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## The World According to *Vogue*: The Role of Culture(s) in International Fashion Magazines

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**Abstract.** Anthropologists are known to work in contexts wider than academic settings, actively engaging with people from other disciplines and professions. The lecturers in the Fashion Institute where we presently work are challenged to integrate the practical knowledge and skills originating from the fashion industry into lessons, lectures and projects that prepare the students for their future careers. Our own task as (anthro)pology lecturers in Intercultural Communication and Culture and Globalization courses is to engrain a broader knowledge to compliment the practical competencies required in the professional settings. An example of the practical assignments is integrating the students' knowledge of minority groups or other cultures in developing certain fashion brands that would appeal to different ethnic groups or social classes within society or be marketable abroad. The deeper knowledge of segmentation, niche markets and specific target groups helps students to orient themselves in professional situations within the fashion industry. This requires an act of translation as well as transformation in order to translate the general (such as cultural theories) into the concrete (such as examples from the fashion industry) and to transform concrete examples and cases into broader theories. This article reflects on such acts of translation and transformation as evidenced in fashion magazines such as *Vogue*.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural context, media, fashion and anthropology

### Fashion and anthropology: overlapping themes

Fashion studies are seen by social scientists as something superficial, fleeting and undeserving serious attention.<sup>1</sup> Barnard<sup>2</sup> in his volume exploring the nature, philosophy and practice of fashion, argues that both trends and fashion are inherently ambivalent entities, presenting social scientists with a challenge of comprehending this ambivalence. Davis<sup>3</sup> also speaks of ambivalence and instability of our identity that fashion feeds. Kawamura argues however that such a view 'leaves nothing for sociologists to investigate', since 'ephemerality and ambiguity are the reasons

why fashion is not taken seriously'. "It is the content of fashion that is constantly shifting, not the institutions".<sup>4</sup> Instead, Kawamura suggests studying fashion within it as a social system, in which the 'gurus' and 'celebrities' of fashion need to be considered together with the production and value systems. Bruzzi and Gibson<sup>5</sup> and Davies<sup>6</sup> argue that the research done by anthropologists and consumer behavior or marketing researchers can well compliment each other and add to joint knowledge.

Traditional anthropological subjects are closely related to fashion studies. These include ritual and ceremony, dress, body, gender, sexuality, identity, meaning and globalization. In this article, we shall briefly describe each of the topics presented to students within the course at AMFI and then address the case of representation within *Vogue's* different editions.

The most significant contribution of anthropology to the study of fashion can be summarized as the discipline's attention to changes within culture (and fashion) that occur over time and space. The problem is at times though that when one talks about countries or cultures (the national and the cultural are often equated) one tends to focus on 'cultural stereotypes' or superficial knowledge, which may lead to simplistic conclusions, such as "Since Indonesia has a large Muslim population and the naked female body image is a taboo, certain fashion magazines have little chance of being widely accepted unless they adhere to local standards." This problem seems, alas, persistent in many cultural studies related to marketing and international communication. Considering the "nature versus nurture" debate, the question of what is in-born (human universals, such as body coverage and decoration, rituals around gender differences, etc.) and learned (cultural particulars, such as types of body coverage and decoration or the forms of rituals) comes to the fore. Fashion studies are thus placed in a context of eternal versus temporary demands and a stage is set for discussing other topics related to universals and particulars – those of the body, gender, and sexuality.

According to Foucault, "the body is given meaning and wholly constituted by discourse. The body vanishes as a biological entity and becomes instead a socially constituted product which is infinitely malleable and highly unstable."<sup>7</sup> Balsamo examines representations and practices of the gendered body from the last twenty years of the twentieth century, focusing on "a continuum of discourses" to explore the "ideological tug of war between competing systems of meaning, which include and in part define the material struggles of physical

bodies.”<sup>8</sup> “The body”, in its “production”, is both a product and a process. “As a product, it is the material embodiment of ethnic, racial, and gender identities, as well as a staged performance, of beauty, of health...As a process, it is a way of knowing and marking the world, as well as a way of knowing and marking a ‘self’”.<sup>9</sup>

Gender debates are prominent in both anthropological theories and fashion studies. In Mead’s prominent volume *Male and Female* she asserted that in all societies there is a division of labour by sex, the care of children is more women’s than men’s work, the sexes are thought to be different in more than procreative ways.<sup>10</sup> Mead’s<sup>11</sup> research among the different ethnic groups of Amercia, however, points to the fact that expressions of femininity may vary greatly within different cultures. Mead also argues for cultural specificity of certain gender and sexual arrangements such as Oedipus complex. Spiro,<sup>12</sup> in his research of gender in an Israeli kibbutz and other societies, argues that ‘nature’ is more powerful than ‘nurture’ in the way masculinities and femininities are enacted in a rather fixed patterns, such as boys being more aggressive and boisterous than girls, even when such roles are being repressed or reversed.<sup>13</sup>

Within anthropology, gender and sexuality debates are closely interlinked. “From the viewpoint of anthropological interest in universals... it has not been sex itself that has been of most interest..., but certain phenomena associated with it, such as incest regulations and male-female differences in temperament and behavior.”<sup>14</sup> Brandes<sup>15</sup> and Herdt argue that (homo)sexuality and particular expressions of masculinity are not just socially constructed but occur – in slightly different forms – in all societies. At the same time, both masculinity and homosexual lifestyle is constructed and perceived through the lens of society. Herdt argues that sexual lifestyle is an elaborate way of explaining how societies construct sex and gender roles: “A sexual identity implies a system of preferences based on morally laden cultural ideas and emotions of what is valued and desired by the society as a whole”.<sup>16</sup> Herdt focuses on the many cultures that have tolerated or even promoted same-sex relations. Herdt uses in the “Sambia” an example from Melanesia, where it is believed that boys can only become men through insemination by an adult male. Herdt argues that although homosexuality exists universally, sexual categories and gender roles are often socially constructed. Butler<sup>17</sup> takes the ‘nurture’ argument a step further, stating that gender is a fantasy enacted by “corporeal styles that constitute bodily significations.” Gender, according to her, is an act or performance, a set of manipulated

codes, costumes, rather than a core aspect of essential identity. Butler criticizes Freud by problematising gender as category of essence and questioning the very essence of what it is to be male or female, masculine or feminine, which are the fundamental ideas Freud started with. Butler attempts to show that gender is not just a social construct, but rather a kind of performance, a show we put on, a set of signs we wear, as costume or disguise hence as far from essence as can be.

Particularly relevant to our study of *Vogue* is examination of fashion and style trends. Gendered bodies and sexualities are 'dressed' not only in actual clothes but in fashion and style. While a common-sense term within popular discourse, fashion trends are barely conceptualized within social sciences. Trends have to do both with the dictates of the global market and with particulars of localities. Examples of trends arise from popular discourse, marketing and consumer research. We need to note that often, research into fashion trends crosses into the areas of marketing, consumer behavior, psychology, sociology and behavioral science. Fashion marketers research trends on the basis of consumer behavior and emotions.<sup>18</sup> Fashion trends are also researched in relation to innovators, as research by Phau and Lo<sup>19</sup> demonstrates. The results of Phau and Lo's study show that innovators were found to have a unique self-image, namely being more excitable, indulgent, contemporary, liberal and colourful. The innovators may adopt a new *vogue* or fashion and its and the dominating tone, which can be the newest hair and the make up line. As representations of identity bound lifestyles, innovations within fashion are related to sociological and cultural developments. At the new *vogue* and the dominating tone symbols, meanings and values are very important, because these elements can translate recent developments to concrete marketing actions.<sup>20</sup> These symbols and values are best represented through the visual media by the means of fashion shows, fashion magazines, and design.

As will be further discussed, representation of the Other or exoticism are good selling points in the global market. To paraphrase Said<sup>21</sup> "Orientalism is a manner of regularized writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient." The Orient in turn, exists for the West, and is constructed by and in relation to the West. It is a mirror image perceived as inferior and alien ("Other") to the West. In the global world, many 'ethnoscapes' cross and intertwine, creating fields of difference or rather perceived difference.<sup>22</sup> We shall later address how this con-

structed exoticism finds its expression in 'ethnic' themed editions of *Vogue*.

Appadurai argues that the process of "othering" is no longer happening just spatially, or in the far-away places, but also temporarily. As certain nations are said to be "developing" presumably in the direction of Westernization, for example) and as the West becomes nostalgic for what has been lost during its own 'disenchantment' due to technological and ideological revolutions, other countries and ethnicities can be symbolically perceived as being distant in time.

The past is no longer no land to return to simply as a form of politics of memory. If your present is their future (as in much modernization theory and in many self-satisfied tourist fantasies), and their future is your past (as in the case of Filipino virtuosos of American popular music<sup>23</sup>), then your own past can be envisioned simply as a normalized modality of your present.<sup>24</sup>

Appadurai further argues that the image, the imagined and the imaginary have all become part of the global cultural process and that imagination has become a social practice. This imagining stretches to the idea of whole nations, peoples and cultures as we create visions of others' as imaginary communities.<sup>25</sup> In speaking about 'virtual communities' (such as internet communities), Castells<sup>26</sup> notes that these do not necessarily differ from 'physical communities' which are, in fact, also a figment of Western imagination and nostalgia. According to Castells, "social critics refer implicitly to an idyllic notion of community, a tightly bounded, spatially defined, culture of support and belonging, which probably did not exist in rural societies, and has certainly disappeared in advanced, industrialized countries."<sup>27</sup> The kind of "community" *Vogue* creates among its readership can be described as both imagined (in a sense of the idealised types of women readers and the imagery and fantasy presented in the magazine's content) and physical (in a sense of actual readership).

To summarize this section, we note that culture and fashion are very closely interlinked, as both anthropologists and fashion industry practitioners are grappling with very similar issues, such as the question of universality or cultural diversity of expressions of body, gender and sexuality, globalization vs. localization, etc. Methodologies, involving both qualitative and quantitative methods, also often overlap, offering a wealth of information at both macro and micro levels of analysis. These range from concrete examples of trends within the fashion industry and

consumer behavior within specific contexts, to greater insights into social processes underlying such trends and behavior.

### **Formulating questions on culture and fashion**

We have analyzed three European national versions of *Vogue* according to its representations of the global and local, and the issues surrounding key factors such as sex and gender representations, tone and authority, and social identity. Our method of analysis can be applied to any country and any magazine brand. Our chosen template of three different national editions of *Vogue*<sup>28</sup> of April 2005 could easily be applied to any country or fashion magazine.

*Vogue* is part of a huge network of magazines and publications owned by Condé Nast. It is associated with the luxury-end of fashion and its readers are generally considered to be from the middle- to upper-classes. In this case study we look at three different national versions: French (approximate circulation: 170,000, subscriptions: 21,000), Russian, (circulation and subscription unknown) and UK (approximate circulation: 187,300, subscriptions: 37,600).

As part of our course and the subject of this article, our main question is *whether cultural and/or national factors play a role in influencing fashion magazine's contents*. If so, we wish to identify some of these cultural or national variables. More generally, we consider the relationship between fashion studies and anthropological theories. This relationship translates into examination of intersecting themes of representation, nationalism and identity within fashion studies and anthropology. These questions are also related to the issue of global or international as evidenced in our choice of editions – versus culturally or nationally specific *couleur locale*, adaptability and sensitivity to local context. As in the case of both nationally and internationally distributed journals, their content is sensitive to its readers' general expectations of what a fashion journal should be about – independently from the country where it is issued – as well as sensitive to national context, for example, journals may include culturally acceptable standards of style, featuring local celebrities and avoiding sensitive or uncomfortable topics.

We have also studied “global” product advertisements, such as those for Chanel No 5, and examined whether these are using the same formula' in all magazines, or local signifiers instead, such as local (by featuring local language, models, or themes; and whether there are

differences etc.) Are their differences in the content of featured “serious” stories on political, social, economic, and cultural topics, if presented. Can we speak of *Vogue* as exhibiting a “brand name personality” relative to its country of origin?

The individual editions of the magazine serve as examples for exposing cultural differences and similarities evidenced from the same “brand name” magazine across different cultural markets. We can thus compare textual and visual signals between cultures with the standard international template of one magazine brand.

### **Researching cultural contexts of international fashion magazines**

Magazines can be seen as the voice of the fashion industry. Beyond the surface level of brand advertisements and industry information they are cultural objects that reflect the cultural *zeitgeist* both visually and textually. As cultural media objects, they narrate dominant cultural trends. Magazines can be analyzed using a number of comparative features, such as fashion content (editorials or articles) vs. advertisements, informative vs. puffing ads, sexual vs. non-sexual advertisements, or types of products used in the advertisements. One can also discuss layout, text/image proportion, content of featured stories, national/international celebrities, political content, etc. The possibilities of analysis are endless.

Cassidy<sup>29</sup> has attempted an analysis of the ‘Cosmo Girl’ from *Cosmopolitan*, as well as, and pointed out national and cultural differences as to how the magazine was received. American *Cosmo Girl* is modern, classy, liberated – she does not want to have children before her late thirties, values sex – but not on the first date! Yet, she is also somewhat traditional, she expects to get married – but not just yet! She owns many shoes and at least one long conservative skirt, etc. Apparently, *Cosmo Girl* was well received in modern Hong Kong, but treated with suspicion in Latin America and Indonesia, both rather conservative countries in terms of traditional gender roles.

In *Vogue Futures*,<sup>30</sup> Hutton analyses the different kinds of contents of *Vogue*, such as visibles (skin, hair, nails, teeth, shape, make-up, style), physicals (brain, senses, breasts, heart, muscles and joints, etc.), practicals (al-aligning, moving, taking time out, eating, etc.), hormonals (sexuality, contraception, fertility, etc.), and psychologicals (attitudes, insights, expectations), etc.



The meaning of fashion symbols is often said to be ‘undercoded’, in a sense that fashion leaves lots of room for interpretation and contextual analysis.<sup>31</sup> The meaning of European fashion in non-European societies, may be debated. McDowell speaks of fashion as the “imposition of a prevailing mode or shap,”<sup>32</sup> and further more, particularly of high fashion, as an indulgent distinction from the majority, reflecting on power and status, as a “weapon wielded against the poor”. Taking this to the international level, Craik<sup>33</sup> reflects contends that the fashion as an exercise of power carries on to exist as European fashion is continuously imposed upon non-Europeans since colonial times. Yet, Craig argues, Western fashion is not unique in its exercise of power and distinction.<sup>34</sup>

### Analyzing advertisements in *Vogue*

Our study of the different national editions of *Vogue* focuses on the editorials and feature contents, advertisements and featured personalities, such as models and celebrities. The editorial and feature content may be interpreted as the most explicit reference to the issues of (national) ownership and (local) audience. Editorial comments are also revealing of the tone, style and ‘personality’ of a particular national edition. Feature stories may provide critical commentary and reflection on issues considered important or interesting for local audiences.

Analysing advertisement matter is one way of uncovering the underlying cultural assumptions. Advertisements are said to be both an ubiquitous and inevitable part of our lives, reflecting and even shaping our culture.<sup>35</sup> However, individuals are not blinded or totally influenced by advertisements that are part of complex and often tacit manifestations of culture. The sheer range of advertised products may fail to address some or most of individuals’ choices, prompting Wood and Allan<sup>36</sup> to postulate that ‘ads don’t work’. Critiques of consumerism suggest that ads for certain products may only “click” with certain audience if there are real values or needs that these may satisfy.<sup>37</sup> We shall thus look at certain ads in *Vogue* without searching for deep content, nor assuming that the products themselves will create a global or local consumer identity. Rather, we will focus on the ads’ graphic features to reveal the differences or similarities in national or international style and presentation.

### Hofstede's model for discussing cultural differences

Geert Hofstede's work in intercultural and international communication relating to the business world is probably the largest and arguably the most important body of work in this area. His 5-dimensional model is still enthusiastically used by management, marketing and human resources departments throughout the world, to understand the mechanisms of national cultural differences. Hofstede's initial source for his work was a cross-national study consisting of surveyed responses by staff from IBM between 1968 and 1972. It was an extensive database with 72 different international locations and more than 116,000 questionnaires being calculated.<sup>38</sup> From this database he initially devised four dimensions and later added a fifth. (1) Power Distance, which measures the degree of inequality in society, (2) Individualism – Collectivism, (3) Masculinity – Femininity, and (4) Uncertainty Avoidance which is “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations,”<sup>39</sup> and (5) Long-term versus Short-term orientation. Countries are ranked on these dimensions in scales<sup>40</sup> from “high” to “low”. From these scores, Hofstede derives a rudimentary idea of that country's cultural patterns or mental software.<sup>41</sup> He states that ‘the usefulness of the country scores is not for describing individuals, but for describing the social systems these individuals are likely to have built.’<sup>42</sup>

I am using Hofstede's theories here not as an exercise in proving or disproving my findings, but as a loose template of four rather than five dimensions, for the purpose of observing differences in the content of *Vogue* across cultures and pragmatic starting point for discussing cultural differences.

### Local representations

How do Russians, British and French readers perceive their own culture in the pages of *Vogue*?

#### *Russian Vogue*

In the Russian *Vogue*, the local is represented by nostalgic references to Soviet and pre-Revolution Russia and underpinned by interviews with successful Russian fashion designers and musicians all of whom are

men. It appears that the face of contemporary Russian society is one steeped in former glory days, or at least one clinging to traditional male gender stereotypes of machismo. The one woman who is given significant visual space is Natalia Vodianova an internationally famous Russian model. She is perhaps considered the country's prime female cultural image export, or ambassador.

Representations of women in the Russian edition of *Vogue* are not overtly sexy or sexual. Women's bodies are in general clothed and 'safe'. There is also a distinct lack of powerful or creative Russian women in the pages. This contradicts Hafstede's findings that Russia is "not as overly masculine culture."

An interview of particular interest is one featuring a Russian actor Evgeny Mironov, who wears not only the international labels Dolce & Gabbana and Dior Homme by Hedi Slimane, but also sports in one shot a track suit replete with the 1980 Russian Olympic games insignia. He is captured in decidedly macho poses, displaying international savvy and local references by his clothing. Mironov is considered one of Russia's most charismatic male celebrities of the moment.

The Culture Section features a new opera from the Bolshoi – Rosental's *Children* – "a pseudo documentary story from our Soviet past, with members of the Party and their favourite composers Chaikovsky, Musorgsky, Mozart, Verdi, and Wagner." Here the past masters also are clearly presented as carrying the cultural torch for contemporary Russian society. Interestingly there is also a serious feature about xenophobia in Russian society, albeit without any accompanying images.

Advertising for local products and events is minimal. There is one ad for Russian chocolate, with the remaining ads for international brands, and a sprinkling of Russian boutiques selling international labels. The majority of the advertisements are for international luxury products using the standard international images. This probably indicates that the local (luxury) market is still underdeveloped and that the readership is focused on the promises of the main brands from the West. In general the image of Russia, as analysed in the April 2005 Russian *Vogue* is one of a country very much concerned with what's on offer in the West, while looking to its own past for a sense of identity.

### *French Vogue*

The French edition of *Vogue* generally focuses on the exterior world rather than on the local; Luxuries long associated with France, such as

in a feature on “Le Lustre du Luxe on Le Crillon hotel in Paris,” highlight international celebrities like Madonna, who stays at the hotel when visiting the capital.

There is an interview with the French author, Frédéric Beigbeder the author of *L’egoïste romantique*, which has been referred to as the male version of the English novel, *Bridget Jones diary* (an international bestseller and film). The other celebrity featured is Loulou de la Falaise – famed for her connection with YSL, and her party days at Studio 54 in New York. A feature article on the French film director Régis Wagner focuses on his film, *Man to Man*, which tells the story of two pygmies captured in Africa and bought to Scotland at the end of the 19th century. The notion of “local” in most of the examples above is largely tainted by notions of “the Local French” held by the outside world, a kind of “us looking at them looking at us.”

Advertisements in the French *Vogue* concerned with representations of “the local” are very much focused on clichéd icons of Paris. *Histoires de L’Eau d’Issey* has the perfume bottle substituting the heel of a stiletto shoe and posing as the tower, in a model of the Tour Eiffel. This ad is also appears in the British edition of *Vogue* along with numerous other French luxury brands. In the French edition, many of the local luxury brands are represented by models or actresses from elsewhere, for example, the English model Kate Moss as the face for the perfume *Coco Mademoiselle* (Chanel), and the American actress Liv Tyler for *Very Irresistible* by Givenchy.

### *British Vogue*

In the April 2005 issue of the British edition of *Vogue*, the representation of the “local” is even more infused the exotic other, than in the Russian and French editions there is also a sense of clichéd Britishness. The return to the fashion of floral decoration (long associated with a romanticised ideal of countryside England) brings back the “English Roses” and “petal power”. The *Vogue Living* section features London-based French stylist Florence Nicaise “telling Chloe Fox about hosting dinner parties with Parisian panache”.

An interesting difference to the 2005 April Russian and French editions of *Vogue* respectively is the emphasis on women achievers and women with high-powered jobs. From women with dangerous jobs in the article ‘Fear Factor’ to challenging jobs in the retail fashion sector like directors at exclusive stores like Liberty, women are portrayed as

positive, strong and financially independent. This correlates positively with Hofstede's "masculinity index", which the UK scores high on. 'In masculine countries both boys and girls learn to be ambitious and competitive.'<sup>43</sup>

Most advertisements in the British *Vogue* are foreign with the majority of luxury products being French. The mass market brand – Rimmel London – is an exception with the effervescent London "It" Girl Kate Moss as its face. Another British brand – Smeg – uses a variety of colored fridges, with one decorated entirely by the Union Jack, the epitome of British design. Another local ad is for Black Prince by Belstaff a specialist company specializing in waterproof clothing for motorcyclists. The current campaign features a mud-splattered couple embracing on a motorbike with a Union Jack sticker on the body of the bike. The Union Jack often returns as the symbol of Britain, as opposed to the French or Russian editions of *Vogue*, where national emblems are rare or do not appear at all.

In summary, while the Russian edition of *Vogue* features predominantly foreign luxury products, and its features and interviews are mostly local, notions of "local" are much more stereotypical of "French" and "British" in the French and British editions respectively, where connections with other "global" locations suggest lifestyle rather than nationhood as the differentiating factor in what constitutes the "local".

### **Representing the other**

We now turn to the question of how the luxury magazine, *Vogue* represents the Other, the exotic.<sup>44</sup> The spring/summer 2005 collections are full of ethnic looks from safari (colonialism and the wild) and sub-Saharan Africa, to Northern Africa and folkloric Europe, illustrating the fashion emphasis on the exotic Other.

#### *British Vogue*

In the British edition of *Vogue*, one fashion spread entitled, 'World Vision: the grown up approach to global style' is loosely based on ethnic influences in the fashion of the season, from gypsy, to African adventure, to "haute safari" via Navajo. The fashion editor certainly counts on a pre-conceived ideas of global expressions and a prior knowledge of

'Other' styles in the readers expected to fill in the editorial gaps. There is also a shopping feature on different global cities and their best trend-setting stores. "Fashion may well be a worldwide phenomenon but when it comes to the must-haves of the season, global tastes vary." The notion of exoticism is very tied into a globalised world that is accessible to the British shopper, a world where different cultures are easily traded both abroad with all the benefits of citizenship of a current world power and within cosmopolitan London.

There is also a feature about how Irish singer Bono and his wife Ali have joined with designer Rogan Gregory to create a fashion line that will be made from organic fabrics from Peru and Turkey with a sustainable agenda. The Irish countryside where the interview takes place, and specifically Bono and Ali's property, is represented as having mysterious Otherness "that ethereal feel, with the mist and the moss and rocks. It's definitely otherworldly..."

Otherworldliness is also captured in the advertising for Hermès, the French luxury brand featuring a campaign for a silk scarf 'Le monde est un fleuve' complete with a map of the world. The Italian fashion house Valentino presents a model with a baby zebra for their African inspired collection. The spirit of different places is very much part of the British imagination, as is of course the acceptability of exotic products. The British *Vogue* reader can still bask in the last of the sun's rays over the British Empire.

### *Russian Vogue*

In the Russian edition of *Vogue*, the themes of the month's articles are all based on travels to exotic locations especially those associated with the fashionable looks of the season: India, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Wild West, Hawaii, Africa, the Greek Islands, Asia and folkloric Europe. The editor's Letter translated at the back of the edition sums up the attitude to the exotic: "*Countries of blazing heat where skin colour graduates from dark olive to bitter chocolate, where white Europeans get special reception...*" Long ostracized by their country's communist ascetics and outsider status in Europe, Russian *Vogue* readers are now given an opportunity to be part of the West.

There is a story of a certain Sheikh Majed discussing life in the hot, exotic Eastern countries of India and China. He questions the nature of exoticism and argues that for some people – like those living in the East – Russia too is an exotic land with the cold, the Kremlin etc., even

though Russians themselves might not recognize this. The exotic East is also the perfect destination for the wealthy Russians reading *Vogue*. The feature has an almost educational tone to it; politely informing readers of what's on offer elsewhere.

The fashion pages in this edition, like the features, go back through time and different eras, including the British photographer Norman Parkinson's iconographic 1975 shot of Jerry Hall in a modest bathing suit on a Soviet-style sculptured platform. In the Russian *Vogue*, there are no bared breasts and the amount of flesh bared is minimal.

Advertisements in the Russian *Vogue* are almost entirely from the West and include all the cultural baggage implied for the former Soviet nation. Everything that has a brand name and is luxurious comes from elsewhere. The advertisement for Burberry Brit perfume has the Burberry print on the umbrella and scarf of what looks like a typical British girl in front of a Rolls Royce with an English bobby (policeman) looking into the car. Another Burberry ad in the magazine features British "It" girl Kate Moss in an English park setting. The Channel advertisement in this Russian *Vogue* features a model with the famous quilted bag and a photo of Place Vendome as a reference to luxury Paris. All ads feature strong icons of 'chic' from abroad. Otherness appears to be a shifting state in this edition of Russian *Vogue*, sometimes the West is the Other (luxury only comes from the West), while sometimes it is the Exotic East ('Countries of blazing heat... where white Europeans get special reception').

### *French Vogue*

In the French edition of *Vogue* the exotic other is focused on two cultures, America and Asia. American culture is portrayed as one global centre of relaxed cool with equally cool and relaxed personalities with a feature on a tailor "Thom Browne (qui) garde son cool très américain et pousse le classique jusqu'à l'excentricité" and LA's Cameron Silver 'culte' vintage dresser to the Hollywood stars. There is also a page devoted to Halston, the American designer who dressed and associated with the jet-set and the glory days of Studio 54.

Asia is another theme in French *Vogue*, which gives a taste of the Other. The Japanese beauty routine – skin cleansing – is the focus of the beauty section. In the fashion pages, there is also an Asian influence: "L'Emprise de sens." These images present a Western model together with an Asian model, engaging in a series of pseudo-lesbian poses – a

flirtation between East and West – but the Western women keeps her clothes on and appears to be in control, while the Asian model is bare breasted and seemingly submissive.

Generally the visual content of French *Vogue* is highly sexualised with lots of nipples and even public hair in the magazine's fashion photography. A comparison the German sport shoe brand Puma exposes fundamental differences. In the French *Vogue* the ad for Puma shows a young girl in 'sporting' clothes lying on what looks to be a hotel bed. In the English *Vogue* on the other hand, the people wearing Puma are a group of New-Age travellers playing with sporting equipment. Both ads appear in the same month, but create different meanings for the brand. The one used for the French market is highly sexualised, while the other one used for the British market depicts the eccentricity of the British.

If we look at Hofstede's "masculinity – femininity" scores, Russia and France both score significantly lower than Britain on "masculinity". "Masculinity" pertains to societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct; femininity pertains to societies in which social gender roles overlap.<sup>45</sup>) This indicates that the attitude towards sex displayed in the British *Vogue* is more likely to objectify and position women in defined gender stereotypes, then for example the French edition. However, this is clearly not the case, and obviously other cultural values come into play here.

### **Tone and authority**

In a classroom situation, when comparing the tone of a text may illustrate attitudes to authority in the dominant cultural patterns but often leaves more questions open than answered.

British *Vogue* stands out for its authoritarian tone in comparison to the magazine's Russian and French editions. In the "*Vogue Shops*" section, collage-style theme pages appear with directives such as "The Look," "What to Wear," and "How to," Telling readers how to do certain fashion looks. Britain has a fairly low "power distance" rating and a high individualism rating according to Hofstede. Critical readers can probably deflect these directives immediately. On the other hand, with its history of class division, the "need-to-know" etiquette may be more important than in France or Russia. Furthermore, Britain ranks higher in "individualism" than either France or Russia, and thus,



adherence to group membership is perhaps somewhat illusive. A quick look at Amazon.co.uk reveals 4061 books relating to the keyword 'Etiquette' which indicates somewhat clearly the country's obsession with aspiration and behavior.

However perhaps the real essence of authority in the sense of Hofstede's interpretation of "power distance" is evidenced in the absence or presence of an editor-in-chief, and whether the editor's top position is displayed in an editorial page, or rather obscured in team work. An editors note is absent in the British *Vogue*, as opposed to the Russian and French editions, which openly present their editors. This supports Hofstede's findings that Britain has the lowest power distance in comparison to France and much lower than Russia. However, the UK has a much higher "masculinity" score, which fosters appreciation for the individual's success in society.

The overall tone of the French *Vogue* is much more suggestive than that of the other two countries presented here. The collage-style pages are evocative, rather than commanding line as in the British edition. The four French collage-pages feature the "Happy Hippie" with images from the hippy era and the contemporary incarnation. "La Hippie attitude est un kaléidoscope de matières et de couleurs juxtaposes." The French readers are presented with inspirations rather than instructions.

In the Russian *Vogue*, the equivalent 'Style' pages are also much more suggestive than directive. Once again, there is a general theme like India, Gipsies (sic) and Africa. The headings are in English, while the body of the text is in Russian, suggesting a readership with an international outlook.

### **Social identity**

Identity in a globalizing world is said to form a shifting, ever-changing, complex paradigm.<sup>46</sup> Within fashion, many types of identities may be distinguished, namely 'personal', 'cultural', 'social', 'fashion', 'brand', 'national', 'international', etc. Personal identity is said to be one, of the problems of modernity. This implies that it is equally true that the fashion industries are deeply implicated in the manufacture of personality. Fashion provides a short-cut by which we enter another identity and join a subculture that insulates us from contamination from other styles<sup>47</sup>. Social identity can be used to elicit, channel, and assimilate fashion's code modifications.<sup>48</sup> Similar to social identity, brand identity is not always clear-cut, it is rather dependent on its country of origin.

Having analysed some of the *Vogue* features we may ask ourselves what type of identity, if any, do *Vogue* readers share across the globe? Do they share an identity? Does the meaning of this identity vary from country to country? Is, for example, the Indonesian woman buying *Vogue* in Jakarta dressed, and more importantly, feeling similarly to the English buyer in London? Further cross-cultural consumer research may aid us in finding some answers.

### **Reflecting on the findings**

Representation of the body in different issues of *Vogue* testifies to the fact that even in the marketing of the body as in advertisements, *Vogue* does not shed the ethnic and racial identities specific to the respective countries' readership. Body decorations, such as the use of jewellery, body art, piercing and tattooing is also nationally or ethnically specific. Remarkably, comparing different editions of *Vogue* we discovered that the ideas of what is truly feminine or masculine vary, although slightly, depending on the country of issue. In our study of *Vogue* we discovered that some editions are more prone to presenting gender and sexuality as constructions rather than inborn essences.

The problem with such analysis is the fact that it is not based on public opinion polls, but rather on magazines readership polls. The readership of international fashion magazines represents a certain target group which is normally not the same as the average citizen. The readers of fashion magazines are culturally Western-oriented, economically relatively well-to-do, and socially quite liberated by comparison with the majorities of their own countries and less westernized societies.

It is indeed attractive for the industry professionals to present culture as possibly explainable and, above all, measurable. Measurability could make cross-cultural encounters somewhat more predictable, and thus assure success of a foreign venture. Hofstede's cultural dimensions are much loved by organizational and marketing social scientists. And yet, the elusive, 'soft' aspects of culture – now you see it, now you don't phenomenon, complexity and diversity of sub-groups within a 'culture' make us weary of the fact that we should be cautious not to generalize about all cultural and national values.

Our article only proves that such pitfalls are almost inherent in the project of intercultural comparison of global products. But the fact remains that there is still something, which researchers will consistently

find when studying a global or international product in different local contexts – cultural variations which can hardly be accounted for by mere chance.

## Notes

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<sup>3</sup> Davis, Fred, 'Clothing and Fashion as Communication' In *Psychology of Fashion*, ed. R. Solomon (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1985), 15–28.

<sup>4</sup> Kawamura (2005), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Bruzzi, Stella. and Gibson, Pamela Church (2000) 'Introduction' In *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*. ed. S. Bruzzi and P. C. Gibson. (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Davis, Fred, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, Michel, "Body/Power." Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977 by Michel Foucault. ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. 55–62.

<sup>8</sup> Balsamo, Anne, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women* (Duke University Press, 1995), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Mead, Margaret, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Dell, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Mead, Margaret, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: Morrow, 1935).

<sup>12</sup> Spiro, Melford, *Gender and Culture: Kibbutz Women Revisited* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> For extended commentary of this case, see Glenn Wilson, *The Great Sex Divide*, pp. 63–66. (London, Peter Owen, 1989); Scott-Townsend (Washington D.C.) 1992 (also available on <http://www.heretical.com/wilson/rkibbutz.html>).

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- <sup>23</sup> Appadurai reflects on the case of popularity of American pop songs in the Philippines, while Americans themselves have abandoned this music years ago.
- <sup>24</sup> Appadurai, Arjun, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *The Anthropology of Globalization*, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo (Blackwell, 2002), 49.
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- <sup>32</sup> McDowell, Colin, *Fashion Today* (Phaidon Press Ltd, 2003).
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- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, xi.
- <sup>35</sup> Williamson, Judith, *Decoding Advertisements* (London: Marion Boyars, 2002).
- <sup>36</sup> Wood, Jennifer and Barney Allan, *Everything You Want: Understanding Consumers, Brands and Communications* (Capstone Publishing Ltd., 2003).
- <sup>37</sup> Roberts, K., *Leisure in Contemporary Society* (CABI Publishing, Wallingford, 1999).
- <sup>38</sup> Hofstede, Geert (2003) *Cultures and Organisations* (London: Profile Books, 2003), 251.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 113
- <sup>40</sup> Any comparative scores from Hofstede used in this paper were sourced online from: [http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede\\_dimensions.php?culture1=73&culture2=33](http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_dimensions.php?culture1=73&culture2=33)
- <sup>41</sup> Hofstede, Geert, *Cultures and Organisations* (London: Profile Books, 2003), 4.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 251.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 89.
- <sup>44</sup> Said (1978).
- <sup>45</sup> Hofstede (2003), 82–83.
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