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Always in with the In-Crowd: *Vogue* and the Cultural Politics of Gender, Race, Class and Taste

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The venerable fashion magazine *Vogue* has always associated itself with the interests of the ruling class, through the cultural and symbolic capital exhibited by the diffused aesthetic of its fashion spreads and through its unabashed attachment to the (white) scions of aristocracy as employees and the *haute monde* of celebrity culture as interviewees. *Vogue* is both cutting edge and deeply conservative in its articulation of fashion discourse, and the intersections of gender, class, race, taste, power and publicity are constantly reimagined and remediated to sustain its prestigious position as the world's leading fashion magazine with a strong pedigree. It is adept at responding to new inflections of power, at adapting to 'new times' and at transforming itself for new audiences while retaining its core loyalties. In this chapter I explore the relationship between *Vogue*, gender, race and class power in relation to the magazine's recent historic appointment of a black male editor and the scandal that this provoked around its track record of privileging whiteness. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's (1993a, 1993b) ideas, I consider the case in relation to the history of the magazine in the UK and to fashion as a site in which tensions around identity, culture and power are articulated and, ultimately, exposed.

'My *Vogue* is about being inclusive, it's about diversity'

In April 2017 British *Vogue* announced the appointment of its new editor, Edward Enninful, a black British fashion writer and stylist of Ghanaian heritage, who was at that point creative director of the US-based style magazine, *W*.[1] Enninful was following in the footsteps of Alexandra Shulman, who had successfully helmed *Vogue* for more than twenty-five years and whose departure came as something of a surprise to the fashion establishment despite her long tenure. Her career at *Vogue* had been marked by a notable expansion of the magazine's appeal to a wider demographic through the incorporation of popular culture and celebrity lifestyle content.[2] She also accelerated the magazine's promotion of star models such as Kate Moss, whose cockney-bohemian image seemed to capture the mood, first of 1990s 'Britpop' culture and even early Blairism, and later of the Cameronian 'demotic Toryism' that dominated British popular media in the years between 2010 and 2016.[3] Shulman successfully engineered *Vogue*'s modernisation during this

period, retaining its commitment to elite fashion while also positioning the magazine within the hegemonic discourse of an expanded meritocracy that dominated popular media culture during the economically stable decade of 1997–2007, and did not fully exhaust itself until the impact of austerity in the years after 2012.

Enninful's appointment was in some ways unsurprising, coming in the wake of growing pressures on the globalised fashion industry and its media ancillaries to better reflect and celebrate diversity and social complexity. As a black Briton who had grown up in London, he came to fashion consciousness as a teenager having been 'discovered' on the London Tube by the modelling scout Simon Foxton, and ~~who~~ had then insouciantly taken on the role of fashion director at the hipster magazine *i-D* at the tender age of 18 before moving to New York and *W* – Enninful seemed made for the role. His credentials encompassed both a degree of 'street credibility' conferred by his background, and an appropriately US-focused cosmopolitanism suited to *Vogue*'s profile as a grand-but-still-hip Anglo-American fashion bible.

Indeed, as Joanne Entwistle and Agnes Rocamora make clear in their study of London Fashion Week, 'perform[ing] effectively within any field one needs to have accumulated the appropriate capital and mastered the field's habitus' (2006: 739). Enninful successfully demonstrated his capacity to perform within the 'fashion field', to demonstrate his accumulation of cultural capital and familiarity with fashion's habitus and, importantly, he showed that he could contribute to the reconstruction of the field for new times. Enninful was already a well-known figure among the fashion elite before his *Vogue* appointment, having used his role at *W* magazine to build a public profile. His appointment as British *Vogue*'s first black, and indeed first male, editor served to herald a shift in the magazine's identity towards a more culturally inclusive profile while maintaining its alignment with the market exclusivity of high fashion.[4]

Enninful's appointment generated acres of media coverage, not only in the fashion press, but also across the mainstream print media. Profiles, interviews, articles and commentaries proliferated, all focusing largely on his racial background and the distinction that this conferred within the predominantly white world of high fashion. Enninful himself appeared keen to acknowledge and enjoy the publicity that his new job generated. In an interview with the BBC reported in the London *Evening Standard* in November 2017, he is quoted as saying:

> My *Vogue* is about being inclusive, it's about diversity. Showing different women, different body shapes, different races, class. To be tackling gender . . . You are going to see all different colours, shapes, ages, genders, religions. That I am very excited about. You are going to see less of models who don't look so healthy. (Davis 2017)

Indeed, there can be little doubt that the appointment was geared to a reinvention of *Vogue* at a point when the circulation of the 'glossies' – fashion and women's magazines with high production values and a strong emphasis on escapist forms of luxury consumerism – was in freefall, challenged by the rapid growth of free online content during the 2000s, including fashion and lifestyle blogs by 'influencers' whose power had begun to rival that of the traditional fashion editor. As *Vogue* saw its legitimacy start to wane, the need for a shake-up became clear.

The Grande Dame of Modernity

Vogue navigates the relations between femininity, taste, class and modernity with some aplomb. Originally established in the US in 1892 as a weekly paper, *Vogue* soon changed to a monthly magazine explicitly targeted at New York high society with an emphasis on fashion and social and leisure activities. Its British offshoot was first published in 1916 as a consequence of shipping restrictions during the First World War, and rapidly assumed a distinctive identity and readership of its own, with a blend of fashion, arts, travel and lifestyle journalism. Alongside other fashion magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, *Vogue* established itself as geared to a 'modern' woman who was financially and socially independent. Unlike more domestically focused magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, which offered advice and 'helpful tips' on running a home and rearing children, *Vogue* always positioned its imaginary reader as already possessing high levels of social and cultural capital – a woman for whom the importance of good taste and stylish living was axiomatic. *Vogue* has thus rarely acknowledged the work of femininity other than in its most culturally valorised form: as the beautification of the self and of the private sphere, and as the aestheticisation of the public realm through fashion as art. Its 'glossy' format – printed on high gloss paper with a focus on strong images rather than text – has always also aligned *Vogue* to a culture in which high end consumerism blends into style as a way of life.

As Margaret Beetham (1996: 90–1) points out in her history of women's magazines, from the outset, it 'produced a femininity which was both class- and status-specific *and* available to the aspirational reader, whoever she was . . . [*Vogue*'s] style of life was an aspiration or even a fantasy'. Sustaining the gauzy threads between these potentially contradictory elements has been essential. Crucially, the magazine has always been adept at responding to new inflections of power and at transforming itself for new audiences while retaining its readership base. *Vogue* epitomises what Alison Light (1991: *passim*) has called conservative modernity, a frame of consciousness or even a 'structure of feeling', in Raymond Williams's (1981) phrase, in which the gloss of newness is tempered by the desire for continuity.

The British edition of *Vogue* is both cutting edge and deeply conservative in its articulation of fashion discourse. As Angela McRobbie (1998) – drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu – has shown, British fashion is split between the idea of fashion as 'art' and the more prosaic model of fashion as a 'rag trade'. Designers aspire to the former and to the cultural status that it bestows. *Vogue* saw its role as the canonical text of fashion as art, successfully presenting itself as the arbiter of good taste and skilfully blending fashion with a more 'serious' focus on the arts, reportage and lifestyle material. It is renowned for using (and indeed establishing) leading photographers and writers, and runs an annual talent competition for the latter, from which a number of its own writers have been recruited, including British *Vogue*'s editor between 1988 and 1992, Liz Tilberis. The magazine's longevity, combined with this carefully cultivated reputation, have helped to ensure it has remained the Grande Dame of glossies. For this reason, *Vogue* editors and contributors have had an unusually high public profile, helping to sustain the magazine's status and power.

During the 1940s *Vogue* helped foster the career of the war photographer (and erstwhile fashion model) Lee Miller, and its editors have all been strong-minded, independent women, often claiming to have feminist principles. For example, Beatrix

Miller (only ever known as 'Miss Miller' to her staff), edited the magazine throughout the 1960s and up until 1984, and was a self-appointed ambassador for the British fashion industry, receiving a CBE for her efforts. Its most famous editor-in-chief is probably Anna Wintour, however, whose rigorous commitment to a glacial personal style and espousal of conservative modernity was reputedly given homage in David Frankel's feature film *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006). Alexandra Shulman has also been widely regarded as one of *Vogue*'s most important successors to Miller, sustaining the magazine's profile and, as noted above, building an extended readership. Perhaps Shulman's most interesting innovation was to create commemorative or collectible issues of the magazine, thus cementing its cultural significance, most notably the spectacular 'gold' and 'silver' millennium issues that appeared in December 1999 and 2000.[5] Shulman was also skilled at maintaining *Vogue*'s relationship with the ruling class, both in its traditional aristocratic form and in the newer, high bourgeois elements (lawyers, doctors, PR and advertising professionals) that now dominate Britain's somewhat fractured but still robust social hierarchy. The magazine's early role as a house journal for metropolitan high society was considerably extended and adjusted throughout the twentieth century as various social waves and transformations (from the Second World War through the 1960s 'youthquake' and beyond) rendered the British class system more porous. By the 1990s, however, the magazine had to calibrate its relationship with an expanded middle-class readership of economically independent working women due to the potential threat posed by rival 'glossies' such as *Elle* and, later, *Grazia* and the emergence of gossip and celebrity magazines.[6] Shulman steered a course in which *Vogue*'s tacit endorsement of consumer feminism (made easier by its disengagement from domestic topics) was balanced by its endorsement of upper-class privilege and an *ancien régime*.

The monarchy had always been a favoured subject, but Shulman enthusiastically continued the tradition of often fawning features on the female members of the Royal family, climaxing in the 'Royal Salute' issue in 2001, which featured Kate Moss with a tilted crown and brandishing a sceptre on *Vogue*'s glossy cover, together with a portfolio of royal photographs through the ages inside. In addition, Diana, Princess of Wales appeared twice on the cover during Shulman's tenure, and was followed by Lady Helen Taylor in August 2000 and by the Duchess of Cambridge in June 2016; the issue seen as Shulman's triumphant valediction.

Yet *Vogue* was always careful to balance its monarchism with politics. During Tony Blair's period as British prime minister between 1997 and 2007 he, and especially wife Cherie, a leading lawyer and controversial figure, were given equally flattering coverage, often of a kind not offered elsewhere in the popular media. This was never a matter of the magazine endorsing a specific political party or policy, but rather of *Vogue*'s discursive relationship with power itself. Later, the Blairs' successors David and Samantha Cameron were the subject of similarly gushing endorsements, particularly the latter due to her established connections with the fashion business as an employee of Smythson, the upmarket leather brand. In a queasily adulatory *Vogue* interview from January 2017, for example, Christa D'Souza (2017) quite shamelessly promoted Cameron's new fashion line, Cefinn, and then Cameron herself as the epitome of modern – working, driven, 'completely equal to her husband' – femininity, notwithstanding her profoundly privileged upbringing. In such features, the intersections of gender, class, race, taste and publicity in high fashion's relationship with power are

completely naturalised. Indeed, the version of 'modern' femininity privileged by such articles is a powerful articulation of neoliberal ideology; its emphasis on 'empowerment', 'choice' and personal agency, and on self-management and self-discipline as a necessary component of female fulfilment is striking. Just as Cameron's husband promoted such values as public policy through his premiership, she is called on to embody them at a personal level. As Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff point out, under neoliberalism and postfeminism, 'women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen' (2011: 7). We might add that it is the job of *Vogue* and other glossy women's magazines to present these imperatives rather than those of domesticity or motherhood as fundamental to the middle-class woman's economic and social success and her personal happiness and fulfilment.[7]

Savagery, 'Street', Exoticism: Visual Style and the Black *Vogue* Model

And yet high fashion glossy magazines are also a form of popular art. Often deploying a modernist aesthetic in which the fashion is partially subsumed within the wider artistic vision of photographer or stylist, the glossies do not present themselves as selling clothes so much as selling a cultural ideal. The interview with Samantha Cameron was both a puff piece for her clothes brand and an endorsement of her taste. Details of décor, food and music preferences are dropped into the article, ostensibly as 'local colour', but the relentless brand naming suggests that this is also part of the quasi-commercial promotion of a particular taste formation.

This creation of an idealised lifestyle extends to the fashion spreads themselves. Glossy fashion shoots always have a 'story', one in which the model is set against a series of backdrops which construct a narrative into which the reader may insert herself. *Vogue*'s stories invariably privilege upmarket (and aspirational) urban settings such as luxury hotels and architecturally striking buildings, or exotic adventures in India, Africa or South America, in which the model is a cultured and sophisticated traveller, never a dumb tourist, and various kinds of ironic slumming, in which the model implausibly scoffs greasy burgers in a seedy relic of 1930s Americana, or is posed against a bleakly picturesque urban landscape. These images invite an appreciation not simply of the clothes but of the composition and form of the image. In other words, they require a high level of traditional forms of cultural capital to be legible. Indeed, the human models who carry the meanings, aspirations and desires connoted by such images are themselves often anonymous, valued in this context for their chameleon qualities and ability to take on different and temporary personas. As Myra Macdonald observes, 'as a spectacular icon, carrying none of her own meaning, the supermodel [in these images] is supremely postmodern. As part of a transitory spectacle which momentarily seizes our restless attention and then disappears . . . the excess and extravagance of her presentation tell us she is a simulacrum' (1995: 112).

In fact, *Vogue* was one of the last of the glossies to name the models in its fashion shoots. Until 2001, the photographer and stylist received credits, the model did not; she was effectively treated as simply one beautiful object among many to be manipulated by the 'real' (usually male) creative artists involved. This, despite the fact that

in other sections of the magazine *Vogue* had enthusiastically endorsed the growth of a celebrity culture around the supermodels of the 1990s, actively encouraging their claims to agency and the extension and monetisation of their individual 'brands'. Such contradictions perhaps capture the way that *Vogue* has always attempted to balance its supposedly high-minded commitment to fashion as art in one corner, while simultaneously vigorously supporting a culture of excessive consumption (and often vulgarity) in another.

Until the 2010s the presence of women of BAME heritage in *Vogue* and indeed other glossies was confined largely to these fashion spreads, which are, of course, in some ways the defining purpose of such magazines. Here, black models featured alongside their white counterparts, although they were also used much less frequently and the range of meanings associated with the manner and style in which they were presented was often highly charged in overtly racialised ways. Black lives, experiences, identities remained largely subordinated. Cosmetics and beauty features rarely included items on products geared to black or dark complexions, for example, except as a 'special focus', thus reaffirming white hegemony and black exceptionalism.

Historically, fashion's mobilisation of black culture and style has also been profoundly problematic. It has tended to foreground three discursive articulations: savagery, 'street' style, and exoticism. The first iteration can be traced back well beyond contemporary fashion to 1920s modernism and the 'discovery' of African art by Western aesthetes. This led to a mania for 'primitive' or 'tribal' cultural forms, from the genuine to the ersatz. Prompted in part by the postwar fashion for psychoanalysis and the impact of the first wave of jazz – a powerful synthesis of African and European music traditions – African art was embraced as both psychologically authentic in expression and as excitingly savage in style, in contrast to the restraint and romanticism of Western traditions. The connection between the aesthetic fetishisation of savagery and fashion was thus mediated by the fashion magazines and their preoccupation with modernity.

Artists, writers and, indeed, fashion designers, developed a fascination with the racist idea of Africa as both unknowable – the 'dark continent' – and as the repository for the Id, Sigmund Freud's term for the instinctual, basic drives for pleasure and gratification that dominate the unconscious. African clothing styles were raided and reframed for Western fashion: 'tribal' costumes of feathers, hair, beads, masks and headdresses were used to signify the freeing up of the inner self, the refusal of Western cultural norms, and the taking on of new and exotic identities. From the 1920s through the hippy styles of the late 1960s, which used the 'primitivism' of Native American dress to signify authenticity and the rejection of Western conformity, to the use of African animal prints in more recent fashion to suggest untameable sexuality, Western fashion has both appropriated the 'other' and shaped it to fit white cultural expectations.

Incredibly, the use of African or 'tribal' references to connote savagery remains a thematic trope in contemporary fashion. Anjali Vats (2014) points out that Alexander McQueen's oeuvre contained frequent uses of such elements, here presented as a commentary on white beauty and style traditions, but still deploying the same tropes of savagery to do so:

> [B]eneath the thin veneer of multicultural celebration and hip intellectualism, McQueen's designs are more concerned with appropriating oddities, stereotypes,

> and wild animals and placing them in a new and Western-appropriate context than any real and substantial engagement with race. (Vats 2014: 113)

The second key way in which black models appear in high fashion imagery is in material that claims to explore urban fashion or 'street style'. Such features draw on the resistant and iconoclastic genres of anti-fashion associated with youth subcultures and club cultures. The centrality of black subcultural forms to these became newly prominent in the 1980s, popularised initially by *The Face*, the ground-breaking style magazine launched by Neville Brody in 1980, and later by *i-D*, where Edward Enninful also learned his trade. These features are analogous to, and indeed often draw on the way that vernacular terms for black music – 'cool', 'hip', 'bad' – have been incorporated into mainstream, primarily white, culture as signifiers of a raw authenticity. Such references associate urban space with glamorised violence, gang rivalries and illicit entrepreneurship. These articulations form a striking contrast with more traditional high fashion references to the city as a site of civilised leisure and the flâneur.

Street style can, moreover, be an extension of the savagery discourse. It is grounded in genres of masculine dress that often exaggerate and parody conventional white good taste. Originating in the 1940s 'Zoot suits' associated with African-American communities in Harlem and Chicago, later iterations have included the 'Super Dude' styles seen in 1970s blaxploitation movies, featuring ultra-sharp tailoring, bright checks and strong colours which deliberately contrasted with the grey formality of middle-class white male dress. In the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of sports clothing alongside rap and hip-hop culture similarly dominated street fashion, again utilising exaggerated shapes in the form of baggy sports pants and oversized track tops. Since the early 2000s, street style has become an increasingly central strand in fashion's discourse, with the focus not on the distinction of specific outfits but rather on the distinction of specific brands – the new signifiers of authentic taste and insider knowledge. The use of street style in the glossy magazines has inevitably involved a feminisation and recuperation of its oppositional tropes and the forced association of streetwear with upmarket brands, however paradoxical this appears. It remains, nevertheless, overwhelmingly associated with black bodies and urban spaces, even when these are those of 'ordinary' people captured by photographers seeking inspiration from the pavements of central London.

The third trope is that of the 'exotic'. This too overlaps with 'savagery', but its use in high fashion is also linked to the way that black models are cast for shoots which foreground a highly aestheticised body as part of the *mise en scène* as opposed to shoots which use the body as a more neutral coat hanger for the clothing. In these spreads, the bodies of black models are heavily objectified, transformed into visually striking instruments of display which may be fragmented, distorted or dehumanised by the photographer's art. For example, a fashion spread from British *Vogue*'s July 2018 issue, 'Amazing Grace', shot in black and white to accentuate its stylisation of bodies, featured primarily black models posed against a stark white backdrop, heavily shadowed and with their faces obscured by giant sized hats and sunglasses (*Vogue* July 2018: 192–5). The images are arresting but clearly do not promote the clothes so much as an aesthetic in which models are little more than interesting and visually striking shapes.

Indeed, this exoticisation extends even to the way that established black models are represented more widely. Alek Wek, a Sudanese-British model has become famous

for supposedly being the first model to be valued for her 'African' facial features. Wek's impact on the industry was even described by Louette Harding (2007) of the *Daily Mail* as being due to 'an uncompromising, sub-Saharan beauty . . . her industry saw her as new and exotic – *a savage beauty*' (my italics). The ideological loading of this description is extraordinary. Wek's round face and wide eyes do not remotely conform to anything savage unless we are to assume that blackness by definition equals savagery (which, presumably, Harding did). As with my earlier examples, fashion discourse's coding of blackness invariably returns it to the realm of the 'other', even when it believes that it is doing something more liberating.

'I haven't got a racist bone in my body': the Shulman Scandal

In August 2014, the British newspaper *The Guardian* ran an article by Tansy Hoskins (2014) pointing out that the UK edition of *Vogue* had not run a solo image of a black model on its cover since 2002 when Naomi Campbell was its star. Black models had been included in ensemble groups, but none had been featured in their own right. Hoskins went on to describe the interventions being made by models themselves into what they regarded as institutional racism in fashion more generally, including an open letter from three leading models, Naomi Campbell herself, Iman and Bethann Hardison, calling out the industry. They were, Hoskins reported, particularly angered by the attitude of *Vogue*'s editorial team led by Alexandra Shulman, who was asked why Jourdan Dunn, a black British model with a growing international reputation, had never appeared on the front cover of *Vogue*.

Shulman's response was that: 'We have put Beyoncé and Rihanna on the cover of *Vogue* and at least half our covers do not feature models. We love Jourdan Dunn and she was the cover star of the last *Miss Vogue* which previously had featured Cara Delevingne.' This suggested that somehow the celebrities were preventing Shulman from putting a leading black British model on the front cover of the leading British fashion magazine. Yet Kate Moss had featured on three *Vogue* covers in 2014 alone and continues to be the magazine's favourite. Campbell retorted by tweeting a group photograph of the *Vogue* editorial team under Shulman's stewardship in 2017 – an entirely white group. Not only that, the core team included a host of privileged 'Sloane-y' women (that is, female members of the upper classes and aristocracy whose base reputedly centres on Sloane Square in Chelsea), whose habitus was unlikely to encompass the kind of 'street' culture that *Vogue* finds fascinating. It featured Emily Sheffield, the sister of Samantha Cameron, who is also the daughter of a baronet.

Shortly after Enninful's appointment was announced, Shulman was interviewed for *The Guardian* by Decca Aitkenhead (2017) about her career at *Vogue*, and her attitudes towards racism and class privilege were made clear, albeit unwittingly to the woman herself, who claimed not to understand the basis of Campbell's criticisms. She defended veiled comments that she had made about the future of fashion journalism as not 'being photographed in a series of designer clothes with a roster of famous friends' – an observation widely believed to be a swipe at Enninful's glamorous lifestyle. When pressed on her apparent reluctance to put black models on the *Vogue* cover, she fell back on the 'some of my best friends are black' argument (actually, it was that 'my son's grandfather, Robert Spike, was one of the civil rights leaders. So it's very offensive to me and my family, the idea that I'm racist'), and went on to

bluster that she 'didn't believe in quotas' so could not be expected to keep a tally of the number of black people that she employed or featured in the magazine. She also insisted that she 'hadn't got a racist bone in my body'.

This train wreck of an interview led to a scandal insofar as Shulman's words were widely reported and became the fulcrum for a spate of critical articles on the fashion industry. It was not simply revealing about Shulman's lack of self-awareness; it was important because it uncovered the extreme tensions around the way a culture of privilege at *Vogue* had been forced up against the economic imperative to change or perish. The decline of the glossy magazine among its traditional readership base, together with the increasing dominance of online content and changing demographics were forcing *Vogue* to modernise again. This time, it would have to work harder to reimagine and remediate the intersectional relations of gender, race and class.

The December issue(s): Enninful Takes Charge

Enninful's much awaited first issue came in December 2017. The cover featured a huge close-up image of the mixed-race model Adwoa Aboah, her head clad in an African-style turban, her face brightly made-up in jewel-like colours reminiscent of the 1970s – and presumably intended to deliberately invoke that decade's use of 'exotic' black models in an earlier iteration of glossy bohemianism. The main strapline beneath Aboah's face simultaneously celebrated and challenged patriotic sensibilities with its statement: 'Great Britain' (*Vogue* December 2017: front cover).

Alongside the main image, further strap-lines simply listed the (impressive) line-up of contributors and featured individuals, which was equally diverse, including Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London; Salman Rushdie, the Indian-born novelist and leading postmodernist; the black British filmmaker Steve McQueen; the venerable actress and ex-Labour MP Glenda Jackson; and the ubiquitous (and it seems obligatory) Kate Moss. This multi-ethnic mix of people from the worlds of literature, film, politics and culture alongside the more expected fashion designers and models suggested that Enninful's vision for the magazine was an expanded and inclusive one. Shulman before him had modernised *Vogue* by incorporating elements of 1990s Britpop, Britart and lifestyle features, including a food column by the emergent star of modern conservative femininity, the 'domestic goddess' Nigella Lawson. But she had also carefully curated its status as the UK's leading 'fashion bible'. Enninful was signalling his determination to foreground multiculturalism and diversity in a revamped vision of a British meritocracy.

In addition to its deliberately iconoclastic front cover, Enninful's first issue contained a letter from the new editor that proclaimed his diversity manifesto:

> I hope you will be as gratified as I am to note how many of the amazing names featured on these pages didn't necessarily begin their lives here, or were perhaps born into families who emigrated here a generation or two ago (like my own). Regardless of where they were born or how they got here, however, they all share huge pride in their homeland, with an outlook that is pleasingly global. (*Vogue*, December 2017: 24)

These words, presumably intended as a shot across the bows, are in fact not particularly radical. Indeed, in some ways they simply rearticulate the ideology of inclusivity and diversity that has long been hegemonic in the largely (if frequently superficially) liberal domain of the arts and culture.[8] Fashion is nothing if not good at identifying what is 'in', after all, and deference to the principles of liberal values and inclusivity have been central to the fashion world's idea of itself for at least five decades, shaping the way it positioned itself at the centre of the twentieth century's youth and countercultures, for example. High fashion, and *Vogue* especially, deftly appropriated the style of such cultures and reworked them for an elite market, colluding with the designers and marketers whose brands sold a sanitised image of rebellion back to the public as exclusive style statements.[9] As Parmentier and Fischer point out:

> [T]he fashion system regularly appropriates style innovations resulting from consumer identity play, both producers and consumers have restrictions on their power in the face of fashion's incessant need for newness and its relentless production of obsolescence. To the extent that end-consumers have scope for agency over their practices and identity projects, it rests in their choice of rejecting dominant discourses. (2011: 9)

It has been the job of the fashion press to legitimate this process by removing the rough edges of working-class resistance and adding the gilt of class aspiration together with the gingerbread of patriotic cheerleading, all in the name of democratising style. Enninful added to this a much more overt assertion of a liberal-pluralist ideology.

What *was* radical here, then, was to see these tendencies presented as the blueprint for *Vogue*'s future. Yet Enninful was also careful to emphasise that inclusivity worked both ways; it was about bringing new people into the magazine but also ensuring that some of the 'old guard' would not be left out in the cold. His new team actually included quite a lot of the old team, or certainly those who had been around *Vogue* for a number of years. Grace Coddington, Venetia Scott and Juergen Teller had all been regular contributors during Shulman's tenure, and were here listed as important to the revamped magazine's modernisation, notwithstanding their relationship with its earlier iteration. As he pointed out, 'Our mission statement was to bring you an old friend with a fresh face' (*Vogue* December 2017: 24).

Enninful went on to garland his first choice of cover girl with high praise:

> I only ever had one woman in mind. I've known the soon-to-be supermodel and activist Adwoa Aboah since she was a child. Elite but accessible, uptown yet downtown, high fashion but street smart – with her digital forum Gurls Talk, Adwoa is also leading the fashion conversation for women into the modern era. (Ibid.: 25)

Yet a note of extreme caution should be added to these effusions. Despite her African name and Ghanaian heritage, Adwoa Aboah is by no means a straightforward outsider to the fashion industry or, indeed, to the British class system. Her mother is Camilla Lowther, a well-known fashion 'booker' (i.e. agent) and a member of the aristocratic Lowther family (Camilla's father is the Earl of Lonsdale). Aboah attended the notably prestigious and suitably liberal arts orientated private Millfield School and studied

drama at university, thus accruing the 'right' kind of cultural capital. Her mother's work as a booking agent has given her the kind of access to the fashion industry and further cultural capital that no 'ordinary' young woman could hope for. In this regard she is not very different from many of her peers and the generation of models that preceded them, a number of whom came from wealthy or aristocratic backgrounds (e.g. Scottish model Honor Fraser is a member of the land-owning Lovat clan), and who were therefore able to readily acquire the social networking skills that gave them an entry into the world of high fashion. Aboah's promotion to contemporary 'It Girl' by Enninful represents not a triumph for democratisation, but rather the successful recuperation of black British style culture by the establishment.

The unacknowledged nepotism of such privileged access is another important dimension to this practice. As well as giving employment to the upper classes, *Vogue* favours the scions of the already famous in its content, promoting the daughters (and sometimes sons) of established performers and celebrities, and especially those belonging to the new cultural elite of rock and media aristocracy; Georgia May Jagger, Romeo Beckham, Pixie Geldof and Lennon Gallagher have all been offered publicity in the form of fashion shoots, and even features lauding their talents. Again, the way that this recirculates and accrues cultural capital within a particular social group and its kinship networks is reminiscent of the privilege enjoyed by the *bon ton* of nineteenth-century high society. The inclusion of black or Asian members of this golden circle can be traced to the shifts that took place during the 1960s, in which pop music success gave an entry into high society for a handful of non-white performers. It is also at least partly predicated on their symbolic value as the apparent physical embodiment of liberal pluralist inclusivity.[10] It does not ultimately mean that the power structures have changed or that those from ordinary backgrounds can otherwise enter. While, since his tenure began, Enninful has featured no less than eight non-white cover models, including Zoe Kravitz, Naomi Campbell, Dua Lipa, Oprah Winfrey and Rihanna, it is notable that they are mainly from this new aristocracy.

Of course, in the wake of the resurgence of feminism and 'woke' culture, no cover girl can be content with a role as an image, as something only 'to be looked at', despite the fact that this is exactly what models must be – an idealised version of contemporary beauty. Such a role now provokes profound anxiety. Models must prove themselves to be more than an image: they have brains as well as beauty, talents as well as looks! Who knew? No profile of the modern model is complete without evidence of her education (preferably Oxbridge), her dedication to good causes and 'activism', her skills (preferably in a fashion-related occupation). And the current ideology of femininity as constant busyness, of women as multi-taskers, managers, carers and, most importantly, self-inventors, also imprints itself just as it did in the interview with Samantha Cameron. As Gill and Scharff point out, 'secure and stable self-identity no longer derives automatically from one's position in the social structure . . . individuals are left alone to establish and maintain values with which to live and make sense of their daily lives' (2011: 6), while women especially find themselves driven to continuous self-reinvention and improvement under a neoliberal economy and within postfeminist culture. In addition to being beautiful and well connected, then, Aboah is a busy career woman and blogger, 'leading the fashion conversation'.

Indeed, Enninful went even further in this December issue to promote the neoliberal ideology of the model as multitasker. He commissioned Naomi Campbell – the

most globally successful black fashion model of our time and one from a genuinely working-class background – to interview Sadiq Khan, the British-born son of a Pakistani bus conductor who was at the time of writing the Labour Mayor of London. Here, the magazine's new focus on immigrant heritage and experience was brought to the fore. Khan and Campbell's 'shared experience' as the highly successful children of immigrants who had both grown up in London was emphasised as the reasoning behind this somewhat extraordinary encounter and its trumpeting of a new kind of British identity.[11]

Yet these interventions are, ultimately, a form of recuperation, operating to modernise and diversify *Vogue* just enough to extend its supposedly more democratic appeal while also shoring up the class system. The fact that the Duchess of Sussex was recruited as the 'guest editor' of the September 2019 issue crystallises the way in which these ideological tensions are held together wonderfully. Widely greeted as a 'modernising' influence on the Royal Family by virtue of her career, her espousal of vaguely feminist values and, of course, by her embodiment of non-whiteness, Meghan Markle is a suitably safe symbol of Enninful's redefinition of *Vogue* as the bible of an expanded pseudo-meritocracy. Markle's main achievement is to marry into royalty as a 'commoner' – without that, her opinions on women, ethnic identity and even fashion would not be seen as important. Her coronation as the most recent royal *Vogue* contributor is, therefore, an example of continuity masquerading as radicalism, and of conservative modernity presented as the shock of the new.

Brand Britain

Promoting British brands has been one of *Vogue*'s most frequently disseminated values. Yet *Vogue*'s world, like that of the social circles it celebrates, is ultimately one that is defined by a particular form of class-based consumerist cosmopolitanism. The magazine looks outwards, primarily towards the fashion capitals of New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Milan, Rome, perhaps Madrid, and increasingly Moscow, Delhi and Beijing (as oligarchs and billionaires dominate its purview), and it looks inwards towards the tightly bounded fashion quarters of London: Chelsea, Kensington, Belgravia, Soho, Camden Town, Bloomsbury, Marylebone, and now the newly hip parts of the East End, Hoxton and Bow. Its contributors and editorial staff are part of a continuous and globalised 'flow' between these locations, flying in from New York and on to Paris, stopping off at Borough Market or the latest hip boutique in Chelsea, yet never venturing further into London's suburbs – or indeed out of London.

Vogue's map of Britain not only frequently conflates 'Britishness' with Englishness, and Englishness with London, it also reiterates the global tourist gaze. Its non-metropolitan horizon extends only to the Cotswolds, Edinburgh (for its festival), the Scottish Highlands, the coastline of Cornwall (but definitely not its industrial heritage), the more picturesque seaside towns of the South coast and East Anglia, and Oxford and Cambridge. The modern exception is the obligatory pilgrimage to Glastonbury, whose festival is now included in the global cosmopolitan hipster's itinerary. Britain's other major cities, and the creativity of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Liverpool, is rarely connected to these global power networks or to the 'Brand Britain' being promoted.

'British eccentricity' is a favourite theme, but is almost entirely imagined in relation to nostalgia for a narrow 'heritage' image of British identity and an upper-class way of life. For example, a spread on 'The Great British Summer' in the July 2018 issue starred various members of the celebrity aristocracy – Shirley Bassey, Lennon Gallagher, Lara Stone, the twin hurdlers Laviai and Lina Nielson – shot 'on location'. These backdrops included the extensive grounds of two country houses complete with neo-classical follies, a Belgravia pub and the terrace of the National Theatre. The patriotism that is frequently invoked in such material is one which privileges aristocracy (whether of the old money variety or the new) and cultural whiteness. As in the case of Meghan Markle, when black or Asian Britons are included, it is in order to refresh not overturn the class relations involved.

Conclusion

Of course, one hardly looks to high fashion for genuine iconoclasm, notwithstanding its solipsistic trumpeting of creativity and vision, and the undoubted cultural importance of a few figures such as Elsa Schiaparelli and Christian Dior, whose work really did transform our relationship with clothes. Notwithstanding *Vogue*'s partial reinvention, Enninful's magazine, like Shulman's, represents fashion in terms of international brands and auteur designers, and continues to circulate the discourses of exclusivity associated with a largely white elite. This limited paradigm is clearly connected to the magazine's dependence on advertising, which is itself dominated by the international conglomerates which control the major fashion and beauty brands such as LVMH, which owns the Dior, Givenchy and Marc Jacobs brands, among many others. Such brands constitute the majority of advertising revenue for glossy magazines and, especially in the context of online competition, cannot be gainsaid.

But it means that *Vogue*'s claims to be extending and reinventing the world of high fashion so that it is genuinely inclusive and diverse is in many ways chimeric, a device to prolong the magazine's cultural role without abandoning its class allegiances or its networks. We should celebrate the appearance of more black models in the magazine and the belated recognition of Britain as a multi-ethnic society, but the power relations of fashion are complex, the field is self-policing, and the system is still a system. *Vogue* is always in with the in-crowd – and the in-crowd is rarely a democracy.

Notes

1. Originally established in 1972, *W* is an offshoot of the more staid and mainstream US fashion magazine, *Women's Wear Daily*. In recent years it has courted controversy in its use of highly sexualised content and 'edgy' fashion shoots.
2. Under Shulman's editorship the magazine achieved its highest circulation in December 1999, with sales of 241,001 copies.
3. Moss first came to public attention when Corinne Day shot her for a style spread for *The Face* in 1988. In 1993, in a controversial campaign for Levis jeans, her waiflike figure and the 'grunge-y' backdrop of a seedy flat provoked accusations that the feature promoted 'heroin chic'. Moss has nonetheless had an extremely successful career and has become one of the most famous and influential models of the past 50 years.

4. In fact, *Vogue*'s parent company, Condé Nast, has until recently always had male managing editors and chairmen. Indeed, the appointment of a male editor might be regarded as a regressive move redolent of an earlier history of women's magazines in the nineteenth century were it not for the fact that *Vogue* has always had high-profile female editors.
5. And which I have kept copies of!
6. The British edition of French fashion magazine *Elle* was launched in 1985; the Italian *Grazia* first appeared in the UK in 2005.
7. For more on fashion magazines and the 'modern woman' see Anna Gough-Yates (2007).
8. I say 'superficially' because there are also significant examples of fashion's racist heritage erupting into its complacent view of itself as a liberal space. Most importantly, in February 2001 John Galliano, the British-born head of the prestigious house of Dior was arrested in a Paris bar for making anti-Semitic comments and was subsequently put on trial for racism. He has since been partially rehabilitated but the fashion world was split over the case.
9. In the late 1970s, for example, the British designer Zandra Rhodes, hitherto associated with upmarket hippy styles, recast herself as one of the 'inventors' of punk, here represented as high fashion, turning a DIY countercultural style involving bin bags, ripped jeans and homemade garments into an expensive fashion statement.
10. A direct parallel can be seen in the marriage of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle. Markle's TV acting career, her beauty and her American nationality combined to make her a member of a cosmopolitan elite, but it is arguably her mixed-race heritage that makes her a particularly valued member of that group as a visual sign of liberal modernity's relaxed attitudes to race, and especially of the British monarchy's own modernisation in that context.
11. Campbell's public image has been significantly influenced by her race. Celebrated as the most successful black model of all time and famous for her romantic association with alpha-male celebrities such as Robert De Niro, it is also notable that she has since pointed out that she earned considerably less than her white peers in the 1990s 'Supermodel' generation. She was not awarded the lucrative cosmetics contracts with major brands that help to perpetuate a model's longevity and public name and has herself said this was because of racism in the industry. Since the peak of her career in the 1990s–2000s she also became a figure of fascination for the tabloid press and celebrity magazines when she was twice convicted of assault. The publicity surrounding these cases, together with the notorious 'blood diamonds' trial when she was subpoenaed to give evidence about a necklace linked to illegal diamond mining which had been a gift from the disgraced ex-President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, helped to perpetuate the stereotyped image of Campbell as an 'uppity' 'angry black woman' with an enlarged ego.

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