

ETHNO-ICONOGRAPHIC VOGUE'S EDITORIALS (1948- 2016): AN APPROACH TO CULTURAL DIPLOMACIES

Editoriales Etno-iconográficos en Vogue (1948-2016): un enfoque a las diplomacias culturales

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Resumen: *Este artículo ofrece la visión general de una investigación que ha sentado sus bases en una sistematización de los mensajes que surgen de la interfaz entre diferentes culturas a través de la comunicación visual de la moda. Profundiza en un estudio semántico de las composiciones relacionadas con la "etno-iconografía" desarrolladas por tres ediciones occidentales de Vogue desde 1948 a 2016. Para esta investigación, hemos examinado 100 editoriales fotográficos. El artículo propone un marco teórico*

que sirva para evaluar la forma en que la moda ha reflejado y construido las nociones coloniales del Otro, impulsadas por políticas visuales de género y raza, y moldeadas por ideologías imperialistas de la industria. El artículo también introduce una exploración del legado de los regímenes visuales eurocéntricos y la negociación con las subjetividades postcoloniales por parte de las últimas ediciones no occidentales. Finalmente resalta que este tipo de imagen puede proporcionar visibilidad a realidades sociales de dichos territorios, permitiendo a las revistas de moda actuar como detonadores de la reflexión crítica y agentes capaces de establecer interrelaciones culturales.

Palabras clave: *Revista de moda, fotografía, etnografía, estudios culturales, diplomacia cultural.*

Abstract: *This article offers an overview of a seminal research that laid its foundations in a systematization of the messages emerging from the interface between cultures through fashion image making. It delves into a semantic study of the compositions related to “ethno-iconography” that have been developed by three Western editions of Vogue since 1948 to 2016. We had examined 100 photographic editorials. The paper proposes a theoretical framework that serves to evaluate the way that fashion has reflected and built colonial notions of the Other, driven by race and gender visual politics, and shaped by the industry’s imperialist ideologies. The article also introduces a prospective exploration of the legacy of the Eurocentric visual regimes and the negotiation with post-colonial subjectivities by non-Western editions. It ultimately highlights that photo shoots also provide visibility to social realities that permit magazines to act as triggers of critical reflection and agents capable of establishing inter-cultural relations.*

Keywords: *Fashion magazines, photography, ethnography, cultural studies, cultural diplomacy.*

1. Introduction

1.1 State of Question

In her essay “‘To the Ends of the Earth’. Fashion and Ethnicity in *Vogue* Fashion Shoot,” Sarah Cheang (2013) addressed the imperialist dimension of the representation of Western brands in non-Western environments, analyzing fashion shoots produced by British *Vogue* from 2007 to 2012. However, the construction of the notion of fashion based on the observation and (re-)presentation of the Other is a tradition that goes back to the first costume books that were printed in the 16th century. Treatises, such as those by the writer and bookseller François Deserps, offered Europeans a particular overview of their contemporaries living in different parts of the world (Deserps, 1557) (fig. 1). This “ethno-iconography”, as the sociologist Daniel Defert (1989) called it, responded to attempts to expose the exoticism and diversity of lands faraway from Europe, while it also



reinforced the Western idea of civilisation through the European dress as opposed to the attire of non-Western local people.

Fig. 1. “L’arabien”, by François Deserps. Published in *Recueil de la diversité des habits...* (1557).

The international editions of fashion magazines like *Vogue*, emerged over the last twenty years in countries outside of Europe and the USA, has occasionally maintained visual constructions engaged with post-imperialist discourses. They have also constituted itself a manifesto of the interest on the insertion of Western brands in the scenario of geographies that, in some cases, were (or are) still economies in development process and evolving consuming cultures. For instance, when the first issue of *Vogue Russia* was launched in September 1998 under the eloquent front page’s title “Russia, at last,” it not only stumbled upon the post-soviet “economically and socially unstable circumstances”, but also upon “the lack of any sophisticated traditions” for the dresses presented in the magazine (Barlett, 2006: 175).

The geographical expansion of fashion might amplify the neo-colonial and post-colonial ideologies that come to the surface regarding the representation of the ethnic through contemporary fashion shoots that are published both in contemporary Western and non-Western editions of magazines. Furthermore, the recent controversy arisen from the involvement of European and US clothing brands in human rights

violations and deplorable labour rights due to the outsourcing of the production heightens the critical tone towards images exhibiting and even representing Western fashions in certain territories. However, if, as Rebecca Zorach (2005: 202) argues, the first costume books contained reflections against the construction of social identity through clothes and the changes of fashion in modern states, would it be possible to look at transversal and critical meanings regarding the use of ethno-iconography in contemporary fashion photography?

From this question, the objectives of the following research are:

1. To trace an evolution of the visual registers employed by photographic editorials that exhibit Western fashion either in non-Western countries, or regions that are outside of its consumption.
2. To propose a theoretical framework that serves to evaluate the way fashion image making has shaped geocultural and socioeconomic notions of the Other, as well as to examine the extent of colonial and neo-colonial ideas in its visual discourses.
3. To prospect the persistence of the imperialist gaze in photographic editorials produced by the Indian edition of *Vogue*, and that are shaping the image of the former colonized country.
4. To interrogate the role of fashion magazines as devices of inter-cultural relations that border on the notion of cultural diplomacy.

This study takes its cases from *Vogue*. As it will be exposed in the present article, it is the fashion magazine that first placed the photographic representation of Western fashion in countries far away from European or North American territory. There is a bibliography that specifically concerns the history of *Vogue*. However, it constitutes a mere base for the approach to the visual policies of the magazine. It is the case of *In Vogue*, edited by Norberto Angeletti and Alberto Oliva (2012), and *Unseen Vogue*, edited by Robin Derrick and Robin Muir (2004). Apart from the aforementioned work of Cheang, it should also be mentioned Paul Jobling, who revealed in *Fashion Spreads* (1999) how the visual construction of fashion is implied in discourses loaded with a meaning that transcends the merely advertising intention. Although he questioned whether fashion photography is a field that builds values linked to race, or it merely reflects them, his book explores codifications of stereotypes by *Vogue* since the Eighties. This limits the historical perspective for the observation of the structures of power that were driven during decades, for instance, by race and sexual visual politics, and that would allow us to assess the potential of the fashion shoots as critical tools and cultural mediators.

1.2 Methodology

In the early stage of this research, the work has addressed the three oldest editions of this publication: *US Vogue* (born 1892), *British Vogue* (born 1916), *Vogue Paris* (born 1920). The reasons for this election are two. First, they have constituted the foundations in the visual codification of fashion since the origins of the photographic genre that concerns us. Second, the geographies that these three editions represent mark the hegemonic axis of the fashion industry.

Thanks to the guidance and help provided by Debbie Smith, Director of new projects at Condé Nast Group and Director of the Vogue Archive, we compiled photographic editorials in which, since 1948 to 2016, the dress is out-of-place. In other words, it is depicted in territories where the consumption of the promoted fashion had not been integrated yet, either because the country was under a sociocultural and economic immobility/instability, or because it was an underdeveloped region.

Insofar as the primary basis of the study is the inquiry concerning the messages that arise from the contraposition of fashion as the representation of ideas like the consumption and the Western civilization, and the ethnic space, container of values like the tradition, the photographic editorials were classified following iconographic criteria that resulted in:

Group 1. Suppression of an identifiable location:

- Subgroup 1.1. Without local or ethnic subject.
- Subgroup 1.2. With ethnic subjects:
 - 1.2.1. Ethnic subject with a passive role.
 - 1.2.2. Ethnic subject with an active role.

Group 2. Insertion of an identifiable location:

- Subgroup 2.1. Without local or ethnic subject.
- Subgroup 2.2. With local or ethnic subjects:
 - 2.2.1. Local or ethnic subject with a passive role.
 - 2.2.2. Local or ethnic subject with an active role.

This division allowed us to select at this stage of the research those fashion shoots with a location that was textually or visually identified through the ethnic subject or the landscape (Subgroup 1.2. and Group 2); a sample of 100 photographic editorials shot in the following countries: Peru, Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia, India, China, Japan, Morocco, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Egypt, Cambodia, Vietnam, Mexico, Iceland, Russia, Mongolia,

Bhutan, Nepal, Jamaica, Portugal, and Spain. In this last two cases, both countries were under a dictatorship when they were chosen for fashion shoots.¹

The study includes the work of Irving Penn, Norman Parkinson, Henry Clarke, Richard Avedon, William Klein, David Bailey, Helmut Newton, Arthur Elgort, Bruce Weber, Sheila Metzner, Peter Beard, Hans Feurer, Inez & Vinoodh, Patrick Lichfield, Arthur Elgort, Enrique Badulescu, Raymond Meier, Peter Lindbergh, Tim Walker, Mario Testino and Patrick Demarchelier.

As some of the countries that, once, were a mere stage in the visual construction of fashion are now leading their editions, the magazine has consummated its role as an interface between fashion and the Other, whereas it has expanded the semantic diversity associated with aspects like the employment of local/non-local models, or the deployment of a lexicon connecting the tradition and the modernity. With the intention of exploring their level of permeability and their communion in the same operative structure and ideology of post-colonial magnitude, we have taken a sample of 20 non-Western case studies. Since the fashion shoot by Parisian-based photographer Jean-François Campos for the August 2008 issue of *Vogue India* affected the signification of the fashion magazine as a cultural interface, the research has especially drawn on editorials published by this local edition. On this regard, it has been studied the work of Jean-François Campos, Ruven Afanador, Tarun Vishwa, Tejal Patni, Ram Shergill, R. Burman, Robert Wyatt, Diego Fuga, Signe Vilstrup, Errikos Andreou, Anita Shroff Adajania, Kristian Schuller, Luis Monteiro, and Arthur Elgort. The article integrates some of the results of this prospection, although it has had narrow circumstances, on one side, related to the limited access to *Vogue India*. On the other, feedback of the Indian fashion system is needed in order to establish a more in deep analysis of the cultural dimension of the ethno-iconographic representations.

Finally, it is necessary to clarify that the article allows us to summarize the development of the research based on the enumeration of the detected mechanisms and encoded messages involved in a phenomenon based on wide-ranging cultural negotiations whose axis of expression is the dress in its dialogue with the place. Therefore, using a methodology that considers the semiotic, gender, economic and social factors, the following paper has a qualitative nature within the field of visual culture studies.

¹ In the case of Spain, we are referring to three editorials shot by photographer Henry Clarke for *Vogue US* when the country was under Franco's regime: "People are talking about... Madrid!" (March, 1954), "Sun-seers" (June, 1969) and "Spain-divino" (April, 1970). In the case of Portugal, we have worked with the images by Norman Parkinson for "Into the Algarve Sun", published in *Vogue UK* in February 1973, one year before the "Carnation Revolution" that overthrew the Estado Novo.

1.3 Some assets about cultural diplomacy

Far from being new, researchers from different backgrounds like History, Politics, Economy and Humanities, are recently trying to delimit the systematization of that practice that, rooted in the World War I and in the interwar period, was developed as a political tool since the cold war and it became globally relevant in the nineties (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2013: 3-4). Related to soft power as well as to public diplomacy - as it is addressed to a country's population, and not exclusively to institutions - cultural diplomacy conforms a neutral, non-coercive and positive platform that establishes bridges and interactions between nations, transcending cultural boundaries (Kim, 2011). Always being based on the prominent and influential role of any cultural expression and institution, this practice is driven by the states, with the development of programs and propaganda-like activities, but also by nongovernmental actors (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 2013: 9). Cultural diplomacy may be expressed by public and/or private institutions through various expressions and forms such as art, music, gastronomy, and fashion, to cite some.

As part of the latter, and still undoubtedly a form of culture, the fashion system is able to operate in three main lines of action related to cultural diplomacy:

- Communication and interpretation of different traditions, heritage, and identities through clothing;
- Constructive use of the ethnic and the local, serving to the exterior promotion of a country, as well as its traditional textiles, clothes, and designers;
- To raise awareness of cultural, politic and, even, socioeconomic issues of a country.

Specifically, fashion magazines can shape the nature and the tone of intercultural relations and exchanges through dress and its representation (or exclusion) as fashion. At the same time, facing the conflicts related to the contemporary processes of modernization of certain countries, it is also necessary to evaluate if they can play a transformative role increasing attention on critical circumstances, for instance, in countries like India, where clothing companies are involved in pervasive poor working conditions.

2 Evolving from the aestheticization of the exotic to the submission of the ethnic

In the late 1940s, there was a burgeoning trend in *Vogue* to use for the first time



Fig. 2. Photo: Norman Parkinson. Place: Niger.
Published in *US Vogue* (July 1951).

locations for the photo shoots in far-off countries. This trend was linked, among other factors, to the growth in commercial aviation that made longer and faster journeys possible. Photographers like Irving Penn, Norman Parkinson, and Henry Clarke started to use a similar language to that of travel photo-reportage, thus underpinning the escapist function of fashion magazines. By putting the models in indigenous landscapes outside of the European-North American realm, their images

frequently placed fashion out of context, displaced away from its usual surroundings. An obvious example is given by an editorial published in *US Vogue* in July 1951. Parkinson used the Victoria Falls in Nigeria as a backdrop of a series of photographs in which model Wenda Rogerson posed in a dress suitable for a Western metropolis (fig. 2).

In a certain way, the nature of these images connected to that of the first engravings of costumes as, to some extent, they acted as a substitute for travel by shortening geographical distances.² It must be remembered that until well into the 20th century, traveling abroad for tourism was a luxury that only the aristocracy and rich bourgeois could afford. Therefore, from the very outset, fashion magazines were a window on a world full of new features where the sophistication of fashion could be discovered in faraway places, such as Paris or London, and where women, especially from the middle class, dreamed of a world of elegance and refinement. Beyond the Eighties, the decade in which Condé Nast's *Traveller* was launched, the accent on travel photo-reportage has still been present in the pages of *Vogue* thanks to the camera of photographers from David Bailey to Patrick Demarchelier.

In the late 20th century, the birth of non-Western editions of fashion magazines drives a similar function, as only the elite in Russia, China or India is able to travel abroad; an

² Collections like those in *Recueil* by François Deserps were partly composed of drawings made by commercial travelers or soldiers on military campaigns. See Ann Rosalind Jones, "Habits, Holdings, Heterologies: Populations in Print in a 1562 Costume Book," in *Meaning and Its Objects: Material Culture in Medieval and Renaissance France*, eds. Margaret Burland, David LaGuardia, and Andrea Tarnowski (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 92-121.

experience that, on the other side, has provided them the opportunity to access to high-end shopping venues around the world. Thus, fashion magazine like *Vogue* has shortened geographical distances in two directions. On one hand, running in parallel with the recent emergence of retailing in Eastern Europe and Asia-Pacific it is a vehicle for the promotion of international brands flocking to those territories. As Djurdja Bartlett (2006: 176) asserted regarding *Russian Vogue*: “Western fashion, which had colonized Soviet women’s subconscious for decades, had finally arrived”.



Fig. 3. Photo: Kristian Schuller. Place: Paris. Published in *Vogue India* (September 2015).

On the other hand, it must be considered that many photographic editorials published in these non-Western editions also use foreign locations. Taking the study case of *Vogue India*, editorials like “April in Paris”, published in September 2015 (fig. 3), provides the viewer/reader the experience of virtually traveling to France. Also to the USA and even the United Arab Emirates or Egypt. Apart from elitist buyers, the target audience of that magazine is also represented by “aspiring epicures” consumers who are not rich, but admire prestigious Western brands and want to be part of the world of luxury.³ For these specific readers, virtually traveling to cities like Paris or Dubai or exploring the Sabi Sabi Game Reserve in South Africa is also a way of dreaming a world of unaffordable and desired sophistication.



Fig. 4. Photo: William Klein. Place: Morocco. Published in *US Vogue* (June 1958).

Now, both in Western and non-Western editions, when this relocation of clothes and models not only take in the landscapes, but include native people and customs, complex relationships started to flow between the fashion on display and the context in which it is shown. Sometimes the clothes become part of the landscape, through an aesthetic harmony achieved by combining shapes and colours with

³ For a more in deep understanding of luxury consumption in India, we recommend the reading of Puddick Melanie and Priya Menon, “Contemporary Lustre,” en Atwal, Glynn, and Soumya Jain, (eds.), *The Luxury Market in India: Maharajas to Masses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

the scenery. At others, tension arises between the surroundings and the ethnic reality. For example, in June 1958 Klein portrayed two Caucasian models in a tea party, wearing swimsuits, and posing between camels and people from the Sahara (fig. 4).

Over time, this dialectic has still been frequent in Western editorials. Thus, *US Vogue* channeled the appetite and typing of the primitive and the colonial memory running features like "... someThing Wild." In this editorial, published in April 1988, actress Kim Basinger embodied a white and adventurous woman doing a safari in Kenya surrounded by black male guides and Masai warriors portrayed by photographer Sheila Metzner as mere extras of the scene.

Decades later, in June 2007, this magazine repeated the same narrative with the cover story, "The Chronicles of Keira," shot by Arthur Elgort. With features of a fairy tale, and inspired by the film *Out of Africa* (1985), another actress, Keira Knightley performed a more fragile and feminine traveller, dressed in luxury brands, while doing a safari which was owned, as explained by the magazine, by Calvin Cottar, whose family moved from USA and established the business in Eastern Africa in the early 1900s, when Kenya was a British Colony and Protectorate (Sykes, 2007: online).

With no attempt to blend in with the conditions and customs of the place, and in order to idealize the experience of the exotic, this type of photo shoots provides a simplified,



Fig. 5. Photo: Arthur Elgort. Place: Kenya. Published in *British Vogue* (June 2007).

if not biased, view of the indigenous culture. Ethnic reality is often excluded as Otherness, as well as being reduced to images arising from the Western imagination and from the dominance and subordination scenarios embedded in colonial memory. In fact, it is not unusual in these photographs for the model to be in a position of hierarchy, accompanied by natives in the role of servants

or extras (Cheang, 2013) (fig. 5).

Since its conquest and establishment in non-Western countries, magazines do not abandon these discourses, although shoots occasionally address to sexual politics that reveal a mechanism of construction of feminine role models strongly linked to the structures European and North American fashion photography. For instance, while dressed in Christian Dior, Fendi or Bluemarine, Indian New Zealander model Ashika Pratt transits in a guided safari through the African Savannah wearing heels and bikinis, as part of an imaginative narration ostensibly loaded with sexual objectification (fig. 6).

Nevertheless, when some non-Western fashion magazines use their native



Fig. 6. Photo: Tejal Patni. Place: Kenya. Published in *Vogue India* (April 2011).

localizations, the scenes become more complex and meaningful as they often negotiate with the post-colonial subjectivity constituted by the subordinating power of European domination. Thus, in countries like India, we find that fashion image making mobilizes what Adam and Tiffin (1991: vii) would define as “a set of practices” in which we detect “colonialist ideologies” and “subjectificatory legacies.” Thus, in “The Layers of Time,” Portuguese photographer Luis Monteiro placed model Ariel Ulrich in historic Benares in order to show how the traditional *churidar* “takes on new life.” (*Vogue India*, September 2012: 249) Indeed, these long fitted trousers, traditional of the male and female Indian dress, are recreated by tight pants in the work of Western designers like Italian Giuseppe Zanotti as well as Indian designer Atsu Sekhose.

However, this proud reaffirmation of the vernacular that seems to survive the



Fig. 7. Photo: Luis Monteiro. Place: India. Published in *Vogue India* (September 2012).

modernization faces contradictory facts. One of the photographs depicts who could be identified as a child maid posing behind the model with a decorative version of the *tripundra tilaka* - the three white lines drawn on the forehead; an spiritual symbol associated to Shiva - and attired with an appealing bright yellow *kurta* - a loose and collarless straight shirt, whose length reaches the knees or bellow (fig. 7).

It is true that, despite being from New Zealand, Ulrich’s Maori physical features allowed her to impersonate Indian origins, overcoming any racial connotation. However, being addressed to Indian readers and celebrating the ethnic and vernacular *churidar*, the identity politics of race in the editorial seems to be based on a simulacrum. In addition, this fashionable woman, dressed in Louis Vuitton and Viktor & Rolf, appears not only as an inheritor of colonial ideologies, but a partaker of the social

problem of inequality that affects Indian children. Through such discourses built on ethno-iconography, fashion seemed to be consolidating a manifesto of neo-colonialism, exhibiting and defending the strength of its system. Moreover, as it demonstrated in the post-war years, it is able not only to resurface but to spread its presence and power throughout the world.

3 From tension to interconnection: the dialogue of opposing values of attire through ethno-iconography.



Fig. 8. Photo: Helmut Newton. Place: Tunis. Published in *British Vogue* (May 1967).

The devices used to make ethnicity an effective tool for the promotion of fashion became as complex as the meanings of this type of photography. The tensions arising from the contact between fashion and societies that are beyond its influence have been partially relieved through strategies of composition and narration, which tend to blur the limits that separate fashionable dress practices and codes from an ethnicity that represents values such as temporal stability. In this sense, two mechanisms for representation stand out: the active participation (dramatized or realistic) of native subjects in the construction of the fashion image, to the brink of incarnating it, and the melding of the model into the surroundings until she emulates the ethnic subject.

A good and early example of the first approach was provided by Helmut Newton in the series of photographs taken in Tunis for the May 1967 issue of *British Vogue* (fig. 8). Specifically, in two of the pictures, the model is escorted by several Berbers pacing along in white robes and turbans, which creates an ethnic image that seems to be “contaminated” by the sophistication of fashion.



L'OUTDOOR DÉCHAÎNÉ DE
MOSCHINO

Non ce n'est pas un défilé en plein air. C'est un conte
inspiré. «Niets» est un jeu de mots sur le hollandais (rien)
et sur Moschino. Parfois ce jeu a une double
lecture en français et en italien. Et voilà.
Biancamano L'Espresso 24

Mis en scène par Fabio Collopi Christiani

Fig. 9. Photo: Inez & Vinoodh. Place: Morocco. Published in *Vogue Paris* (February 2010).



Fig. 10. Photo: Tim Walker. Place: Papua New Guinea. Published in *British Vogue* (August 2007).

Decades later, Inez & Vinoodh obtained a similar effect for an editorial published in February 2010 for *Vogue Paris*. In the photographic series, the model Daria Werbowy is accompanied by a male Moroccan who interacts with her by holding her arm or resting his hand on her shoulder. As with Newton's Berbers, the invitation to play a dramatized role in the photo makes the native become an active element in fashion image making. With this mechanism, Inez & Vinoodh generate a discourse loaded with social significance through dialogue between opposing codes. Indeed, to the extent that the native is always portrayed wearing the traditional *djellaba* – the loose and long hooded upper garment with full sleeves -, he becomes a fixed and stable constant for the series of images that aim to show the model's changes. In addition to acting

as a counterpoint to fashion through the attire, he also supports with his role a confrontation between two imperatives of the genre: the one associated with indigenous culture and the modern Western stereotype itself. Thus, some pictures include the native subject calmly contemplating feminine strength, independence and confidence, which is dramatically portrayed by Werbowy (fig. 9). In this regard, it cannot be ignored that fashion magazines are a factor in the construction of messages addressed to women, starting with the precedents set in women's press from the 17th century.⁴ This provides greater relevance to the editorial's ability to deal with the question of ethnicity from a space that was conquered by women in Western society, in contrast with other cultures and situations.

On other occasions, the native and the ethnic dress took centre stage in fashion photography. In that sense, Cheang made an in-depth

⁴ Among the precedents are the newspapers *Gazette de France*, first published in 1631, and the *Ladies Mercury* in England, first published in 1693. In the 1670s, another important publication appeared, *Le Mercure Galant*, which gave regular reports on fashion. See María Isabel Menéndez Menéndez, "Aproximación teórica al concepto de prensa femenina," in *Comunicación y Sociedad*, Volumen XXII, no 2 (2009): 27-34.

analysis of Tim Walker's shots taken in Papua New Guinea for the *British Vogue* editorial "To the Ends of the Earth", where eleven of the sixteen pictures represented the Huli tribe (Cheang, 2013: 41-42). In one of them, using a clever game of mirrors and gazes, the British photographer helped the viewer ultimately identify with a native subject who, with his traditional accessories, was portrayed/reflected in the mirror of Western fashion (fig. 10).

This meant a break with the idea of ethnicity as something alien to the fashion world, and vice-versa. In fact, it could even be said that the typical, traditional and stable appearance of the Huli manages to bring to light the basic concept that fashion is a question of masquerade and disguise. Going beyond these intentions, rationalized by the globalizing trend of fashion, the unique treatment of the Huli and their attire aims to transmit their culture through the sublimation of their aesthetic values.

Similar approaches to the ethnic dress of other countries are found in non-Western editions. An illustrative example of these practices is offered by "Paradise Found,"



Fig. 11. Photo: Tarun Vishwa. Place: Bali.
Published in *Vogue India* (April 2011).

published by *Vogue India*, where Elena Fernandes, Indian model born in the UK, poses in Bali for compatriot Tarun Vishwa wearing designs by Jonathan Saunders, Burberry or Giambattista Valli. In one of the pictures, she figures with a Balinese bride and groom, flanked by the attendees of the ceremony - all of them looking at the camera like in a wedding photo session. Beyond the connotation of superiority that emerges from the way Fernandes is leaning her arm on the groom's shoulder, it is remarkable the coexistence of brands like D&G or Etro and the vernacular, represented by the colourful regional rich and colourful textiles called *songket* and the Balinese wedding costumes worn by the bride and groom (fig. 11).

To some extent, this image reminds us the mechanisms that were going to be employed by Mario Testino's work for "Dark Horse", published in *US Vogue A* in September 2014. Throughout the series of images taken in Peru, the *chalanes* (Peruvian horse riders) participating in the photographic narrative become possible contributors to a trend, to the point that they potentially embody fashion itself when, finally, they even pose like models around Karlie Kloss.



Fig. 12. Photo: Anne Menke. Place: Alaska.
Published in *Vogue Japan* (February 1999).

At this last discursive level of fashion ethno-iconography, it is noteworthy to mention the type of images in which the model manages to become a recreation of the local people of the country where she is posing for the shoot. Amongst the non-Western cases explored, the images published in 1999 in *Vogue Japan* for an editorial that invited the reader to visit the village of the Inuit provides a remarkable example of that tendency. The photographer Anne Menke articulated a serene, natural symbiosis between a Japanese model, the locations and the indigenous people of Alaska, the Inuit (fig. 12). In this way, fashion did not proclaim to be present among or even assimilated by, minorities and places far away from its capital cities, but to be something that had sprung directly from

them. Thus, ethno-iconography had turned the magazine into an essential means of connection, but also inter-connection, between cultures. Once the stage is overcome where typical ethnic groups were observed and described by editorials from a distance, they are presented as an integral part of fashion imagery. From its propagandistic function, the magazine becomes a potential means of documenting textiles, clothing and aesthetic resources from other countries and, therefore, provides them with an opportunity to build and disseminate a competitive identity in the field of fashion.



Fig. 13. Photo: Signe Vilstrup. Place: India. Published in *Vogue India* (November 2013).

In this regard, non-Western editions make room for native fashion brands, taking them out of the marginality. For instance, in “Rites of Passage,” published in *Vogue India*, designs by Dolce & Gabbana, Christian Louboutin or Myla figure as mere complements overshadowed by the impressive outfits created by pioneers of Indian fashion industry and successful designers like Sabyasachi Mukherjee, Arpita Mehta, Anushka Khanna or Pallavi Jaikishan. The editorial, with photographs by Signe Vilstrup, is halfway between a photographic album of memories and an ethnographic report that illustrates one of the oldest traditions in India (fig. 13), a wedding. In fact, the beautiful compositions evoke the aesthetics of princely India photographed in the nineteenth century by the Indian Raja Deendayal.⁵ The images of the editorial translate some of the rituals related with the ceremony, like the *Pithi Dastoor* – during which the groom and the bride are painted with a paste of turmeric and sandalwood – or the *Mehfils* – which consists in the gathering of guests and family. But the Romanticism and the Bollywood dreamlike grammar contrast with the reality of a society in which women are still submitted to the drama of arranged marriages.

⁵ Born in 1844 at Sardhana in Meerut in United Provinces, in the late nineteenth century, the prolific photographer Raja Deendayal obtained the patronage both of the British like Sir Lepel Griffin and the Indians like Maharaja Tukoji II and started to established photography studios in cities like Bombay and Secunderabad. Declared the “Photographer to Her Majesty and Queen”, he took portraits of members of the British Monarchy and dignitaries, as well as the monarch Nizam VI of Hyderabad, whose wedding he immortalized.



Fig. 14. Photo: Signe Vilstrup. Place: Studio. Published in *Vogue India* (October 2014).

By contrast, as part of *Vogue India's* campaign #WomenEmpower, we remark editorials like the eloquent “Warrior Woman.” The same photographer, Vilstrup, portraits Pooja Morr posing alone or accompanied by male and female dancers of Shiamak Davar’s *Selcouth's* show. Again, Western brands like Burberry coexist with Indian names like Anand Bhushan or Siddhartha Tyler. However, the styling, the choreography and the poses suffer from an overload of references to a sort of tribalism that aim to capture the strength of the model rooted in the most primitive essence of her being, which allows for the emplacement of these images under the umbrella of the ethnocentric image making (fig. 14). In this sense, it is essential to

highlight the neutral background used by Vilstrup. While studio photo shooting constitutes an old way for fashion photography, the absence of a context harks back to the early engravings of costumes in which the backgrounds and settings hardly appeared. Like those images from the European Early Modern Period, the decontextualized clothes alone indicated the region to which the subject belonged, triggering and building a sense of their Otherness easily captured in these anthropological images.

In this point, it is inevitable to mention Irving Penn's work on ethnographic types. In 1948, Alexander Liberman, then chief editor of *US Vogue*, pushed him out of the study and travel to Peru to compose a series of photographs for “Flying Down to Lima,” the first editorial located outside of Europe and North America. Since then, the American photographer developed a fascinating creative process (in and

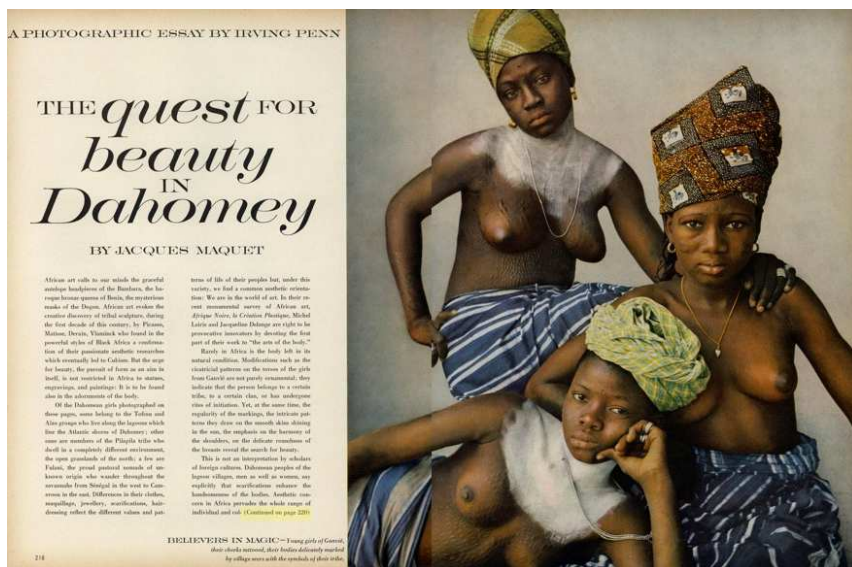


Fig. 15. Photo: Irving Penn. Place: Studio. Published in *US Vogue* (December

out his compromises with the fashion magazine) focusing on portraying locals from places like Crete, Extremadura and, above all, non-Western countries like New Guinea and Morocco (fig. 15). Away from their natural surroundings, these people figured in the interior of Penn's iconic portable studio tent, which, designed and built in New York, would serve to mount the workplace anywhere in countries of Africa and Asia.⁶

In a completely different approach, on more than one occasion editorials produced for *Vogue's* Western editions have displaced "ethnic fashion" by taking photographs against neutral backgrounds or in settings that do not show any specific geographical or local features. This occurs, for instance, with Mario Testino's series for "L'Etoile de Lima", published in the Peru special issue of *Vogue Paris* in April 2013 (fig. 16). Here the model Kate Moss is portrayed in front of a plain studio paper background, wearing clothes from luxury brands whose fabrics and patterns reflect features of indigenous Peruvian attire. This is done in such a way that the focus on purely visual communication, with no accompanying text, puts the full weight of the geographical characterization on the clothes. In the context of the fashion magazine, the clothes are tacitly released from an anchor to a local centre of gravity. In the pages of *Vogue Paris*, the image becomes a declaration of the globalizing power of fashion that appropriates features of ethnic attire and integrates them into a system of clothing obsolescence that nullifies the sense of the traditional and the indigenous.⁷

⁶ The collection of his work as a traveling ethnographic photographer can be seen in Irving Penn, *Worlds in a Small Room* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974).

⁷ Concerning this effect, it must be remembered that, since its first publication in the United States in 1892, and especially after the boost given when Condé Nast bought it from its creator in 1905, *Vogue* did not just write about fashion. Together with Harper's Bazaar, which started in the United States in 1897, it marked and constructed the style and the way of understanding fashion, first in the USA and later across the whole world.

4 From ethno-iconography to social realism in fashion photography



Fig. 16. Photo: Mario Testino. Place: Studio.
Published in *Vogue Paris* (April 2013).

There also exists a semantic dimension that cannot be ignored and that depends on the frequent intersection of fashion and ethno-iconography with documentary photography. In 1995, *US Vogue* proved this potential with an editorial entitled “Traveling with style,” in which Bruce Weber photographed Somali model Iman and her husband, David Bowie, on a trip to South Africa. Bordering on the language of photojournalism, the pictures celebrated a country moving towards a

new stage of hope in which the racial barriers of apartheid would be torn down; a declaration led by the fashion publication that unleashed the triumph of freedom and racial dignity, opening with a photo of Iman wearing a T-shirt with the face of Nelson

Mandela and dancing with local people.



Fig. 17. Photo: Bruce Weber. Place: South Africa.
Published in *US Vogue* (June 1995).

It is remarkable the picture of the Somali model with a Jacqueline Kennedy look while she shook hands with the newly appointed president of South Africa in another section titled “South Africa Now” (fig. 17). The visual rhetoric provided the picture with the air of a diplomatic meeting with a magnificent country, which, as explained in the text, was opening its arms to the world in order “to be shared” (*US Vogue*, 1996: 159). In this way, the magazine not only becomes a platform for South Africa to tell the world of its project as a nation. It also positions itself in the front row of a multilateral model of relations between countries where

non-governmental agents must be seen as fundamental to tasks similar to those of cultural diplomacy, by establishing mutually beneficial foundations for development and cooperation.

However, moving fashion photography to places away from the geographies if its consumption may be offensive, not so much for mixing luxury with underprivileged



Fig. 18. Photo: Patrick Demarchelier. Place: India. Published in *British Vogue* (September 1997).

socio-economic areas, but also because of the role these places have in the industry's trend to outsource production. In this respect, India has been the most challenging country for fashion editorials, as it is easy to slip into neo-colonial discourses, as occurred with Patrick Demarchelier's polemical photographs for "Indian Summer," published in *British Vogue*, in September 2007 (fig. 18).

But a scandal of greater resonance happened one year later. In August 2008, *The New York Times* echoed the reactions caused by a fashion editorial published in *Vogue India* (Timmons, 2008: online). The argument was sparked off by sixteen photographs by the Frenchman, Jean François Campos, in which clothes and accessories from famous luxury Western fashion brands were shown as part of the attire of a group of underprivileged people.

The controversial series of photographs seems to comprise a symbolic declaration. Campos used people wearing luxury clothes to represent openness through fashion to a modern identity for the country. The "war of styles" between the west and the east, involved in all colonization (Craik 1994: 26-27), seemed to end in a playful and peaceful coexistence that promised to decentralize (democratize) the consumption of fashion.

As the newspaper wrote, in answer to criticism from within India, the fashion system based its defense on the trivial and playful nature of its images, as well as the industry's ability to reduce the level of poverty in the country. With the heading “*Welcome to the new India — at least as Vogue sees it*” (Craik 1994: 26-27), the economics correspondent of *The New York Times* ironically took up the tone of national promotion of the August number that *Vogue* titled the “India Issue.”



Fig. 19. Photo: Jean François Campos. Place: India. Published in *Vogue India* (August 2008).

However, by inviting the reader to a visual journey around Jodhpur, the truth is that Campos's pictures were very far from an attempt to hide the reality of the city of Rajasthan. The striking contrast caused by placing items by Fendi, Burberry and Miu Miu in a framework of documentary realism accentuated the visibility of those details that laid bare the condition of the people in the photograph. The images mean something more than a negotiation through external appearance. In the shape of a disguise, luxury is even more revealing of poverty (fig. 19).

Later, Arti Sandhu would refer to this editorial to note how the main fashion magazines were throwing off the habit of making the masses virtually disappear from photo shoots located in those countries (Sandhu, 2015: 115-116). For the professor of Columbia College in Chicago, one of the ways to achieve it would have been precisely the inter-relationship between the viewpoints of the local people and Western travelers in this type of visual discourse. At the same time, the pictures invites to reflect on the terrible consequences for the local people if the path to modernization is

partly complicit in the exploitative labour practices,⁸ and the precarious labour regulations for the textile sector, as shown by the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in the neighbouring Bangladesh.

5 Conclusion

For decades Western fashion magazines have been demonstrating their potential to go beyond purely commercial objectives and adopt the role of go-between in bi-lateral international relationships. As a mean of communication and representation of contemporary clothing, fashion, stereotypes, and lifestyles, they are sources that reveal with special clarity the construction, maintenance, and inheritance of the sociocultural structures that have built the identity of non-Western nations.

Very frequently European and North American fashion magazines, protected under the umbrella of dramatization, did not do any effort to build a more realistic depiction of those identities that are portrayed in its editorials. But with its movement to countries far from the centres of production of global trends in clothing and lifestyles, this journalistic genre has to deal positively with some challenges. We assume the role that clothes play in shaping cultural and national identities. However, the control of one's region image provided by its local edition of a magazine like *Vogue* not only constitutes an indication of its position at the table of the global industry but also an opportunity to reflect on and manage that media itself.

In this sense, whereas, during decades, non-Western countries have been presented as an Otherness with no voice of their own, now they have a tool to translate and communicate (both nationally and internationally) their tradition, identity, and aspirations. At a regional or national level, that opportunity would have to imply a negotiation with inherited Eurocentric prejudices and patterns, that, as we have seen in cases like the editorial "The Layers of Time," in which the image of the child maid is maintained, is not carried properly.

At the global level, considering the conflict emerged from the need to improve the terrible conditions with which the expansion of the production is operating in countries like India, magazines must assume a sensible and responsible representation of social imbalances through the promotion of fashion. Within this specific context, the cultural roots, the ethnic and the local (being included also native designers) must not

⁸ Many of the people affected were Dalits (outcaste) and migrants. For more information see, Martje Theuws and Pauline Overeem, *Flawed Fabrics. The abuse of girls and women workers in the South Indian textile industry* (Amsterdam/Utrecht: Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations and Indian Committee of the Netherlands, 2014).

be only a way of communicating a history or an identity. It must translate a dignity of a whole country and neighbour regions that are facing and experiencing modernization with a majority of the society legally helplessness in the demand for decent working conditions that contribute to the economic development of certain sectors. Through the possible intersection with documentary realism, images could conduct to the field of the global fashion industry an understanding of the life and situation of people in those regions.

Finally, the fashion magazine plays an essential role in the promotion of national brands, encouraging the international investment, but it also has to overwhelm the comparatively weak influence of some regions in global fashion and its structure.

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