Global histories
a student journal

Re-fashioning Modernity. A comparative study of the flapper and kanga and their relation with modernity

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2022.531

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 8, No. 2 (December 2022), pp. 64-84.
ISSN: 2366-780X

Publisher information:
'Global Histories: A Student Journal' is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. 'Global Histories' is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

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Abstract

Starting with the definition proposed by the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group (MGRG) in their 2008 book The Modern Girl Around the World*, this paper aims to deconstruct Eurocentric narratives often attached to the concept of modernity in relation to fashion.*[1] *It achieves this through a comparative analysis of visual iconography depicting the figures of the flapper and of urban women wearing* kanga *in the Zanzibari post-abolitionist society of the 1890s. Employing methodological tools such as the heuristic device and the connective comparison, this paper will critique the univocal visual link established in cultural theory and the collective imagination between modernity and the image of the flapper. In order to provide a counterexample to this dominant association, the six features identified by the MGRG as pertaining to the flapper will be applied to women wearing kanga, a type of decorative fabric used as a garment, in the context of Zanzibar at the end of the nineteenth century. Although existing scholarship on fashion and its connection to modernity does reflect upon the Eurocentricity of the concept, this comparison provides an original contribution in that it aims at reframing the connection between fashion and modernity through the re-reading of the idea of the Modern Girl to include non-Western expressions of style.*

About the author

Barbara Testini is a PhD student at the joint doctoral programme in Historical Studies at the Universities of Florence and Siena, where she researches African representation in the Italian press in the years between 1960 and 2010. She obtained her Master's Degree in Global Cultures at the University of Bologna, with a thesis about the narratives on Italian colonialism in History textbooks for high schools. Her academic interests span between the collective memory of colonialism in a European context, issues of representation, and dystopian feminist literature.

Introduction: *kanga* and the flapper

According to the cultural historian Joanne Entwistle, "the term 'fashion' carries with it the more specific meaning of a system of dress that is found in Western modernity."[2] In other words, "fashion" is only ever a product of European and North American industrial modernity, and reaches the rest of the world through exportation and colonial imposition. This insistence on the convergence of fashion and the characteristics of Western modernity is embedded in the premises of the Modern Girl Around the World Research Group (hereafter MGRG), which was a collaborative research project largely based at the University of Washington from 2003-2009. The panel was composed of faculty members with an expertise on various topics such as literary criticism, history, cultural and feminist studies, and political economy. The aim of the MGRG was to retrace the Modern Girl "as a global phenomenon," by discovering "the Modern Girl's various colonial and national incarnations and revealing linkages among the many geographic locations in which she appeared" and contextually "explor[ing] the[…] issues of consumption, representation, and social and political agency through a variety of approaches."[3] They discuss a set of case studies located in the United States, France, South Africa, India and the British colonial empire, the USSR, Australia, Japan, China (Shanghai), and Germany between the 1920-1930s, focusing on class and race. Through this approach the MGRG attempts to gain a truly global insight on the manifestations of the Modern Girl.

In doing so, the MGRG aims to deconstruct Eurocentric narratives on those phenomena that have been considered as grounded in, or even originated by, European history, such as modernity. Their methods of inquiry challenge the notion of modernity in non-Western contexts as "deviations from an abstracted 'norm'" or as a measure of development and progress "that posit some societies as 'ahead' and others as 'catching up.'"[4] The principle goal of the MGRG study is then to "decenter the idea of Western modernity" by "pay[ing] attention to how people in different contexts understood the Modern Girl as *modern*." However, by relying on signifiers rooted in European modernity (specifically the figure of the flapper) to define "what [they] refer to as 'the Modern Girl look': the Modern Girl's surface or image and its representation," they reproduce the link between European cultural production and modernity while excluding non-Western fashion from their purview.[6]

Starting from these conceptions, this article will first break down the concept of modernity and its connection to fashion.[7] It will then provide a historical overview on the origins of *kanga*, focusing on the "modern" elements that make a *kanga*-wearing woman comparable to the flapper style.[8] Finally, this article will reexamine the key features the MGRG identifies as pertaining to the Modern Girl to apply them to the context that informed the use of *kanga*.[9] To achieve this, I will examine the idea of the Modern Girl as it was defined in the book *The Modern Girl Around the World*, accepting the invitation proposed by the MGRG, whose "hope is that the chapters collected here will inspire others […] to employ the method of connective comparison […] in the study of gendered modernity in a global frame."[10] The method they speak of consists of comparing phenomena by *connecting*

rather than *contrasting* them; that is, by focusing on how local processes exert a reciprocal influence in a global network of relations.[11] By doing so, the MGRG singled out six specific recurrent themes associated with the Modern Girl and her expression of style: the modern, the girl, visual economy, nationalism, commodities, and consumption (and agency of the consumer).[12] The MGRG has specifically connected the idea of "modern" that the Modern Girl typifies to the specific Western iconography of the flapper, as it is known in an Anglo-American context, or *garçonne* in the French context.[13]

The flapper fashion style is popularly recognised as an iconic cultural facet of the 1920s and 1930s in Europe and the United States. It is characterised by specific features, including both physical appearance (bobbed hair, accentuated makeup, loose-fitting dresses) and behavioural traits (smoking, drinking alcohol, dancing). It is this figure which the MGRG uses to define the "modern girl" which serves as the subject of its analysis.[14] While the MGRG has examined the singular re-interpretations of the Modern Girl around the world, it fails to acknowledge that the six parameters they set to identify the modernity of the flapper actually appear outside of the spatial and temporal constraints set in the study. The scope of my study is therefore not only to expand such constraints, but rather to point towards alternative visual manifestations of these underlying forces. Even though the *kanga*-wearer may not look like the stereotype of the flapper, the two figures undoubtedly share key attributes. Thus, my aim is to broaden the interpretation of how these characteristics can be manifested in order to acknowledge indigenous modernities that are not just reproductions or appropriations, albeit with a component of agency and reworking, of a North Atlantic model.[15]

Scholar Susan Stanford Friedman theorises that "*modern, modernism, and modernity*" are "contradictory terms resisting consensual definition," opening up the field to multiple interpretations of modernity, but also to arbitrary conflations of meanings.[16] In the MGRG's text, the visual figure of the flapper becomes an archetype of "The Modern." Modernity, in this sense, is understood as the manifestation of specific cultural and economic formations which can be traced back to a Western (or Western-influenced) inter-war historical context. Closely linked in literature and art to the artistic and intellectual movement of modernism, with which the style was contemporaneous, the flapper appears in film, literature, and popular media as the visual manifestation of modernity as a concept. Thus, the idea of "The Modern" overlaps with the time-specific and space-bound cultural phenomenon of modernism, erasing the possibility of linking modernity to other expressive means and forms.

The process of associating modernity to modernism works in both ways, and contributes to establish a univocal link between the two terms. According to fashion historian Elizabeth Wilson, the word 'modernism' has been used as "an umbrella term to indicate a wide variety of different currents in modern art and aesthetics," suggesting that the concept encompasses "what is *common* to much of modern art: its oppositionalism and iconoclasm, its questioning of reality and perception, its attempt to come to grips with the nature of human experience in a mechanized (unnatural) world."[17] In this way, the cultural

experience of modernism is expressed through the classification of "modern art," which represents the first conceptual leap from the artistic movement (modernism) to the time period (modernity), and further to the set of characteristics that should constitute the modern. At the same time the term 'modernity' attempts to encapsulate "the essence of both the cultural and the subjective experience of capitalist society and all its contradictions,"[18] thus conflating modernity with the modernist experience of the early twentieth century North Atlantic, particularly Europe. This potentially obscures various modernities around the world by unambiguously associating the peculiar experience of twentieth century modernism with modernity.

Fashion has typically been viewed by scholars dealing with the study of dress as a product of Western modernity, as defined through "status, mobility, and rapid change" in a Western, capitalist world.[19] Scholarship on dress in Africa has been traditionally tied to an anthropological approach that did not bestow African clothing the status of 'fashion'. This reinforced the colonial view of Africa as unchanging and traditional, and demonstrates how fashion has been excluded from non-Western contexts because of its link with Western modernity.[20] Yet, according to historian Jean Allman, fashion has been "centrally implicated in the forging of a distinct African modernity, through slavery and freedom, colonialism and conversion, ethnicity and nation, gender and generation, hybridity and cosmopolitanism, state-building and state authority, subjecthood and citizenship."[21] A study of clothing, then, provides access to the many ways in which modernity is expressed in the African continent.[22] In this matter, fashion can be a useful tool in discovering new paradigms for a (gendered) modernity in a global perspective, in order to liberate it from its Eurocentric focus. Fashion is a cultural activity, and as such it is a product of social norms, individual self-expression, and technology.[23] An understanding of fashion which moves outside its constraints as "a dress system specific to the West"[24] enables the analysis of non-Western fashions as equally important. By employing the theoretical framework of modernity, it is possible to recognise its core features ("status, mobility, and rapid change") moving them outside its geographical boundaries.[25]

In order to validate the claim that these characteristics of modernity can be found outside of the West, and in forms not directly adopted from Western models, I will consider the case of the *kanga* dress, which became popular in Zanzibar between 1890 and 1915. *Kanga*, a type of colourful patterned cloth, was worn as the marker of a new social identity among young, urban, Zanzibarian women. Drawing on the same six elements established by the MGRG as particular to the Modern Girl, I will argue that these signifiers of modernity appeared in Zanzibar years before the explosion of the flapper style as a global fashion movement, and developed in a social and geographical context outside of the West. Echoing Jeremy Prestholdt, this consideration might further prove that "change in Zanzibar was as radical as contemporaneous change in Europe," even though it has been "excluded from any definition of modernity."[26] Re-reading kanga through the same analytic parameters elaborated by the MGRG could then open up an opportunity to challenge the notion of modernity especially in its relativism, which confines the idea of "modern" to the European context.[27]

Historical context: the origins of *kanga* between cosmopolitanism and subjectivity

Kanga is the Swahili term defining both the textile and, by extension, its use as a fashion garment. It was worn along the coast of East Africa, more specifically in the area including today's Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Kanga is a printed cotton cloth of about one meter height and one and a half meters length, composed of a wide, decorated border (*pinto*) and a central graphic image or pattern (*mji*) that features an inscription in Kiswahili below the image, on the bottom side of the kanga. The text is called *jina*, meaning the 'name' of the *kanga*, and is usually a proverbial phrase, a common saying, a blessing, or a warning.[28] *Kangas* are sold and worn in pairs, to create a two-piece wrap dress composed by a long skirt and a top that covers the shoulders and often functions as a headscarf, depending on the occasion.[29]

The origins of the garment can be dated back to the decade between 1876 and 1886, shortly before the British Empire imposed the abolition of slavery on the British protectorate of Zanzibar in 1890.[30] Wrapped clothes were not new in Zanzibar, even though the origin and dissemination of *kanga* are strictly intertwined with the opening up of a new social niche for formerly enslaved people. In those years, the standard composition of a *kanga* was formed through the combination of four main design elements which reveal its cosmopolitan nature: bright colours, written text, European-style borders, and motifs from Indonesian batiks.[31] Local women originally sewed together imported European handkerchiefs to create wrappers, which became known as *leso ya kushona* (meaning 'stitched handkerchief' from the Portuguese term for handkerchief *lenço*). Later, they introduced the innovation of printing plain, factory-made cloth imported from India with blocks obtained from starchy vegetables, that were first carved with geometric designs and then dipped into vegetable dyes, thus creating what has been defined as *kanga za mera*, the first of *kanga* in archaic Swahili.[32] Resident Indian merchants improved the block printing technique on cloth imported from Southern Asia by making use of the tie-resist textile techniques from Gujarat.[33] During these early stages in the style's development, *kanga* was printed by hand, as the irregular positioning and the variations in the intensity of dye show.[34] By the end of the 1880s, however, changes in colonial export policies opened up the necessity for Dutch textile designers to look for other markets outside of the Dutch East Indies. Dutch companies started to export their printed batik to East Africa, adapting designs originally mass-produced for the Indonesian market to suit consumers' demand in East Africa. This was done with the mediation of Indian merchants, while at the same time introducing new synthetic dyes with more vibrant colour.[35] Such a variety of actors involved in both the creation and the marketing of the first forms of *kanga* reveals the depth of translocal connections in East Africa. At the same time, one cannot overlook the role of local women as producers and their agency as consumers, who shaped an international supply chain with their demand. The history of these confluences, as well as the innovations put in place by Zanzibari women and the adaptation of *kanga* as a marker of social status, all point to the modernity and the globality of such a garment.

Being the most significant indicators of class, status, and ethnicity thanks to its visual character, clothing in the coastal areas of East Africa is inextricably intertwined with social hierarchies, and at times has been employed as a means to achieve social upward mobility.[36] From the 1870s to the 1890s, the population of the island was constituted by the Arab ruling elite of Omani descent, the free Swahili population, enslaved people captured from the continental African mainland, and immigrant traders from Southern Asia.[37] Such diverse social strata were easily recognised by the way they dressed: female members of Omani aristocratic households typically wore a long silk scarf or cape, known as *ukaya*, over a knee-length shirt and pants, and an embroidered face mask known as a *barakoa*.[38]

At the other end of the social ladder were the rural Swahili and the enslaved population, both of which normally wore lower-quality garments. The latter made use of white wrapped cloths known as *merikani*, which women gradually started to dye with indigo, while the former wore "[a] simple dark cotton cloth of the poor, known as *kaniki*, or a piece of imported colored cotton cloth, called *kitambi*."[39] The most fundamental difference was undoubtedly that free women marked their higher status by covering their heads, or by wearing an *ukaya* that went from their shoulders to their ankles, and by wearing sandals.[40] This aspect is meaningful when taking into account that slaves were explicitly prohibited to veil – they often shaved their heads – and were forced to go barefoot to be distinguished from the free born.[41] These habits reveal that one's social respectability and positioning were highly dependent on being free and of Muslim faith. It is therefore not surprising that after the abolition of slavery in Zanzibar became effective in 1897, formerly enslaved people tried to assert their status by opting for clothing that could mark their belonging to an Islamic community of free people of Swahili descent.[42]

The abolition of slavery opened up the necessity for formerly enslaved Zanzibarians to establish their social positioning and practice an entirely new expression of style to signal their recently acquired identities. To effectively articulate their social mobility, liberated slaves put in place innovations in their way of dressing that allowed them to negotiate their space in society, resulting in the emergence of an entirely new fashion. *Kanga* had recently appeared on coastal East African markets, and formerly enslaved women started to buy them in bulk for a variety of reasons. Pragmatically, rich fabrics offered a tangible display of recently acquired wealth and a visible differentiation from the dress worn in slavery. Secondly, *kanga* could be wrapped around the body but also put on the head as a veil or to cover the shoulders as Swahili women used to do, thus allowing formerly enslaved women the opportunity to access previously forbidden markers of religious and social respectability. Finally, these women were affirming their agency and taking pride in being fashion-conscious and demanding as far as colours and patterns were concerned. At the same time, they were partaking in a cosmopolitan network of trade that signalled not only their social and economic empowerment, but also their belonging to a Swahili urban identity, marked through the involvement in transnational exchange on a global scale.[43] In this context, *kanga* was sported as a marker of social mobility that epitomised an identity as urban, freeborn Swahili, which was crafted by formerly enslaved women through the means of dressing.

Between flapper and *kanga*: a comparative analysis

With the understanding of *kanga* as a dressing style utilised by East African women to negotiate their mobility and identity in a rapidly changing context, it is possible to establish a connection between *kanga* and the flapper style that sets the ground for comparison. To achieve this, I will use the definitions presented in *The Modern Girl Around the World* and demonstrate their applicability to women who wore the kanga style in late nineteenth century Zanzibar. In so doing I set out to complicate the exclusive association of modernity to criticise the claim of universality that this fashion style acquires when it is defined as quintessentially as the "Modern Girl." By employing the methodology proposed by the MGRG, the heuristic device and the connective comparison, I propose that the flapper is only one of the possible outcomes of modernity – that, indeed, the *kanga*-wearing Swahili woman of the late nineteenth century represents an indigenous African modernity. As a result, the idea of modernity expressed by the Modern Girl is reframed and broadened to include any forms of visual manifestation that are not related to a Western model, but still embody the same themes.

A heuristic technique in sociology can be defined as "any procedure which involves the use of an artificial construct to assist in the exploration of social phenomena."[44] It serves as a means to demonstrate a hypothesis which has been elaborated *a priori*, and constitutes the starting point of the research. Instead of drawing conclusions from the observation of phenomena, the heuristic method formulates a theory and then looks at the object to establish whether it is applicable in the given context. The MGRG employs this method as a visual tool, arguing that "numerous iconic visual elements including bobbed hair, painted lips, provocative clothing, elongated body, and open, easy smile enabled us to locate the Modern Girl around the world in approximately the same years between World War I and World War II."[45] Employing this methodology in a different context, *kanga* can also be interpreted as a heuristic device signifying an abstract concept. The meaning attached to *kanga* is constructed in order to explain social phenomena that are peculiar to Zanzibari post-abolition society and that, more extensively, make Zanzibar part of the Indian Ocean world through translocal connections.[46] Communication strategies among women are another aspect that allows reading *kanga* as a heuristic device, because it has been used both metaphorically, but also quite literally as a device allowing communication among women. While *kanga* communicated a newly acquired social status, the inscriptions printed on the cloth also "spoke" directly to other women instead of the wearer.[47]

Another key component of the MGRG methodology is the comparative method. In sociology, the comparative method is used in order to compare "cases or variables which are similar in some respects and dissimilar in others," analysing how specific phenomena are distributed in different societies.[48] The MGRG uses this method in comparing the visual elements of what has been defined as "the Modern Girl," tracking its iconography on a global scale. The process through which the comparison is achieved has been called by the MGRG "multidirectional citation": "the mutual, though asymmetrical, influences and

circuits of exchange that produce common figurations and practices in multiple locations," resulting in a "continual incorporation of local elements with those drawn from elsewhere."[49] In so doing, they identified six elements characterising the modernity of fashion in a European and North American interwar context, associating them firmly with the flapper style.

Keeping in mind the fact that "a major methodological issue is whether the units of comparison […] and the indicators chosen to compare differences or similarities are genuinely comparable and can legitimately be used outside their specific cultural settings,"[50] I will first prove that the flapper and the *kanga* figure are comparable by applying to my case study the same six elements identified by the MGRG as typical of the flapper. By examining the six aspects which define the Modern Girl according to the MGRG – the modern, the girl, visual economy, nationalism, commodities, consumption, and the agency of the consumer – I will highlight the fact that these characteristics are not exclusive to that figure, but rather, can be situated within other cultural and temporal contexts. Following this assessment, I will consider how these aspects apply to the case of women wearing *kanga*, to include other expressions of style that are not exclusive of a Western understanding of 'modern' fashion.

The girl

The MGRG recognises that the definition of "girl" rests on a European understanding of this term, especially when it is used in opposition to the concept of woman to signify frivolousness, superficiality, and immaturity.[51] Drawing on an idea of "girl" established in the Victorian epoch, the MGRG articulates the following definition of the term:

> "Girl" signifies the contested status of young women, no longer children, and their unstable and sometimes subversive relationship to social norms relating to heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood. […] Our research strongly suggests the historical emergence of "girl" as a modern social and representational category and as a style of self-expression largely delinked from biological age.[52]

This definition is clearly influenced by a Eurocentric perspective, as it takes European social norms as its reference points. This is evident in the parameters on girlhood established by "heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood."[53] As the MGRG posits, the social category of "girl" emerged in 1880s Victorian England, to refer to young, unmarried women who were contesting traditional female social roles. The social destabilisation their independence caused was a result of their marital status, which challenged the socially-assumed equation of unmarried status with childhood, in opposition to the married woman. In a society where adulthood is not marked by the institution of marriage, such a dichotomy loses its value. Thus, the conflation of "girlhood" with a liminal status between childhood and marriage is dependent on normative presumptions which take Europe as its reference point.

The association of girl-ness with frivolousness or immaturity is additionally problematic, even more so when the term is applied in a racialized context.[54] In the case of

young, non-white women, cultural perceptions oscillate between excluding these individuals from the categories of modernity and thus of "girl-ness," and deploying infantilizing language regardless of biological age to downplay the intellectual development and social importance of women of colour.[55] For example, during the Jim Crow era in the United States, the word "girl" was meant as a racial insult when used in opposition to "woman" for adult Black females.[56] As the contributions to the MGRG show, the links between "girliness," "fashion," and "modernity" has been variously interpreted in different cultural contexts depending on existing racial hierarchies. For example, in Australia, white Australian flappers were portrayed as more properly fashionable than Aboriginal women because of their supposed uncivilised nature that made them unsuitable to modern displays of style.[57] On the contrary, in former colonial or racially segregated contexts (such as India and South Africa), women belonging to specific social categories actively took advantage of the attributes of the modern girl fashion to contest racist claims of a primitive, uncivilized femininity and engaging in a respectable view of modernity expressed through fashion.[58] Moreover, being a girl is defined by the MGRG as inherently modern: the flapper and her equivalents "denoted an up-to-date and youthful femininity, provocative and unseemly in its intimacy with foreign aesthetic and commodity influences."[59] Such an association is carried out through attributes that can be applied to *kanga*-wearing women as well, as they draw on aspects linked to fashion and modernity, such as the consumption of specific commodities and frivolous behaviour. One example of this is the consumption of specific commodities, which can be considered cosmopolitan in nature and allows the display of economic ability. Another one is frivolousness, a concept which is conveyed by the very meaning of the word *kanga* (guinea fowl in Kiswahili), which comes from the assumption that women behaved like a flock of birds when moving in groups, chattering and strutting.

As the MGRG's research shows, it is the conflation between girl-ness and modernity as understood from a European standpoint which made possible different reinterpretations and adaptations of the flapper style in contexts that experienced various degrees of Eurocentric influence, especially regarding race. However, defining "girl" as "a *modern* social and representational category *delinked from biological age*,"[60] opens the possibility of applying the concept to formerly enslaved women using *kanga* as a form of dress. In a context informed by slavery and Islam, clothes and the act of veiling attested the affirmation of one's own identity as an "autonomous social adult," in contrast to the "perpetual status as a legal minor" that was imposed on women during slavery.[61] Historian Laura Fair posits that the act of veiling in the first half of the twentieth century, which was carried out through the use of *kanga* as a headscarf, was still perceived as a political affirmation of emancipation and a display of social and economic ability (*uwezo*).[62] Taking into account the characteristics of "girl" which do not relate directly to age, the MGRG definition of girl ("[…] women who occupied an ephemeral free space between childhood and adulthood")[63] can be applied to *kanga*-wearing women of later nineteenth century Zanzibar. The invention of *kanga* signals a passage between a metaphorical childhood, represented by the status of slavery, and a self-asserted social adulthood, accounting for a symbolic rite of passage that can be compared to girl-ness.

Nationalism

A reflection on the meaning of "girl" and its link with sexuality in the Western world can shed light on the highly ambivalent relationship between girlhood and nationalism. As the MGRG notes, the nationalistic policing of girls who self-identified as modern in the realm of sexual transgressions (which include exerting agency over the choice of sexual partners, a display of sexual behaviours in the public space, or lesbianism)[64] can be considered the result of the Eurocentric process of nation building, which implies a delineation of female roles based on marital status. Secondly, the iconography of the flapper was widely depicted in European nationalistic propaganda as the epitome of modernity, thus creating a permanent link between a specific style and the visual representation of modernity itself.[65]

In order to detach nationalism from a Eurocentric, chronologically modern understanding of ethnic and social identity, I propose to consider it in a broader sense as a construct. Benedict Anderson's theory of the imagined community is one such way to understand the emergence in Zanzibar of "Swahiliness" as socio-ethnic belonging of formerly enslaved individuals to a legitimate community. According to Anderson, any *nation*-ness can be considered a "cultural artefact" that fulfils specific criteria, that is an "imagined political community."[66] In the decades following the abolition of slavery until 1915, emancipated slaves began to identify themselves as Swahili even if they would have been previously considered of another ethnic origin.[67] In pre-abolition Zanzibari society, class was deeply intertwined with ethnicity, with people of Arab descent forming the wealthiest strata of the population. The Swahili were a coastal freeborn community, while enslaved people usually came from various locations in the mainland. Consequently, in order to be integrated as freeborn people, the formerly enslaved started to adopt specific ways of dressing as a marker of their invented ethnic identity and, by extension, of their newly acquired social roles.[68]

A crucial role in the affirmation and legitimacy of the new social role of formerly enslaved people is played by respectability. Respectability (*heshima*) is a key notion in Zanzibar Muslim society, and it is strictly interwoven with honour, economic affluence, social reputation, and Islamic religious practices such as veiling.[69] During the second half of the nineteenth century until before the abolition of slavery, slaves of both sexes were forbidden to cover their heads, a denigrating public marker of their servitude; what differentiated visually enslaved women from poor but freeborn Swahili was the possibility for the latter to mark her social status by covering her head with a cloth and by wearing an *ukaya*. On the contrary, underneath those pieces of clothing that signalled both their ethnicity and their social status (free-born, Muslim, Swahili), poor Swahili women wore a wrapped cloth, either an indigo-dyed *kaniki* or a cheap, often imitation *merikani*, that was similar in quality to the clothes worn by enslaved people.[70] Having previously been denied the right to veil, one of the first changes in women's fashion in the post-abolition period was the emergence of veiling as a display of good Muslim faith and respectability, that simultaneously avoided the visual identification of formerly enslaved people as such. The overlapping of garments in use by both enslaved and free women allowed freed women to easily adapt their style to that of the Swahili freeborn community by adding caps and headscarves.

However, in the period between 1890 to 1915, formerly enslaved people did not settle for the appropriation of key elements to show their respectability, such as veiling, by simply mimicking Swahili clothing. Rather, they sought to transform their dress to abandon the cloth associated with servility (*merikani* or *kaniki*) with the incorporation of *kanga*.[71] At first, the variation consisted of block-printing the white *merikani* with red or black dyes to create an altogether new product, the *kanga za mera* (first *kanga*). But as formerly enslaved people struggled to establish a new social identity, elements such as fashion consciousness and purchasing power served as an act of self-affirmation as urban, free Swahili women. This granted imported *kanga* an increase in popularity as a symbol of such status because it gave "bodily shape to these new identities."[72] *Kanga*, as a luxury item that could be worn as a veil, became the easiest, most immediate way to exhibit a newly gained respectability in the process of becoming esteemed members of the community. At the same time, the wearing of *kanga* reinforced the sense of belonging to a new social category, expressed through the urban, cosmopolitan concept of Swahiliness. *Kanga* emerged out of the post-abolition cultural politics of Zanzibar alongside Swahili identity, which was constructed by formerly enslaved people as a marker of the social role of free, Muslim members of the coastal society of Zanzibar and East Africa.[73] In this way, it is possible to argue that, like the flapper, the *kanga*-wearing woman visually expresses a "nationalist" identity deprived of its strictly European connotation, as an imagined community of urban, freeborn, Muslim Swahili, forging an entirely new identity which intermingles ethnicity and social status.

Commodities

Both the *kanga*-wearing woman and the flapper were recognizable by their engagement in commercial activities. In the study by the MGRG, the spread of commodities linked to the specific aesthetic appearance of the flapper is related to modern femininity's connection to capitalism.[74] In the 1920s and 1930s, what allowed women to define themselves as modern was "driven by the capitalist logic of supply, demand, and profitability."[75] Another trait besides consumerism that defined the flapper was her cosmopolitanism, achieved thanks to the purchase of those same commodities that circulated and were publicized worldwide.[76]

The similarities between the flapper and the *kanga*-wearing woman appear evident in the link between commodities and cosmopolitanism. The MGRG explicitly referred to "a close association between the Modern Girl and commodity capitalism in all contexts."[77] The process of the invention of *kanga* involved both local actors and global influences, in a cultural context which placed great value on cloth as a commodity.[78] Nevertheless, the connection made by the MGRG between the use of commodities, consumerism, and capitalism seems arbitrary, in the sense that they conflate consumerism with capitalism as an apparently exclusive and mutual relation. In fact, it is quite the opposite: coastal societies, especially in East Africa, show that it was possible for a highly consumeristic social environment to be characterised by the consumption of a very specific set of commodities even in a non-capitalistic society. This observation casts a new light on the relationship between fashion and Western modernity: their indissoluble link was in Western

industrial capitalism, which opened the field to consumerism and the spread of commodities associated to fashion. Yet, scholars working with dress, fashion, and modernity in Africa have demonstrated that consumerism is a phenomenon disentangled from capitalist society, thus undermining the foundations of the apparently unique bond of fashion and Western modernity.[79]

The invention of young women's urban Zanzibari identity through *kanga* also reflects a cosmopolitanism specific to this nexus point in the trade networks of the Indian Ocean. The ability to earn and spend money, and thus engage in the expansive global trade networks which characterized this region, became a key point in articulating the idea of respectability to redefine a former female slave's social position. Previously excluded from these economies, formerly enslaved women flaunted their freedom and independence through the purchase of garments, such as *kanga*, which underscored their participation in these formerly off-limit worlds.[80] In doing so, *kanga* became emblematic to publicly exhibit one's growing financial autonomy and personal emancipation, and to perform *uwezo*. Such a cosmopolitan attitude played a crucial role in establishing translocal connections, mainly through trading commodities such as cloth.[81] Cosmopolitanism, understood as an active engagement with other parts of the world, implies the capability of engaging with settings that go beyond the local by incorporating elements from a global context and adapting them to the local environment of Zanzibar.[82] Because *kanga* was an imported cloth, designed specifically for the urban Swahili market but inspired by various Southern Asian designs, *kanga* can be considered a very specific commodity that characterised social, cultural and gendered life in Zanzibar in the 1870s-1910s. By wearing *kanga*, formerly enslaved women visually signalled their cosmopolitanism and newly-achieved ability to participate in the global economy. Like the flapper, who increasingly engaged as a consumer in global trade networks, the *kanga*-wearing woman's liberation from slavery allowed her to make her economic freedom visible.

Agency and consumerism

The MGRG relates the agency of the flapper as a consumer to her participation in nationalistic policies or in class politics, whether to embody or contest them.[83] Yet, nationalism is not a category that could be properly applied to the context of Zanzibar at the end of the nineteenth century, because it is a product of European societies. However, many scholars of Swahili societies in East Africa have explored the role of consumption within social hierarchy. I thus argue that it is possible to analyse agency by taking into account the role that social hierarchies, rather than nationalism, play in that society. As Elisabeth McMahon explains in her study on respectability in Zanzibar, displays of wealth became increasingly important in order to affirm an ex-slave's *heshima*. *Kanga* thus provided the perfect combination of a dress that aligned with Islamic rules on clothing, was a global luxury item, and was a means to show agency and independence.[84] Laura Fair also points out that consumerism was practiced by former slaves to articulate their aspirations of upward social mobility.[85] To legitimate their newly acquired social mobility, formerly enslaved women could have simply appropriated the *buibui* from the ruling elites of Omani descent in order to affirm their respectability according to the Islamic faith. Instead, they invented *kanga* through an original use of fashion that involves translocal trade.

The agency of the consumer is a particularly interesting aspect of consumerism in Zanzibar, due to the interaction with translocal actors. MacKenzie Moon Ryan provides a detailed account on what she calls "the global invention of *kanga*," highlighting the strong influence that women had on the market.[86] According to Ryan, *kanga* was created by and for local women, in cooperation with Indian merchants, which simply improved a pre-existing block-printing technique performed by women to decorate imported plain cloth.[87] Further development in design came from Indonesian batik motifs, which Dutch textile designers under the suggestions of resident Indian merchants adapted entirely to suit the East African market.[88] Manufacturers also had to comply with exacting women's desires for variety of patterns and colours.[89] Ryan refers to German traveller Dr. Karl Wilhelm Schmidt, who recorded that new patterns came to the market every four weeks, and their price and success were highly dependent on customers' appreciation.[90] Such a frequent demand reveals how quickly fashion changed in urban Zanzibar, thus resulting in a fierce competition among women to wear the latest *kanga*. This influenced the market offerings, but also induced highly consumerist behaviour: a colonial officer explained that an average "Zanzibar girl"[91] possessed "two or three dozen sets at one time."[92] It becomes evident from these observations that women who wore *kanga* were very active in shaping the development of the style, using their agency as consumers to assert their preferences.

What emerges from the study of both *kanga* and flapper fashions is that consumerism, far from being a mere purchasing of items offered by the market, plays a key role in determining one's own agency as a social actor. This considered, affirming that the distinctiveness of *modern* societies lies in the fact that they are "increasingly organized around consumption"[93] casts a different light on the very meaning of modernity, especially in relation to fashion, in non-European contexts. In other words, if modernity can indeed be characterised by consumption as a distinctive trait, Zanzibari urban society could easily be defined as modern.[94]

Visual economies

The MGRG considers advertising, particularly of cosmetics, the channel of diffusion for flapper fashion.[95] Though the existing scholarship does not suggest that any form of commercial advertisement intended to sell *kanga* actually made use of pictures, illustrations, or representations of women wearing *kanga*, the style is visual in nature. At the turn of the century, several resident studio photographers took pictures of local women wearing *kanga*, and then circulated them as popular postcards.[96] But *kanga*, as an article of dress, is also visual because it is a "communicative genre."[97] *Kanga* can function as a non-verbal means of communication as it conveys messages that are subject to speech prohibition. Through the allocation of the text to a certain pattern, which is broader in size than the script and therefore visible for a longer time, the act of wearing a specific design could evoke the meaning of the script without actually needing to read it.[98] Thus, like the aesthetic iconography of the flapper, the *kanga* was meant to be "read" primarily as a visual medium.

Scholars of the Swahili coast have also demonstrated that societies engaged in translocal trade within the Indian Ocean region could be defined as consumerist, notwithstanding the absence of the specific kind of advertisement that constitutes one of the main aspects of Western consumerism during the Twenties.[99] The assumption of "visual economy" as the circulation of advertisements of distinct commodities is one of the most problematic aspects in the application of the multidirectional citation method: the MGRG defined the global Modern Girl phenomenon through the visibility of a specific set of features all over the world in forms of media such as movies and commercials.[100] The first weak point in such a claim is the fact that those characteristics are peculiar of a single style of fashion (the flapper) that has been adapted to different contexts. Yet, as the MGRG admits, "while the method of connective comparison reveals continuities in the visual representation of the Modern Girl across contexts, our research suggests that similar visuals did not always carry similar meanings."[101] This recognition leads to asking whether it is really a single style of fashion that conveys the idea of modernity, or rather if modernity is expressed through clothing. It is evident that the MGRG defines the idea of modernity through a single style, overlapping the concept of *modern* girl and the flapper style. As I argue above, the underlying premises on which the MGRG builds this connection reflects a set of Eurocentric definitions. Instead, I would argue that a more open approach would be to address the topic from another direction: rather than defining one style as modern, and then seeking out examples of that style in order to locate modernity (around the world), I argue that avoiding Eurocentrism requires seeking out modernity, in all its forms, and addressing the various styles, including *kanga*, which emerge in those contexts.

A key point for the MGRG was to connect the clothing of the Modern Girl with the specific visual and material commodities made available in the consumerist, capitalist society of 1920s Europe and the US. Prestholdt, borrowing from Jean Baudrillard's theory of object systems, affirms that in the "urban culturedness" of nineteenth century Zanzibar, "consumer objects can be incorporated as signs entirely divorced from the function intended by their manufacturers."[102] An example of this could be the fact that tokens of modern Western technology such as "clocks, airplanes, cars, glasses, furniture" or "rounded hunting horn and [arrays] of umbrellas" were drawn on *kanga* as decorative elements.[103] Yet the incorporation of Western objects in Zanzibari material culture did not imply the assimilation of the ideological basis attached to them by Western societies.[104] On the contrary, this process resulted from an interpretation of cosmopolitanism that extracts symbols from cultures around the globe without importing associated systems of values.[105] In this sense, according to Prestholdt, Zanzibar *mirrored* Western modernity. However, Prestholdt refuses to apply the term "modernity" to the historical context of Zanzibar, arguing that the concept of "alternative modernities" legitimates Western modernity as the norm from which non-Western variants take inspiration.[106] In his vision, modernity is "a bundle of specific cultural and ideological forms foundational to imperialism and colonization," rather than a universal(izing) global phenomenon.[107] While Prestholdt's interpretation has merit, describing Zanzibari cosmopolitanism as a peculiar trait of Swahili coastal society, without considering its intertwinement with modernity, does not offer an

exhaustive comprehension of the phenomenon. A true decolonization of modernity happens by reconceptualising the core of what modernity is, through common points that are not exclusively inherent to a Western set of values.

Conclusion: Reframing Modernity in Fashion

This paper has demonstrated that the study of translocal connections within the Indian Ocean world, and the re-building that Zanzibari society underwent after the abolition of slavery, can provide a tool to criticise the idea of the Modern Girl shaped in its visual form as the flapper style. The MGRG solidly identified the Modern Girl with the use of "specific commodities and explicit eroticism."[108] In so doing, they attached grounding characteristics of a modern girl, such as "consumption, modernity, and globalization" and the subversion of social norms to an image which is highly Western-oriented, corresponding directly to the flapper.[109] By identifying common points through the method of connective comparison between *kanga* and the flapper, I applied what the MGRG considered as grounding aspects of the modernity of the flapper to the context of women wearing *kanga* in Zanzibar in the 1890s. One of the first parallels that emerged from such comparative analysis was the use of fashion itself in order to convey specific meanings. The kind of message spread by a style of clothing can be different; what is important is the communicative intention of individuals that leads them to choose one corporal commodity to express certain values. At the same time, fashion was culturally linked to frivolousness in both Europe and Zanzibar; despite this, both flappers and women wearing *kanga* overtly challenged the existing traditional social order. For flappers, the explicit eroticism of the style and their open sexual behaviour subverted social norms regarding women as mothers and faithful wives.[110] For *kanga*-wearing women, the style redefined the social position of former slaves through the reformulation of dominant ideals of a Swahili, Muslim coastal society. In doing so, they both created and affirmed a completely new identity.

Another fundamental component of modern identity building is its declared cosmopolitanism. In both cases of *kanga*-wearing women and flappers, they expressed their cosmopolitanism through the consumption of specific commodities. These consumption patterns revealed connections beyond the local level, as well as an incorporation of the global within the community. This article illustrated that the process through which such cosmopolitanism is achieved corresponds to what the MGRG calls "multidirectional citation." This statement recalls Prestholdt's view that Zanzibar's cosmopolitanism was "a particular vision of the world that referenced trans-oceanic trends but made them relevant to the Zanzibari social environment."[111] Such a perception of one's place in the world requires agency, in both direct (women printing geometrical motifs on plain cloth to adjust it to their tastes) and indirect ways (actively choosing and selecting items, thus influencing the market).

Finally, this paper has demonstrated the need to detach fashion from its all-pervasive association with the rise of capitalism and the Western interpretation of modernity.

Conversely, my intention was to show that, thanks to its "powerful political language,"[112] clothing is one of the ways through which modernity can be studied from a non-Eurocentric, global perspective. By employing the connective comparison method, this paper illustrated grounding characteristics between the Western flapper in the 1920s and women wearing *kanga* in Zanzibari post-abolitionist society, in order to track more diverse manifestations of modernity in material culture. In so doing, my aim was to extend the idea of modernity beyond its limits as a mere adoption of a Western style. This could guarantee African fashion, especially *kanga*, an improved status, rather than depicting it as a deviation from an established norm grounded on Western ideology, values, and iconographic interpretations of modernity.

Notes

[1] Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, T*he Modern Girl Around the World. Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

[2] Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body. Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 40

[3] Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device. Collaboration, Connective Comparison, Multidirectional Citation," in *The Modern Girl Around the World*, 2, 22

[4] Ibid, 7.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid, 8.

[7] Sources on this topic include both literature exploring the connection between modernity and fashion, such as: Kurt W. Back, "Modernism and Fashion: A Social Psychological Interpretation," in *The Psychology of Fashion*, ed. Michael R. Solomon, 3-14 (Lexington, Toronto: Lexington Books, 1985); Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams. Fashion and Modernity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003); as well as literature concerned with the study of fashion in the context of Africa: Jean Allman, ed. F*ashioning Africa. Power and the Politics of Dress* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

[8] Literature on kanga is quite extensive, and it focuses on several aspects. Among them, the connection between dress and the construction of social and individual identity has been explored by Rosabelle Boswell, "Say What You Like: Dress, Identity and Heritage in Zanzibar," International Journal of Heritage Studies 12, no. 5 (2006): 440-57; Corrie Decker, M*obilizing Zanzibari Women. The Struggle for Respectability and Self-Reliance in Colonial East Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Laura Fair, "Dressing up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar," *The Journal of African History* 39, no. 1 (1998): 63-94; Laura Fair, "Remaking Fashion in the Paris of the Indian Ocean. Dress, Performance, and the Cultural Construction of a Cosmopolitan Zanzibari Identity," in *Fashioning Africa*, ed. Allman, 13-30; Laura Fair, "Veiling, Fashion, and Social Mobility: A Century of Change in Zanzibar," in *Veiling in Africa*, ed. Elisha P. Renne (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013); Elisabeth McMahon, *Slavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa. From Honor to Respectability* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Maria Suriano,"Clothing and the Changing Identities of Tanganyikan Urban Youths, 1920s-1950s," *East African Culture, Language and Society* 20, no. 1 (2008): 95-115.

Other authors have dealt with the cosmopolitan aspect of *kanga*, that involves translocal connections and global trade. See Sarah Fee and Pedro Machado, "Entangled Histories: Translocal Textile Trades in Eastern Africa, c. 800 CE to the Early Twentieth Century," *Textile History* 48, no, 1 (2017): 4-14; Sarah Fee, "'Cloths with Names': Luxury Textile Imports in Eastern Africa, c. 1800–1885," *Textile History* 48, no. 1 (2017): 49-84; Paola Ivanov, "Constructing translocal socioscapes: consumerism, aesthetics, and visuality in Zanzibar Town," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6, no. 4 (2012): 631-654; Jeremy Prestholdt, "On the Global Repercussions of East African Consumerism," *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 3 (2004): 755-81; MacKenzie Moon Ryan, "Converging Trades and New Technologies: The Emergence of Kanga Textiles on the Swahili Coast in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures, and the Material Worlds of the Indian Ocean*, ed. Pedro Machado, Sarah Fee, Gwyn Campbell, 253-86 (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); MacKenzie Moon Ryan, "A Decade of Design: The Global Invention of the Kanga, 1876–1886," *Textile History* 48, no. 1 (2017): 101-32; Maria Suriano, "Local Ideas of Fashion and Translocal Connections. A View from Upcountry Tanganyika," in *Translocal Connections across the Indian Ocean*, ed. Francesca Declich, 163-89 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

Finally, a linguistic analysis on kanga scripts has been carried out by Rose Marie Beck, "Ambiguous Signs: The Role Of The Kanga as a Medium of Communication." *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 68 (2001): 157-69; Rose Marie Beck, "Texts on Textiles: Proverbiality as Characteristic of Equivocal Communication at the East African Coast (Swahili)," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (2005): 131-60; David Parkin, "Textile as commodity, dress as text. Swahili *kanga* and women's statements," in T*extiles in Indian Ocean Societies*, ed. Ruth Barnes, 44-61 (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005); Saida Yahya-Othman, "If the Cap Fits: Kanga Names and Women's Voice in Swahili Society," *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 51 (1997): 135-49

[9] Fundamental for this topic is an understanding of the concept of multiple modernities. For further readings on this, see S. N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1-29; Susan Stanford Friedman, "Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of *Modern/Modernity/Modernism*," *Modernism/modernity* 8, no. 3 (2001): 493-513; Jeremy Prestholdt, "Mirroring Modernity: on Consumerism in Cosmopolitan Zanzibar," *Transforming Cultures eJournal* 4, no. 2 (2009): 165-204.

[10] MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," in *The Modern Girl Around the World*, 22.

[11] Ibid, 3-4.

[12] Ibid, 2.

[13] For the sake of simplicity, in the following pages I will refer to this cultural formation only as "flapper".

[14] MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," 2.

[15] I am grateful to reviewer Bella Ruhl for this formulation.

[16] Stanford Friedman, "Definitional Excursions," 497.

[17] Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams. Fashion and Modernity* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 62-63.

[18] Wilson, *Adorned in Dream*s, 62-63.

[19] Jean Allman, "Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress," in *Fashioning Africa*, ed. Allman, 2.

[20] Allman, "Fashioning Africa," 3.

[21] Ibid, 5.

[22] Ibid, 4.

[23] Back, "Modernism and Fashion," in *The Psychology of Fashion*, ed. Solomon, 2.

[24] Ibid, 3-4.

[25] Ibid, 2.

[26] Prestholdt, "Mirroring Modernity," 166.

[27] Ibid.

[28] For reference, see Beck, "Ambiguous Signs," 157-69; Beck, "Texts on Textiles," 131-60; Laura Fair, "Dressing up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar," *The Journal of African History* 39, no. 1 (1998): 63-94; Fair, "Remaking Fashion in the Paris of the Indian Ocean," in *Fashioning Africa*, ed. Allman, 13-30; Fair, "Veiling, Fashion, and Social Mobility," in Veiling in Africa, ed. Renne; Ryan, "Converging Trades and New Technologies," in *Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures, and the Material Worlds of the Indian Ocean*, ed. Machado, Fee, and Campbell, 253-86; Ryan, "A Decade of Design," 101-32.

[29] Examples of the multiple ways in which a *kanga* may be worn are found in the catalogue of the online exhibition "Wearing What Cannot Be Spoken," curated by Rose Ong'oa at Arkansas State University. https://www.astate.edu/a/museum/exhibits/wearing-what-cannot-be-spoken/index.dot.

[30] Ryan, "A Decade of Design," 101.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid, 103-109; Fair, "Remaking Fashion in the Paris of the Indian Ocean," 18.

[33] Moon Ryan, "A Decade of Design," 105.

[34] Ibid, 103.

[35] Ibid, 113.

[36] Fair, "Dressing Up," 63.

[37] The archipelago known as Zanzibar has been the destination of multiple migration movements, which determined the social composition of the island in ethnically based social strata. Persian sailors from the Shirazi Period (thirteenth-fifteenth centuries) had gradually founded outposts on the East African coasts and on the islands of Pemba and Unguja, intermarrying with the native bantu communities and thus creating the nucleus of Swahili ethnic and cultural identity. Later on, the Omani sultanate took possession of the archipelago at the end of the seventeenth century, and established the capital city on Zanzibar in 1840.

[38] Fair, "Remaking Fashion," 15-16.

[39] Fair, "Clothing, Class, Gender," 72.

[40] Fair, "Remaking Fashion," 16; Fair, "Clothing, Class, Gender," 74.

[41] Fair, "Remaking Fashion," 17.

[42] Ibid, 18.

[43] Fair, "Remaking Fashion," 20; Fair, "Clothing, Class, Gender," 77.

[44] *Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2003), s.v "heuristic device."

[45] Ibid.

[46] For further readings on trade of cloth in the Indian Ocean region, see Machado, Fee, and Campbell, ed., *Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures, and the Material Worlds of the Indian Ocean*; Fee and Machado, "Entangled Histories".

[47] In this regard, the linguistic and social analysis performed by Rose Marie Beck in her study on the so called proverbiality of the *kanga* is particularly noteworthy. See Beck, "Ambiguous Signs,"; Beck, "Text on Textiles".

[48] *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 5th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2006), s.v. "comparative method."

[49] *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*. 5th ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2006), s.v. "comparative method."

[50] MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," 4.

[51] MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," 9.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid, 11.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid, 9.

[60] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

[61] Fair, "Dressing up," 87, 86.

[62] Ibid.

[63] MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," 9.

[64] Ibid, 16.

[65] See Ibid, 15-18.

[66] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 4.

[67] Fair, "Dressing up," 75.

[68] Fair, "Dressing up," 75.

[69] For a deep analysis of the semantic switch that the term *heshima* underwent after the abolition of slavery, see McMahon, S*lavery and Emancipation in Islamic East Africa*.

[70] Fair, "Dressing up," 72-73; Fair, "Remaking fashion," 16.

[71] Fair, "Remaking fashion," 17.

[72] Fair, "Dressing up," 76-77.

[73] Ibid, 76.

[74] Such commodities include: "[L]ipstick, nail polish, face creams and powders, skin lighteners, tanning lotions, shampoos, hair styling products, fancy soaps, perfumes, deodorants, toothpastes, cigarettes, high-heel shoes, cloche hats, and fashionable, sexy clothes." MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," 18.

[75] Ibid, 19.

[76] Ibid. 15. Uta Poiger, the author who wrote about the German Modern Girl, refers to the phenomenon as a "cosmopolitan aesthetic." See Uta G. Poiger, "Fantasies of Universality? *Neue Frauen*, Race, and Nation in Weimar and Nazi Germany," in MGRG, *The Modern Girl Around the World*, 317-346.

[77] MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," 9-10.

[78] Allman, "Fashioning Africa," 3.

[79] Among others, contributions to the topic include: Allman, "Fashioning Africa"; Prestholdt, "Mirroring Modernity"; Machado, Fee, and Campbell, T*extile Trades, Consumer Cultures*; Fee and Machado, "Entangled Histories".

[80] Fair, "Dressing up," 79.

[81] Fee and Machado, "Entangled Histories".

[82] Prestholdt, "Mirroring Modernity," 170.

[83] Ibid, 20-21.

[84] McMahon, *Slavery and Emancipation*, 64, 129.

[85] Fair, "Dressing up," 67.

[86] Ryan, "A Decade of Design."

[87] Ryan, "A Decade of Design," 103.

[88] Ibid, 113.

[89] Ibid, 119.

[90] Quoted in Ryan, "Converging Trades and New Technologies," 270.

[91] In my opinion, this spontaneous association between the term "girl" and consuming fashionable items cannot be ignored.

[92] Quoted in Ryan, "Converging Trades," 281.

[93] *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, s.v. "consumer society." Emphasis mine.

[94] Prestholdt, "Mirroring Modernity".

[95] MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," 12, 20.

[96] Ryan, "Converging Trades," 268.

[97] Beck, "Ambiguous Signs," 158.

[98] Even though the inscriptions vary at a faster rate than patterns, which on the contrary tend to be repeated, the fact that the inscription is hardly readable when the kanga is worn brings women to memorise the name of the kanga and associate it to a specific motif, in order to be able to "read" the garment without having to see the inscription. See Beck, "Ambiguous Signs," 162-163. See also Beck, "Texts on Textiles," 131.

[99] For further readings on consumerism in Eastern Africa, see McMahon, Slavery and Emancipation; Laura Fair, "Remaking Fashion," Ryan, "Converging Trades,"; Allman, "Fashioning Africa".

[100] MGRG, "The Modern Girl as Heuristic Device," 12.

[101] Ibid, 14.

[102] Cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard uses the word "system" to suggest that "individual objects do not function on their own but instead depend on a system that relates the larger meaning of the whole." Quoted in Prestholdt, "Mirroring Modernity," 177.

[103] Beck, "Texts on Textiles," 134; Ryan, "A Decade of Design," 117.

[104] Prestholdt, "Mirroring Modernity," 169-70.

[105] Ibid, 170.

[106] Ibid, 169-70.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid, 1.

[109] Ibid, 9.

[110] Ibid, 15-16.

[111] Prestholdt, "Mirroring Modernity," 170.

[112] Allman, "Fashioning Africa," 2.