visit to America.

Fig. 6. 'Before' and 'After' photographs of Miss Rilda Marta of the Eastern Cape who traveled to the United States where she attended a beauty college.

everything'.[97] According to Walker and Marta, cosmetics enabled rather than undermined racial respectability.

For all the connections that the Apex campaign and Marta's articles drew between South Africa and the United States, profound differences existed in the relationship between cosmetics and racial respectability in these two contexts. Whereas black women in the United States shaped discussions of beauty culture and owned some of the largest cosmetics companies, in South Africa black men dominated the cosmetics discussion in *Bantu World* and white men owned the companies that imported and, later, manufactured cosmetics for black women. Black beauty culture in the United States, in part, gained its respectability from making individuals like Sara Washington and Madame C. J. Walker into millionaires, and removing thousands of women from back-breaking field, laundry and domestic work and turning

[97] Quotes from 'Miss Rilda Marta's Trip to United States of America Full of Interest'; *Bantu World* (6 July 1935), 12; 'Miss Rilda Marta's Trip to America', *Bantu World* (13 July 1935), 12.

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them into sales agents. Such highly successful black businesswomen did not exist in interwar South Africa. Washington and Walker must have appeared as unusual figures to *Bantu World*'s readers. In her study of the 'Negro' in interwar South Africa, Amanda Kemp has deftly illustrated that, while black South African writers routinely referenced African American male intellectuals and leaders, they rarely evoked African American women. Kemp writes that 'when the emancipated, autonomous transnational black subject was gendered female, an ambivalence emerged'.[98] This ambivalence stemmed from a continuing faith in the propriety of patriarchy. For Dhlomo and his allies, 'independent' women were not *AmaRespectable* women.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing *Bantu World*'s beauty competition and articles and letters on, and advertisements for, cosmetics, this essay has explored how new visual media and consumer goods were part of gender struggles in interwar South Africa. The modern girl heuristic elucidates how female figures identified by a cosmopolitan look, an explicit eroticism and the use of specific commodities surfaced in many parts of the globe, and how their near-simultaneous emergence was tied to the international circulation of commodity cultures, mass media and political discourses. The modern girl's presence in *Bantu World*'s beauty competition and cosmetics discussions reveals that black South African women were implicated in such circuits earlier than previous scholarship has suggested. Mrs. Flora Ndobe's beauty competition photo and Miss Rilda Marta's diploma from an African American beauty college attest to black women's engagement of transnational forms of self-fashioning and commercial enterprise. Interwar gender struggles in South Africa, and perhaps elsewhere on the sub-continent, were not limited to women's defense of 'traditional' practices and the reconfiguration of kinship relations amid conditions of racial subjugation, labor migrancy and often dire poverty. Women also provoked controversy by elaborating new appearances and consumer practices that drew inspiration from abroad. Given scholars' increasing attention to how globalizing consumer capitalism contributed to the demise of *apartheid* and has structured social life – particularly among youth – since 1994,[99] it seems important to understand the longer history of such processes in South Africa.

[98] Kemp, '"Up from Slavery"', quote from 6; see 156 for Kemp's discussion of one of Marta's articles. For an account of another African American woman who provoked ambivalence and admiration in South Africa, see I. Berger, 'An African American "Mother of the Nation": Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940–1963', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27 (2001), 547–66.

[99] R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (New York, 1994); Dolby, *Constructing Race*; F. Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge, 2002), 152–4; M. Hunter, 'The Materiality of Everyday Sex: Thinking Beyond 'Prostitution', *African Studies*, 61 (2002), 99–120; A. Mbembe and S. Nuttall (guest eds.), *Public Culture* (Special issue: Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis), 16 (2004); J. Hyslop, 'Shopping During a Revolution: Entrepreneurs, Retailers and "White" Identity in the Democratic Transition', *Historia*, 50 (May 2005), 173–90.

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Analysis of *Bantu World*'s beauty competition and cosmetics discussions also reveals the introduction of new modes of displaying and assessing feminine beauty. The beauty competition harnessed photos of attractive young women to foster race pride, promote the commercial success of the paper, and encourage women to attend more carefully to their appearance. Photographic portraits drew aesthetic attention away from bodily attributes and focused it on the face. This shift may have encouraged some black women to wear powder and lipstick in order to be photogenic. Cosmetics were small and seemingly intimate commodities that promised to transform one's appearance in a larger public. Almost all of the toiletry and cosmetics ads that appeared in black periodicals during the 1930s concentrated on the upper body by promoting products that cleaned and refined faces, teeth and hair. In line with these ads, *Bantu World*'s editors viewed smiling as essential to an attractive appearance. Reader–voters agreed. Such aesthetic attention to the upper body and head supported *AmaRespectable* aspirations by providing a counter to exoticizing and eroticizing representations of black women that focused on sparsely clothed lower halves. But facial beauty regimes could confound racial respectability when they seemed to endorse segregationist South Africa's skin color hierarchy by making black skin look lighter.

More so than other contentious modern girl practices like smoking cigarettes, wearing provocative fashions and fixating on romance, the use of cosmetics emphasized the phenotypic dimensions of racial distinctions. Black women may have worn white face powder to even out their skin texture, conceal blemishes or highlight their faces. Until the mid-1930s, they only had access to powders in pale shades. Yet, for Dhlomo and his fellow critics of cosmetics, such varied intentions and consumer constraints mattered less than the impression that black women were trying to 'look white'. This impression called into question women's pride in being African and their commitment to racial uplift. Cosmetics use provoked such strong reactions from some *Bantu World* writers and readers because it combined a challenge to middle-class notions of gender propriety with intimations of racial shame. Although all participants in this debate agreed that appearances mattered, they disagreed as to what consumptive practices enabled both a 'modern' and a respectable look. *AmaRespectable* women had to walk the very thin line between paying too little and too much attention to their appearance.

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