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Figurative Mobility:

Veiling, Orientalism, and Unknowing Women in US *Vogue*, 1917–25

BY ILYA PARKINS
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Abstract: In the years of the veil's declining popularity as a fashion accessory, the New York edition of *Vogue* devoted sustained attention to the garment. A series of textual meditations on its significance amounted to a minor philosophical discourse on concealment, revelation, and femininity itself. This preliminary investigation of these treatments of veiling considers its positioning vis-à-vis both the white women who were the normative subjects and imagined readers of the magazine, and orientalized women who were only spectrally present in the pages of *Vogue*. This paper compares the ways that veiled unknowability was figured for white women and orientalized women in the pages of the magazine, and considers the veil-as-fashion-accessory (distinct from but obliquely related to the imagined "veil-as-cultural-signifier") as a material technology of opacity that was seen to enable a strategic positioning of white femininity in relation to power. Veiling presents a significant instance of a power-saturated relational encounter, highlighting asymmetrical points of contact between two feminine imaginaries, which hinged on questions of opacity as a conceptual analogue to feminine mystery. This reading shows that invocations of the veil frequently defaulted to translucency while remaining steeped in the language of opacity, and thus obliquely established translucency as a privileged category that allowed white bourgeois women some conceptual mobility while tying orientalized women to pure opacity.

KEYWORDS

- veiling
- modernity
- magazines
- orientalism
- mobility

Movement for some involves blocking movement for others.
- Sara Ahmed (141)

"No matter how easily understandable one may be with one's hat off, one cannot help becoming a creature of mystery, subtly, strangely disturbing, when one dons a hat covered entirely with a lace veil" ("Makers of Mystery" 41). So begins a 1917 American *Vogue* article about veils. It suggests that the veil opens onto an intangible something that lies beyond the scope of legibility and understanding, and that interlocks with feminine unknowability. This passage is perfectly emblematic of the issues attached to representations of the veil in *Vogue* in these days, the last of the veil's use in fashionable dress in North America.

The trope of mystery that is consistently invoked in writing about this accessory underscore the possibility and politics of *knowing* women. This was, in fact, what all written representations of the veil in *Vogue* traded in — and taken together they constitute an extraordinary body of work on the relationship of femininity and feminine style to the modern imaginary.

Specifically, as some of the feminist literature on the veil as a fashion accessory has theorized, the veil complicates how the viewer might distinguish between seeming and being: between what the woman appears to be, and what she is, or, put another way, between surface and depth **(see fig. 1).**[1]

In effect, the veil reveals the instability of this dualistic categorization, allowing the fashionable white women interpellated by *Vogue* to effect a series of crossings across ideological boundaries that corresponded to the organization of social life: public and private, distant and proximate, modern and anti-modern, and even the West and the Orient. But it is crucial to recognize that it does so only for white women, affording them some conceptual mobility while reattaching the binary between surface and depth to orientalized women whose wearing of the veil is taken as a "cultural" sign. For white women, as I shall show, the attachment to an unstable binary afforded a kind of conceptual mobility, a constant possibility, if not practice, of crossing, derived precisely from the stasis attached to representations of orientalized women wearing veils.

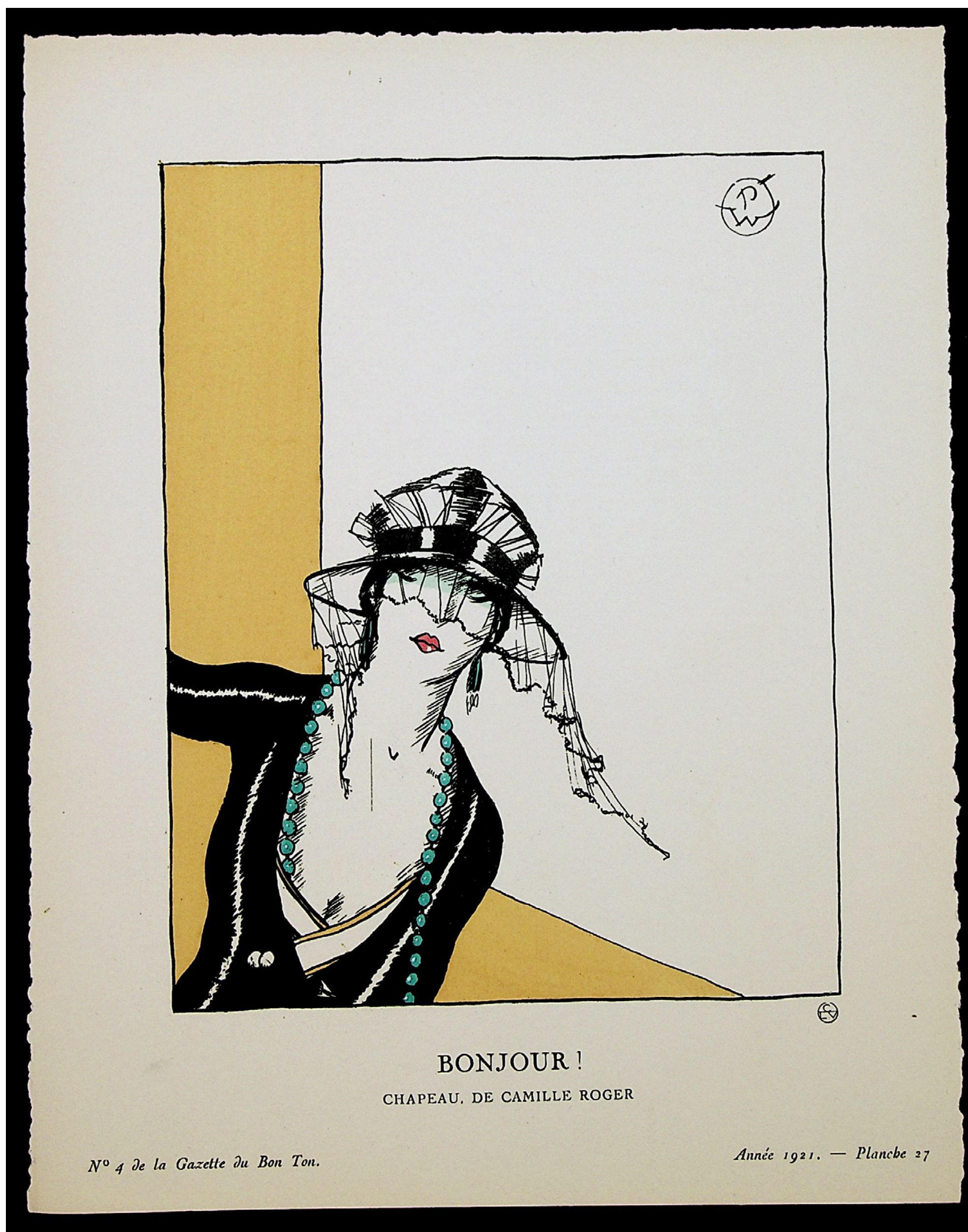

FIGURE 1

Porter Woodruff, "Bonjour! Chapeau de Camille Roger," illustration, *Gazette du bon ton* (E. Levy, Année 1921, No. 4), planche 27. Royal Ontario Museum, Library & Archives, Toronto.

The veil is the ideal object to open up the question of conceptual mobility because it gains its meaning from its indeterminacy. Veiling was constructed in *Vogue* as a kind of technology of mobility; it flagrantly played on the opposition between opacity and transparency, enabling white women to cross between these states and thus obliquely to align themselves with the mobility imagined as characteristic of modernity. In this sense, the veil is shown to allow white femininity to inhabit multiple states: to slip from legibility into inscrutability, to effect a crossing that unfixes them, a movement away from perceptions of their stasis, and toward modernity. For "the mobility of women" — even the largely conceptual mobility that I am treating here — is, as Wendy Parkins reminds us, "bound up with considerations of temporality and the nature of the times they occupy" (3). As women moved, they seemed to enter modernity, as has been ably traced by feminist scholars.[2]

The fact that this movement was limited to fashionably-attired white women, though, should give us some pause in seizing upon mobility as a defining trope of feminist modernist studies; figurative mobility is a privilege.

Parsing the archive of the veil in *Vogue* allows us to nuance our understanding of what movement meant for moderns, revealing its racialized character.

My discussion centres on an analysis of veils' appearances in the US edition of *Vogue* between 1917 and 1925, when they were regularly featured. Occasionally the features focused on bridal veils, but just as often they treated veils as quotidian accessories, and there were also several pieces on the philosophical significance of veiling. Some of the pieces were richly illustrated — such as when they were highlighting new veil styles — and some were composed mostly of text. What were largely absent were explicit, extended discussions of veils worn by orientalized

women — in Nirmal Puwar's words, the "veil as the exemplary sign of the barbaric East, most especially the Islamic East" (65). Rather, orientalized women, under the sign of the veil, seem to circulate as ghostly presences through *Vogue*'s pages.

And yet they are not at all absent. Traces of what they are fantastically imagined to be profoundly mark many, if not most, of the features on the veil as accessory. One feature from 1919 captures this: "A veil … adds a touch of that Oriental mystery that is a never-failing charm" ("Veils are Fragile Bits of Silk…" 49). Thus it is not merely mystery that women are putting on, but "Oriental" mystery. Another piece speaks of "a becoming untrimmed Persian turban," ("Motor Hats Take the Veil" 36), and another features this description: "Sprays of orange-blossoms and some of the mysterious charm of those veiled beauties of the Orient … lurk in its soft folds and its misty flowing lengths" ("Mystery and Loveliness…" 56).

What interests me in these portrayals is the relationship they reveal between veiling for white women, who are the normative subjects, and imagined readers, of *Vogue*, and an imagined "Oriental" veiled woman, who is nearly absent from the pages of the magazine but who haunts the portrayals of veiled white women. For it can never be that fashionable white women are donning an undefined feminine "oriental mystery." As feminist discussions of orientalism have pointed out, orientalized women come to stand in for the fantastical construction of the Orient as a whole, and the feminization of the Orient means that the concept tends to be embodied in a feminized figure.[3] When white women take on oriental mystery, then, they are coming into contact with other women. And so the discourse of veiling, ghosted as it is by orientalized women, represents the meeting of two fantasies of femininity. Veiling thus produces a significant instance of relational encounter: it enables points of connective contact between the imaginaries of white femininity and orientalized femininity, which hinged on questions of knowledge and the limitations of knowledge, transparency and opacity. The issue of what could be known and what could not — and its racialized character — connected women in various ways to the possibility of mobility, which was central to the definition of the modern public sphere and has been taken up by feminist scholars as emblematic of women's relationship with industrial modernity.

The veil's facilitation of encounters between different women, as it was imagined by such discourses, rewrites the assumption that orientalism depended on the absolute abjection of the other, on the maintenance of a constant distance through abjection, and the policing of difference.

In fact, clothing in this period offers a host of examples of the incorporation of the other into the normative embodied subject. The veil is only one of many such garments in a period in which orientalist tropes were popular, especially visible in the influential work of Leon Bakst (set designer for the Ballet Russes) and Paul Poiret from about 1910 as well as slightly later, through designers such as Jessie Franklin Turner and Mariano Fortuny. All of them incorporated an eclectic mix of apparently "oriental" elements into their costume and dress design, opening a window on the construction of differences and power-saturated relationships among women in modernity. But, because of the veil's unique relationship to the category of knowledge and the explicit linking of this garment to the question of who the woman "is," it also allows us to think through the many instabilities emerging in this ontological category in a moment of vast structural transformations in America, such as the movements of great numbers of white, middle-class women into paid labour and higher education.

My research has found that *Vogue*'s virtual obsession with the decline in this practice is unique; it is simply not evident in comparable forums in other countries. Knowing some of the magazine's history is helpful in understanding what is at stake in US *Vogue*'s abiding interest in the veil. As Alberto Oliva and Norberto Angeletti note, *Vogue* was always intended to speak to two related audiences: an elite one and an aspirational one. "*Vogue* set the rules for social conduct and was avidly read by those who considered themselves a part of New York's elite as well as by those who strove to join it" (8).

Although the magazine began in 1892 as a general society gazette aimed at both men and women, under the guidance of new publisher Condé Nast from 1905 the title took off as a high fashion magazine for women, still marked by its ethos of distinction.[4]

In the period that I am tracing, from World War I through the mid-1920s, there was a subtle shift in its orientation, which had consequences for its positioning as exclusive. This followed from a change in the status of American fashion, as France's grip on the industry began to loosen during the First World War. In this period, *Vogue* increasingly catered to an American elite for whom, Alison Matthews David writes, "a trip to the Paris couture houses was no longer an obligatory rite of passage" (32). The magazine thus reflected a consolidating American womenswear industry that was distinguished by its mass production and its excellence in the design of casual sportswear. The word "casual" is an important indicator of what might be considered threatening about this change — the perceived loss of qualities like elegance, refinement, and distinction, those very qualities seen to provide the magazine's *raison d'être*. This period of transition, like any, was marked by ambivalence and fluctuation.

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As fashion changed — and with it, options for women's self-presentation — the veil came to stand for a lost order of femininity. Even as the magazine broadened its focus past France, anxieties about the meaning and consequences for women in regards to the ascendancy of American womenswear found its way onto *Vogue*'s pages in oblique ways. Of course, this worry was about the erosion of a particularly *classed* type of femininity. The veil-as-accessory was associated with the middle and upper classes — especially when it was not nominally functional, as with mourning veils. Its lack of functionality, in fact, was precisely what aligned it with the upper classes. And so, the loss of the veil in everyday life, in the context of the broader democratization of fashion through mass production and the development of the American casual sportswear industry, was a signal of the perceived loss of the "good taste" and "distinction" of the American elite.

The classed nature of *Vogue*'s approach helps to contextualize the place of mobility — both actual and figurative — in its pages. The magazine's quintessential modern woman was frequently pictured motoring, sporting, dancing: moving. As well, travel featured heavily in its pages, both in advertising and editorial coverage. Regular travel-themed special issues emphasized travel as not only passing through space but as a boundary-crossing encounter with otherness; of particular interest were colonial and so-called "exotic" destinations, such as North Africa and Polynesia. *Vogue* evinced a deep investment in fantasies of the kinesis of modern life, and given that the magazine primarily represented and interpellated women, this had the significant consequence of inserting a particular, classed femininity into the modern imaginary. For as Tim Cresswell puts it, "a modern citizen is, among other things, a mobile citizen" (On the Move 22). I read discussions of the veil as an important site for the production of a mobile white femininity. Though not, on the surface, about representations of movement, the way that veiling was imagined as allowing fashionable women to slide between categories suggests a figurative or discursive mobility for white femininity that included or even depended on the ability to provisionally cross into an orientalized representational domain. Because of its tight connections to illegibility, mystery, and opacity, the veil thus reveals for us the racialized epistemological implications of the construction of modern feminine mobility.

Veiling, Knowing, Being

How did representations of the veil connect knowledge to figurative mobility for the modern woman? An excellent clue is found in a one-page, illustrated spread on bridal veils from 1919. It features five verses, one for each of the five illustrations of fashionably veiled (white) brides. The verses explicitly gesture at the orientalization of many of the women they describe. One points to a woman with "Oriental" eyes and "Chinese tresses" who engages in flirtations from underneath her tulle veil. Another evokes "brides of dark and siren mystery" who "wear a turban soft and Eastern." *These* women "have theories that women's place is seldom in the home." Another is "led demurely to the altar / Blushing, shy, she will not falter / though she promises to honour and to love — but not obey" ("Veils for Petite and Stately Brides" 54). In these instances, in which orientalized femininity lends its representational associations to white women, the veil facilitates a quiet rejection of normative domestic femininity. This is in keeping with Piya Pal-Lapinski's observation that "the … exoticized woman's body interrupted constructions of domesticity … and reorganized the relationship between public and private spheres" (1).

In exoticizing the bodies of white brides, the veils enable a renegotiation of white femininity, in which women would use the veil to *appear* submissive, while at the same time using their apparent isolation behind it to take control of their husbands.

The veil figures as a technology of domination, which authorizes women to act while preserving the façade of their passivity. That this version of empowerment is consistently celebrated as a positive state of affairs should complicate our assumptions about the figuration of power and control in the heterosexual contract in modernity.

As long, it seems, as white middle-class women were able to participate in upholding the fiction of masculine dominance, their use of various technologies of domination would be tolerated, if not celebrated. As the anonymous author of "Makers of Mystery" (1917) rather hyperbolically states, "[a]lmost every woman who has ever made history has done it with the aid of a veil" (39).

In veiling, then, white women participate in the undermining of *gendered* heterosexuality even as they participate in and avail themselves of its privileges. The veil facilitates an invisible, or at least barely detectable, movement outside of the confines of a particular kind of heterosexual contract, a mobility that is not afforded to orientalized women in the same way, as they are considered to partake of modern mobility — though of a different, more practical sort — only when they remove the veil.

When looked at in this way, the veil allows an important opportunity to consider the articulation of whiteness and heterosexuality in the pages of *Vogue* in the 1910s and 20s. What white women borrow from the orientalized veil is its conceptual ties to the blocking of a desiring gaze (and even the reversal of the gaze, as more than one article in *Vogue* brings up the way that veiled women become all eyes, and look rather than being looked at).

These portrayals of veiling imagine a heterosexual economy propelled by a kind of push and pull between proximity and distance, with the distance suggested by the "oriental mystery" and being used to incite and provoke the desiring, heterosexual gaze. The lack of knowledge is a key to the propulsion of desire. Mary Ann Doane writes that "the veil incarnates contradictory desires — the desire to bring her closer and the desire to distance her" (116). Note the language here — this is kinetic. Even in descriptions of spectators' desire, we find images of femininity as mobile. White heterosexuality as an institution relies on the fostering of this movement, white women's ability to claim power from it depends on its instability.

Crucially, the veils-as-accessories that are featured in *Vogue* are inevitably made of tulle or lace, or some other translucent material. They do not actually conceal anything; rather, they refer to the *possibility* of concealment, which gives them their erotic charge.

As Doane puts it, "the veil, in its translucence, both allows and disallows vision" (110). The movement that is suggested for white women is a movement into and out of legibility that is controlled by the material activity of dressing in the veil, and that directly enables the power they are able to claim over men. Significantly, it is a figurative mobility that accrues in large part because of the garment's associations with orientalized women.

This narrative of the veil as a technology of women's domination of men is echoed in multiple features on the veil and the psychology of veiling. Virginia Remnitz writes in 1917, "the chief end of the

veil is the confounding of the wise man in his wisdom, that it may entangle him, with the fool, in his toils" (148). Several writers express their concern that veiling is on the wane, for the loss of this accessory in everyday life "sets the man free," in Remnitz's words. To lose the veil is to lose an obscure but effective instrument of control. Forrester Parker's concern, in 1923, is that with the trend toward simplification in women's clothing — the shortening of skirts, the removal of bulk, the move away from tight corseting — "they have abjured the primitive lure that lies in the thing that is half hidden and half revealed" (148).

This is a frequently recurring theme in the more general literature on changing fashion, style, and femininity in this period. It is usually expressed as a concern that femininity is not suited to the "frankness" that characterizes modernity.

An editorial column from 1920 — called, not incidentally, "The Seventh Veil" (1920) — suggested, commenting obliquely on recent changing of styles so that more skin was revealed than was previously acceptable, that "[a] shoulder can be more delectable seen through a mist of gauze; an ankle moving in a cloud of lace; an eye glancing down through downcast lashes … It is not well to be too well known" (71). Fashion's rapid change was understood as a threat to such an ethos, as it participated in a general cultural turn toward frankness — a word that appears frequently and generates a great deal of ambivalence in women's periodicals and beauty and behaviour manuals in the 1920s.

The sense that the veil was a kind of analogue of femininity ran consistently through this work. The argument is encapsulated by the sub-headline of a piece from 1920 called "Seven Veils from Dangerous Women": "Lace and tulle of other days rise from the plane of mere dress accessory and become one of the delicate

forms of self-expression" (45). Other articles suggest that the relationship between femininity and the veil is even more direct than an expressive one. Forrester Parker makes explicit the connection that runs through virtually all of the mentions of the veil in *Vogue*: women are *essentially* veiled. They are, for Parker, "vested with the psychology of the veil" (146). The veil functions as a metaphor for femininity in general.

There is an obvious question, though: if the white woman is *essentially* veiled, then why does she need to *wear* a veil? If, as Virginia Remnitz writes in 1917, "veils are the aura of women's soul and body," then why the need to "manifest through them" (148)? The small illustration that accompanied Remnitz's article about veils intriguingly depicts not a veil but a woman's general robing ritual; she is pictured getting dressed, wearing a chemise, and putting on pearls. The illustration crystallizes the point about women's status: the entire apparatus of her self-fashioning is akin to an act of veiling. Yet by depicting an act of performative self-constitution — the woman clothing herself to *become* a woman — the illustration also bears the fundamental contradiction of this ongoing discussion. If, as Forrester Parker writes, woman "works behind a mystery … moves in the realm of the unknown, the unknowable" (146), why an accessory to prove this? Parker's own article bears the weight of this contradiction, as the author suggests at once that the woman already "is an elemental influence … invested with the psychology of the veil," and that she is unknown

Veiling variously promoted ontologizing or epistemically oriented understandings of white femininity.

As we see from the confusion around whether women were essentially unknowable or required veiling to become mysterious, they could even slip between these states. As Doane puts it, the drama provoked by veiling of any sort revolved around the knowledge that *seeming* and *being* do not necessarily coincide, that women are unpredictable and ultimately unknowable. For Doane, as with others

working to interrogate the vexed and cultural status of femininity in relation to truth, the non-congruence between what things "seem" to be, and what they actually "are," throws into question a whole range of ontologizing assumptions about femininity.
The apparent confusion over the difference — or lack of difference — between what a veil-wearer (a woman) *seemed* to be, and what she *was*, signals the importance of discourses of veiling as epistemic. In inadvertently calling into question the ontological — or "being" — status of women, the work on veiling placed primary importance on epistemology, on what could be known of white women, and how it could be known.

Feminist postcolonial theorists have also placed the veil in an epistemic context. Veils of orientalized women historically signified as anxiety-producing interruptions of the capacity for transparent knowledge. As Meyda Yeğenoğlu puts it, "[t]he grand narrative of the colonial gaze is a deaf tropology of the veil, made up of tales of unveiling, fantasies of penetrating the inaccessible world of the other, the metaphysics of discovering her truth, fantasies of domesticating and reforming and thus controlling her" (58). In the colonial project, in which women come to stand metonymically for the Orient, "[t]he unveiling of the Oriental woman … ensures a 'panoptic' position for the colonial subject" (58). The project of forcibly rendering visible what has been obscured by the veil constitutes the colonizer as the sovereign subject: universal, invisible, and masterful. *Vogue* takes up this theme, such as in an article entitled "The Lifting of the Veil," about Turkey's 1923 transition to a secular republic. Here, *un*veiling is approvingly tied to the successful introduction of Western influences. "'Off with our veils,' they seemed to cry, while each day, one by one, a new and unveiled face appeared that had but a short time before been hidden from the light … the Turkish woman is rapidly emancipating herself." Apparently this emancipation was taking place through contact with "Western" films, with their images of "women, active, important, dominating life" ("The Lifting of the Veil" 152). This is a fine example of a widespread contemporary discourse of unveiling as civilizing, as the triumph of the colonizer — via the cultural industry of film — over the culture that the veiled woman stands in for. It is also a narrative of the mobility of feminized Western mass culture, which crosses borders to do the work of liberation.

And so, both the veil-as-accessory and the orientalized veil pointed to the primacy of knowledge relations in the construction of veiling, and the question of secure ontologies that epistemology seems to displace. Yet the portrayals in *Vogue*, while they do suggest that knowledge figures in orientalized veiling, ultimately attach orientalized women to static ontologies. They do this by showing how white women use the epistemic dimensions of veiling to move in and out of perceived states of being, or ontological positions. In fact, the portrayals suggest that white women have something akin to agency in this movement, as they put on and take off the garment. The effect is to underline white women's transformability, the sense that their femininity is not static, but itinerant. Modern, white femininity was constituted through fantasies of mobility that included dipping into the immobility attributed to orientalized women.

Constructions of white women used discourses of knowledge and its limits to imply the capacities to both veil and unveil, while orientalized women were not imagined in ways that allowed for the crossing of the barrier between the knowable and the unknowable.

This is an important key to understanding the anxiety about white women's loss of the habit of veiling — its detachability points to the mobile and hence changeable nature of femininity.

In fact, the ephemeral nature of veiling points to the ephemeral temporality of fashion more generally, and this temporality offers important clues into the differential construction of veiling. Consider this reference to the continuum of veiling, in a long article from 1920 called "Paris Looks to the East for Spring": Marjorie Hillis writes, "[couture house] Worth evidently favours the Oriental to cover the face, at least partially, by high-standing collars" (58). Here, face-covering is mobilized in a fashion innovation: this "mode," as *Vogue* calls it, has appeared and it will disappear again within a year, or at most two years. This signals the way that the veil-as-accessory gets attached to the temporality of fashion, a temporality that offers an intriguing and potentially hopeful model of constant change. Yet it is only the veil-as-accessory that can resolve into such a state, for the terms by which the orientalized veil is invoked situate it — as well as the women who wear it — firmly outside of the changeability and mobility of modern fashion with its possibilities for becoming other selves. They consistently link it to history, and in doing so, segregate it from the outset from the changeability of modern veils as stylistic innovations, a changeability that is reinforced by associating the garments with particular fashion designers and linking them to other trends.
Given the embodied relationship between garments and bodies, these kinds of associations do not rest in the objects themselves, but accrue to the bodies that wear, or are imagined to wear, them. Again, then, we see how the white woman gets positioned as mobile, this time by taking on the unique temporality of the veil as fashion.

The anxiety over the veil and the way that women use it to slip in and out of femininities suggests that there is not, in fact, much of a mystery to women at all — not to white women, at least. In their case, behind the veil as accessory, as Doane and Kelly Oliver have pointed out, lies nothing: no enigma, no secret, no depth. The symbolic potency of the veil lies in its suggestion that there is something to conceal, when there is, in reality, nothing. This is part of the veil's instability. In a Nietzschean vein, the veil hides the secret that there is no secret — as a 1919 *Vogue* feature opines, the veil's "mission in life is, elegantly, to conceal nothing at all" ("The Parisienne Wears her Veil with a Different Air" 49). The accessory, in its detachability, suggests that the concealment and secretiveness of white women is not essentially specified, but rather is a discursive construct.[5]

And so the fear that seems to underlie this body of work is that if, in the climate of modern frankness, there is a movement away from veiling, a key illusion about women is lost and women would be seen to exceed the representational regime in which they are caught.

This can be understood as a variant of what several theorists have seen as the primary anxiety related to changing fashions in the early twentieth century: fashion could be the material means by which the social position of women is changed.6 While unveiling must not be understood in exactly the same ways as the trends of cropped hair, lack of ornamentation, shorter and less voluminous skirts, and flattened silhouettes that primarily worried commentators, it still seemed to dispense with similar distinctions between masculinity and femininity.

The same schema does not hold for orientalized women who spectrally populate *Vogue*'s discussions of veiling. Whereas white women's suggestions of excess resolve in an emptiness — there is nothing beyond the veil — the excess suggested by orientalized veiling refers to "the Orient" more generally. Numerous critics have pointed out the ways in which, as Meyda Ye/ eno/ lu writes, "the veil hides the real Orient, and keeps its truth from Western knowledge/ apprehension" (47). The excess here functions somewhat differently, since the veil refers not only to itself and to femininity — as does the white woman's veil — but stands in for a homogenized Orient. This collapsing of veiled women with the fiction of the Orient is certainly found in the pages of *Vogue* in this period, such as in a 1925

advertisement for travel by French Line cruise to "the enchanted part of Algiers," which itemizes "veiled women" among a list of features that authenticate the city as "Oriental" (French Line 16b). The excess of the veiled orientalized woman comprises "an ontology or presence not just beyond knowledge but closed to it as a requirement of its essential being" (Meyda Yeğenoğlu 48). The orientalized veil does not resolve into an anxious half-sense that there is no depth or truth behind it. Instead, it remains on the woman's body, doing its job, forever referring to something larger than itself, its own kind of excess: the "essence" of the Orient more generally. In the rare and scattered references to the orientalized veiled woman that do appear, then, their conceptual mobility is even further hampered by the fact of their being anchored in a vast, imaginative geography. Tying this iteration of femininity to a landscape — even if the place is fantastical — in itself pre-empts the mobility that characterizes white femininity in *Vogue*. If the veil is the analytical centre of discourses of orientalized women, then it is the veil as immovable object, as inert materiality, a veil that does not allow the movement — of person, of subject — that the tulle veil suggests, which does a neat job of both backgrounding the woman wearing it, and suggesting her own immovability.

White women, in donning the veil, become provisionally hybridized, briefly able to borrow from the layers of significance attached to orientalized veiling in order to emphasize their own capacity for becoming; that is, they are shown in the pages of *Vogue* contingently and temporarily taking on the static quality attributed to orientalized femininities, paradoxically in order to enhance their own conceptual malleability. In the process, the orientalized women, who are fulsomely present even though they are only gestured at, are fixed in time and space as the horizon from which white femininities will develop.

Relationality, Figurative Mobility, and Modern Femininity

These readings of white women as hybridized in the donning of the veil, against the fantastical stasis of women of colour, complicate assumptions that orientalism relied on a discourse of absolute difference. Often discussions of orientalism recognize some singular and fixed point of relation among colonizer and colonized, but their analytical lens immediately departs from the relationship to consider its denial. In Frantz Fanon's terms, for example, whiteness is defined and secured by a process of abjection, whereby the unsavoury elements of the self are psychically cast off and imaginatively attached to the colonized. Drawing on Fanon in a discussion of veiling, Alia Al-Saji writes, "[i]n this process of othering, both 'white' and 'black' identities are constructed, and though they are constituted relative to one another, these identities are taken to be mutually exclusive" (884). Here relation does not extend beyond the concepts' constitution, and relation in fact is the condition of their distance.

In *Vogue*'s representations of veiling in the early twentieth century, though, the focus on the veil as a *worn* garment complicates the emphasis on the opposition between the West and the Orient. It brings into focus the element of sensual relation in the contact between these two feminine imaginaries, "Western" and orientalized. Peter Stallybrass writes that "the particular power of cloth to effect … networks is associated with … its ability to be permeated and transformed by wearer and maker alike…" (38). It is these networking capabilities of veiling that seem to be at play in the work on veils as accessories. Attending to this aspect of their representation in the modernist period thus has the capacity to open up a complex understanding of crossing.
Crossing becomes not merely a trajectory that sees subjects passing between static points, but designates a porous ontology. Like "becoming," it describes a flexibility, a non-identitarian and incorporative mode of being that is alive to otherness, to the world. So far, so feminist.

And yet, there is a way in which feminist invocations of relationality and networking can be read to suggest that relationship is always benign, even actively so, that networks are inherently flattening of power relations. Jennifer McWeeny instructively reminds us, "The material proximity of our fleshes in lines of intercorporeal relations affirms merely an opportunity for solidarity and coalition, not their factual existence" (282). And yet, the anti-individualist tenor of so much feminist work, while welcome, tends to elevate relation while *abstracting* it from the complex theorizations of power that also characterize the field. In an example relating to the question of modern women's mobility, Wendy Parkins reads Virginia Woolf and Vernon Lee as building an ethics of relation through (auto)mobility, which enables a changed relationship to space and time, self, and other subjects: Parkins traces the "ethical dimension to car travel that is directly linked to an enhanced agency that freedom of movement is thought to provide." The form of travel "creat[es] possibilities for connection with other subjects in new ways…" (152) Certainly, ephemeral and shifting access to abundant others through mobility suggests new forms of relation. But as Tim Cresswell reminds us, "while there is a temptation to think of a mobile world as something that replaces a world of fixities … we need to constantly consider the politics of obduracy, fixity, and friction" ("Toward a Politics of Mobility" 29). This friction is political: it "shows how mobilities are immanent to spatial means of creating, maintaining and deepening social stratification, or social inequalities" (Cresswell, "Toward a Politics of Mobility" 257). Indeed, the deeply relational practice of veiling in this early twentieth-century context should put in check the tendency to venerate material relationship as *necessarily* effecting a more sensitive and less power-saturated field. What this case shows, in fact, is that the porousness of the garment benefits white women, who take on some of this transformative complexity themselves while orientalized women are shut out of possibilities for permeation and transformation. As Reina Lewis notes, it is again the particularity of clothes as worn and visible garments that makes them effective in drawing attention to hierarchically arranged differences, and not flattening them: "Clothes operate as visible gatekeepers of those divisions and even when worn against the grain, serve always to re-emphasize the existence of the dividing line" (509).

We find here relation, to be sure, but the mobility in this story is marked by its multiple relations; it is important not to think of the fashionable white woman and the orientalized woman as existing in a relation isolated from other discursive constructions. Carolyn Pedwell argues that "we need means of representing and theorizing relationality as complex and multiple. If we widen our field of analysis and imagine the binary in question as existing in a relational web of other binary relations, we can think of the relationship between particular … practices and their imagined subjects from a starting point of multiplicity" (93).

In effect, the relation being effected by representations of veiling — between fashionable white women and orientalized women — gains its conceptual force from a linked chain of other binaries, including modern and traditional, seeming and being, and West and East.

The web all of these draw is resolutely historical and implicated in the maintenance of both patriarchal and colonial epistemologies and flows of power in a world structured by colonial relations.

In making sense of all of this, I find in Sara Ahmed's early work in *Strange Encounters* (2000) a convincing rendering of the power asymmetry that always structures an encounter with the other. As she puts it, encounter is antagonistic. Whereas there is a tendency to see hybrid figures, like the white woman veiled in an orientalizing veil, as transgressive testaments to the instability of identity, Ahmed argues that "[h]ybridisation [is] … a technique for getting closer to strangers which allows the reassertion of the agency of the dominant subject" (*Strange Encounters* 123). This is clearly the case in *Vogue*'s writing about veiling, as evidenced in the "backgrounding" of women of colour, who provide tropes that white women can borrow from in order to accumulate power in their intimate relationships and in the spectacular visual field of early twentieth-century modernity.

Ahmed's work also helps us to understand what is at stake in the consumer culture that frames *Vogue*'s references to veiling. She writes that "[t]he consuming subject in approximating the smell or look of strangers is clearly not the stranger: this proximity allows rather than disallows the (ontological) distinction between the one who becomes (the consumer) and the one who merely is (the stranger)" (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 118). Consider the ways this plays out in uses of veiling. As we have seen, the white woman borrows selectively from the figurative field of the orientalized woman. As she does so, she moves toward another kind of selfhood, using the resources provided by the visual field of modernity to claim power in the intimate terrain of heterosexuality. And yet, she is, in Ahmed's words, not the stranger, because whereas the stranger is fixed in place — temporally, spatially — by the veil, the white woman uses it as the very condition of her crossing, her mobility. And so, as Ahmed writes, "the agentic nature of the consuming self is established through … the proximity of strangers" (*Strange Encounters* 118). That is, the effect of distancing orientalized women from the self takes place through movements that require proximity. This recognition of the simultaneity of ostensibly opposed spatial states resonates so well here because the discussion is centered on the veil: as a material thing, a garment, or accessory, this is an object that allows the wearer to put on or even incorporate the other — to bring her spatially proximate, intimately so, even while reinforcing her distance. Ahmed argues, "the 'stranger' only becomes a figure through proximity: the stranger's body cannot be reified as the distant body" (*Strange Encounters* 13).

This is certainly the case with the act of dressing, as one bridges that distance through clothing the body with something that accrues otherness.

Further, the emphasis on the encounter, with its temporal designation —something that takes place in a particular place and time — pairs well with the ephemeral nature of getting dressed: one puts on a veil and takes it off again, and each instance of putting it on can be considered another encounter.

Ahmed's understanding of the workings of distance and proximity illuminates questions of movement in general and nuances mobility in a way that counters what I read as a tendency in feminist modernist studies to fetishize mobility. The result has been an attachment to the figure of the mobile woman among feminist modernist critics. As Wendy Parkins notes, since the Enlightenment, "to be modern is to be free is to be mobile, escaping confinement" (6). No wonder feminist critics have seized on mobility as a defining feature of women's liberation; it has come to denote the ability to step out of a fixed position and move through space, and been embraced as both emblematic and productive of changes in women's social status. Feminist theorists identify images of women's mobility as primary evidence of changes in women's position (and perhaps unwittingly reinforce the equation of public life with subjectivity). Liz Conor notes, for example, that the flapper "was notable for her mobility, her love of dance and movement, and her 'sporting' sexual 'frankness' with men" (210). This Conor sees as evidence of a change in the social status of women, a loosening of restrictions on the space she could occupy, through her ability to circulate. Others have traced the ways that urbanization and mass transportation enhanced prospects for women's mobility and occasioned their visibility as public citizens. Many, including myself, have in particular turned to fashion's ephemerality, its own mobility, to consider how some women seemed to be materially afforded greater mobility through both the physical properties of dress and the frenetic tempo of the modern fashion system. And yet, mobility was not only

uneven — as Wendy Parkins recognizes (7-12) — but stratified. As postcolonial theorists, including those working on representations of veiling, have consistently shown, constructions of mobility consistently frame women of colour as immobile, thus excluding them from this key ingredient in the construction of modernity; even as certain classes of white women claimed new space through urbanization, travel, and work.

Of course, most of the work on mobility's liberatory potential concerns physical movement across space, or at least the suggestion of an increased ability to move, such as that offered by less restrictive clothing.

The examples of veiling show, however, that what I would call conceptual or figurative mobility is just as important. For white women, veils were seen to facilitate a strategic deployment of mystery that allowed them some flexibility, some kinesis in terms of their adoption or occupation of constructions of femininity. Veiling's ambiguous figuration ascribed a certain conceptual suppleness or agility to white femininity — in particular, it allowed them to move in and out of various ontologically framed states. Recognizing this mobility enlarges our perspective on the relationship of femininity to mobility in the modern cultural imaginary; not only did the physical entry of certain classes of women into public space denote their mobility, but so did the intensification of what might be called a representational capacity of white women to occupy multiple ideological or figurative states.

This insight dovetails with other instances in which white women's newly imagined mobility positions them antithetically to women of colour in fashion and beauty discourses — in the French as well as the American context. Making the connection

between epistemologies and mobility allows us to see how the mobility that is often fetishized in feminist analyses of early twentieth-century femininity is a peculiarly white quality. This is not a new insight — postcolonial analyses have long pointed out how colonial subjects are characterized as both spatially and temporally fixed and immovable. But what seems noteworthy are the way that discourses of veiling relied simultaneously on fixity and mobility in order to ultimately underline the flexibility and kinesis of the modern woman, and the way that the veil as a material garment facilitates this complexity. It suggests that white women are positioned as both different from and analogous to orientalized women, and ultimately as having some control over the quality of their sameness or difference from "the Orient." They are to use the intimately proximate technology of the veil-as-garment to facilitate this positioning. Because veils are material objects, and because they were freighted with conflicting significance in these days, when they were considered to be under threat, they are excellent tools for understanding the applicability of Ahmed's theory in this very specific historical moment. With their closeness to the body and the ways they open onto the incorporation of otherness, they demand that we consider the proximity of others in the formation and renegotiation of feminine subjectivity in the early twentieth century. Veils are inherently dissonant in binaries like proximate and distant, centre and periphery. In suggesting that white women could "put on" the Orient, veils point instead to a complex constellation of seemingly oppositional categories in mass culture — proximate and distant, modern and anti-modern — and potentially also in embodied experience in this period.

Notes

1. Mary Ann Doane's work has been most influential in this regard.

2. See, for example, Vadillo, Parsons, and Breward.

3. See, for example, Ye⁄ eno⁄ lu, Puwar, and DelPlato (282-4).

4. Condé Nast laid out his influential vision of *Vogue* as a specialized "lifestyle" publication in a 1913 article published in the *Merchants' and Manufacturers' Journal.*

5. On the accessory as detachable and thus as a reminder of the constructedness of identity, see Fraire.

6. See, for instance, Roberts.

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Author Biography

Ilya Parkins

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Ilya Parkins is Associate Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of British Columbia's Okanagan Campus.

She is a specialist in feminist theories, early twentieth-century cultural formations, femininities in mass culture, and fashion. She is the author of *Poiret, Schiaparelli and Dior: Fashion, Femininity and Modernity* (Berg, 2012), and the co-editor of *Cultures of Femininity in Modern Fashion* (UPNE, 2011). Her work has appeared in journals including *Feminist Review*, *Biography*, *Time and Society*, and *French Cultural Studies*. She is completing a project that investigates images of femininity as unknowable in the modernist period. Her new work concerns contemporary feminist and queer wedding culture.

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