

# Exploring Indigenous Histories in Fashion Museums: An Analysis of the Exhibition “Alta Moda” by Peruvian Photographer Mario Testino

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## **Abstract**

This essay analyzes “Alta Moda”, one of three permanent exhibitions in the Mario Testino Museum (MATE) in Peru, featuring portraits taken in Cusco. Mario Testino is a Peruvian fashion photographer who was born in Lima, the capital of Peru, in 1954 and was raised in the same city. In 1976 he moved to London, where he currently continues to live. As a *limeño* living in London, Testino seems to have observed Peruvian garments through a Western perspective, creating a specific narrative that fits a traditional idea of “Peruvian culture.” The aim of this essay is to analyze the discourse created around “Peruvian culture” through the exhibition of images of dress in the museum. This essay will also engage with the way in which Testino constructed and legitimized his own identity as a Peruvian photographer as part of a culture that enforces a simplistic binary that essentializes its Indigenous communities through the opposition between rural and urban, tradition and modernity, dress and fashion, and Western and non-Western.

“Alta Moda” was one of the three exhibitions presented at the Mario Testino Museum in Lima, Peru. Mario Testino, Peruvian fashion photographer, was inspired to create this exhibition during a photoshoot for *Vogue Paris* in Peru, where he discovered the costume archive of “Filigranas Peruanas,” a Cusco-based dance association. The association was created in 1980 by Leonardo Arana and Ana Ojeda, Peruvian performing arts professionals, as a way to share the dance and textile heritage of Cusco, an Andean city located in southeastern Peru (Ideario 2021).

Mario Testino was born in Lima, the capital of Peru, in 1954 and was raised in the same city. He later moved to London in 1976, where he started his career and eventually became a world-renowned fashion photographer. He is most often recognized by the portraits he took of the late Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997, and his frequent collaborations with *Vogue*.

In 2012, Testino founded the Mario Testino Museum (MATE) located in Barranco, the art district of Lima. While the museum closed in 2020, it was initially created as a not-for-profit foundation that aimed to expose the work of Peruvian artists and local culture to an international crowd, to exhibit the work of international artists to the local audience, and to promote critical thinking skills through their educational program.

As such, MATE hosted temporary exhibitions by both Peruvian and international artists, exhibited a permanent display of Testino’s work, and promoted the artistic exchange between Peruvian and British artists through partnerships with London-based arts organizations such as the Delfina Foundation (MATE 2019).

The permanent display of Testino's work at the MATE, which included sixty-eight photographs, was changed every couple of years according to Testino's personal choice. In fact, the MATE exhibitions were curated through his eyes and stood more as an exhibition space rather than as a curatorial one. Moreover, the museum worked from the personal archive of Testino, which is located in his own house, and thus the MATE team could not determine the exact number of artworks that Testino held. Another crucial component of the museum was Bodega MATE: a boutique located inside the museum that promoted and sold garments and accessories by Latin American designers (MATE team member, interview by author conducted via Skype and email, August 28 and September 12, 2019). In this way, and even though it was promoted as a not-for-profit foundation, MATE was a place where Testino built his identity as a photographer, standing as a personal museum rather than as a fashion, photography, or art museum.

The "Alta Moda" exhibition featured portraits taken in Cusco as part of a larger research project that culminated in a book of the same title, published in 2013 by the MATE museum, with articles written by Mario Testino, Soledad Mujica, Fedora Martinez, Jennifer Allen, and Hamish Bowles (Alta Moda 2013). Through this project Mario Testino aimed to leave a legacy to his home country, Peru, while showcasing the wide range of traditional dress and its meanings. In addition, he aimed to create the first Peruvian photographic archive focused on fashion, wanting to explore part of the hidden history of Peru through clothing (Testino 2013). Through these portraits, he likewise intended to pay homage to Peruvian photographer Martín Chambi, who was born in 1891 in Puno, an Andean city in southern Peru. Chambi became known as the first Peruvian photographer from Indigenous origins — and the first one to reveal what life was like for the Indigenous communities in the Peruvian Andes (Archivo Fotográfico Martín Chambi 2020). While Testino shares a nationality with the late Chambi, their cultural heritage differs, and the historical narrative that each photographer tells through their work diverges.

The contrast between Lima and Cusco is the first issue that arises from this exhibition. Even though both are Peruvian cities, Lima is located on the West side of Peru, on the coast, and Cusco is in the Andes. Lima is a colonial city that was founded in 1535, three years after the Spanish arrived, by Francisco Pizarro, a Spanish conquistador. During this period, Lima became a “a bustling New World city that shared many of the urban characteristics of Madrid’s court and those of Seville’s port” (Bass and Wunder 2009, 132-138). While it became a diverse city, “one of the deepest anxieties that Lima faced in the colonial period was the very indeterminacy of racial identities” (Bass and Wunder 2009, 132-138), an issue that created a new social hierarchy that positioned Europeans at the top. During Chambi’s time (1891–1973), Cusco was seen as a more “primitive” city due to colonial ideas of hierarchy that appeared in the sixteenth century with the Spanish colonization of the Americas. These ideas position Western Europe and its traditions as the epitome of modernity while positioning Indigenous Peruvian culture as outside of the modern world and, in consequence, as underdeveloped. These beliefs persist in present-day Peru, and thus, as a *limeño* living in London, Testino seems to have observed the garments through this perspective, creating with it a specific narrative that fits a traditional idea of “Peruvian culture” that is inextricably linked to Indigenous tradition and underdevelopment.

The aim of this essay is to analyze the discourse created about “Peruvian culture” through the exhibition of images of dress in the museum. This essay also discusses the way in which Testino constructed and legitimized his own identity as a Peruvian photographer as part of a culture that enforces a simplistic binary that essentializes its Indigenous communities through the opposition between rural and urban, tradition and modernity, dress and fashion, and Western and non-Western.

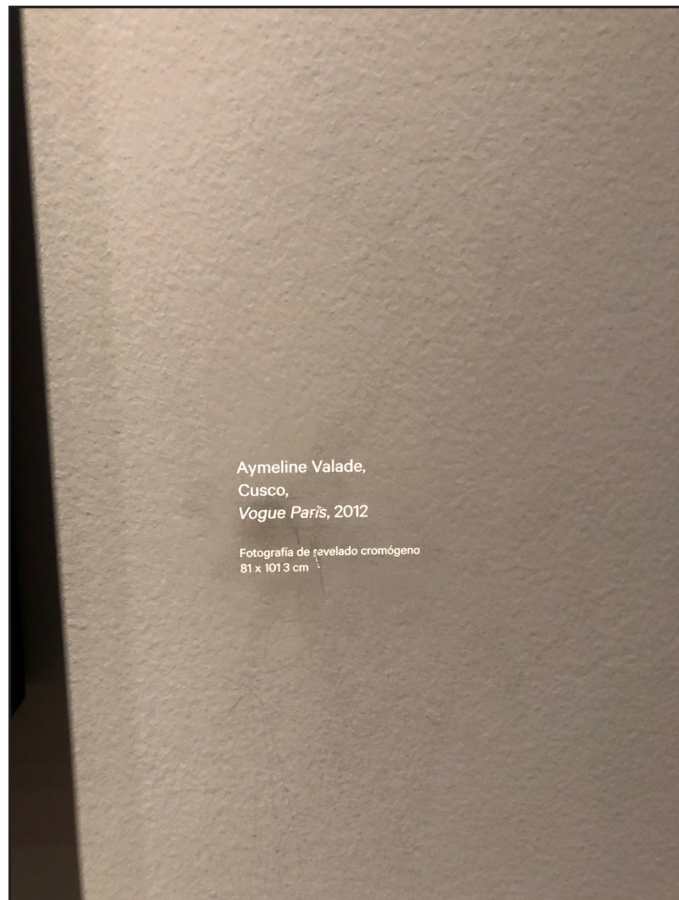


**FIGURE 1** PHOTO OF THE *VOGUE PARIS* PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN AT THE MARIO TESTINO MUSEUM, JANUARY 8, 2020.

### “OBSERVATION”: ORIENTALIZING THE SELF

The ground floor of the MATE featured Mario Testino’s permanent collection, which showcased his editorial work. The gallery displayed sixty-eight photographs and one video, divided into six rooms according to different genres: celebrity portraits, fashion editorials and cultural fashion photography. The last room, titled “Observation,” showed Testino’s editorial work around the world. The wall text included a quote by Testino where he referenced his exposure to a wide range of cultures: “I have exposed myself to so much: every fashion, every city, every point of view. The more you see the more discerning you become” (*Alta Moda* 2019). While Testino explained that by working around the world and with different cultures he had gained a wider understanding of them, these photographs portrayed certain stereotypical ideas about these places, highlighting cultural stereotypes that emphasized “non-Western” elements.

One of the photos, positioned next to the exit door which took the visitor to the second floor — the floor where “Alta Moda” was located — was taken in Peru in 2012 (Figure 1). This photograph was part of the *Vogue Paris* April 2013 editorial shoot that inspired Testino to create the “Alta Moda” series, and, due to its position in the room, it appeared to have been intentionally placed there as a visual introduction to the “Alta Moda” exhibition.



**FIGURE 2** PHOTO OF *VOGUE PARIS* CAPTION TAKEN AT THE MARIO TESTINO MUSEUM, JANUARY 8, 2020.



**FIGURE 3** PHOTOGRAPH OF CAPTION IN THE APRIL 2013 ISSUE OF *VOGUE PARIS*.

As a photograph created for a fashion magazine, the original intention was to showcase and promote the garments as products. While the magazine caption specified the provenance of the garments, the museum caption (Figure 2) instead provided the model's name, location, magazine, the type of photograph, and its size. The message transmitted through the photographed garments in the museum was therefore differentiated as, while observing the photograph, the visitor had no extra information about the garments.

While this photograph aimed to promote the designers and brands behind the garments, the focus changed when the photograph entered the museum. It shifted from a commercial piece created for a fashion magazine to a museum piece and transformed Testino's role.

As a fashion photographer, his work obtained a renewed status and a fresh perspective when showcased on museum walls, while as a Peruvian, his insider perspective validated the image of Peru that he decided to portray.

The photograph featured French model and actress Aymeline Valade jumping in the Sacsayhuamán fortress — built in the fifteenth century during the Inca Empire — in Cusco. She was photographed wearing a combination of traditional Peruvian dress and Western fashion. Valade was styled by Emmanuelle Alt, editor-in-chief of *Vogue Paris* at the time, and the original April 2013 magazine caption (Figure 3) specified the provenance of the garments: Etro embroidered coat and floral silk pants, Céline sequined sandals, Aurélie Bidermann earrings and cuffs, and an AKONG necklace. The hat and belt, which were traditional pieces and not from luxury fashion brands, were not credited. In this photograph, the roughness of the ground and the large stone wall of the Sacsayhuamán fortress juxtaposed with these garments create an opposition between a “pre-civilized” community and the “modern” world.

The model's jumping posture in the *Vogue Paris* photograph seems unusual for a fashion editorial and unlike usual movements individuals perform in their everyday lives. Through this performance, Testino appears to attempt to recreate a “primitive” identity, adding another layer of interpretation to the photograph — one which was validated by his statement describing his exposure to as many cultures and perspectives as possible. The model's jump was, in fact, reminiscent of another aspect of “Peruvian culture,” as she seemed to be representing part of *la danza de las tijeras* (roughly translated to scissors' dance), a south-central Peruvian Andean dance.

*La danza de las tijeras* is a ritual dance, which is considered one of the most representative elements of Andean culture. In fact, it was inscribed in 2010 in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO 2010). This ritual dance is a competition that coincides with

the most important phases of the agricultural calendar and can last up to ten hours. Its name comes from the scissor-like metal sheets that the dancers hold in their hands while performing. Even though the dance is now a part of catholic religious celebrations, the dancers, who wear garments embroidered with gold threads, sequins, and miniature mirrors, cannot enter any church while wearing these garments, as tradition states that their abilities to perform the dance come from a pact with the devil (Zevallos-Aguilar 2003, 131-146).

In the Peruvian Andes, some performers wear traditional dress with sneakers; of these, an interesting style are canvas sneakers. Joanne Eicher examines the influence of Western fashion on rural areas and explains that, even a garment or style is not worn by a community, it is still present, making it harder to completely disengage traditional dress and fashion trends. She also explains that it is not up to a historian to assess if fashion exists in certain communities. Rather, it is necessary for this community to be aware of changes in dress for fashion to exist (Eicher 1995, 295-306). These communities are usually depicted as being outside of the modern world, but the use of canvas sneakers demonstrates that there is not a binary opposition between Western and non-Western fashion. In fact, as this example shows, Western fashion is part of these communities' lives even when performing traditional aspects of their culture.

The use of canvas sneakers to perform one of the most representative elements of Andean cultures confirms Eicher's research, as it shows that Indigenous communities are likewise influenced — and a part of — the modern world. This style additionally exhibits a contemporary example of transculturation through dress (Ortiz 1947, 102-103), as it brings together elements from the three periods of Peru: the pre-Columbian period through the dance itself, and the colonial and postcolonial eras through traditional dress and the use of canvas sneakers. As a country whose history goes back to the ancient civilizations, traditional dress is central to the comprehension of its past and its impact in both the present and future of its communities. However, the current use of traditional clothing by certain local communities does not automatically signify that their use is part of their everyday lives or that these garments have remained completely unchanged since pre-Columbian times. Despite this, a binary opposition between Western and non-Western fashion is represented through Testino's editorial for *Vogue Paris*, where he relies on a representation of Peru as completely opposed to industrial development through the rural location and the styling of the garments. The subtle incorporation of an element of Andean culture such as *la danza de las tijeras* shows his localized knowledge, but it likewise adds to the construction of Peru through non-Western references connected to "primitive" societies. Overall, the photograph creates an *idea* of Peru through the use of bright colors and patterns, but without including any Peruvian designers.



This photograph exemplifies how, in fashion magazines and museums, Peru is usually represented as timeless and opposed to fashion. This idea plays a crucial role in the construction of Latin American national identities on a local and global level, as the focus is consistently placed on the differences between Western and non-Western civilizations. Consequently, as countries without global fashion capitals, they are considered “smaller” in comparison to those that play “larger” roles in the global fashion industry, such as the ones with recognized fashion capitals (New York City, London, Milan, and Paris).

In the photograph displayed at the MATE, the stone wall in the background heightens the idea of timelessness through the opposition between the handcrafted wall as a representation of an underdeveloped society, contrasted with a modern world where fashion exists. The April 2013 *Vogue Paris* issue where this photograph initially appeared was dedicated to Peru; however, the image of the country, as reflected in Testino’s photograph, was achieved through a conception of binary oppositions between Western fashion and traditional Peruvian dress. This opposition was increased by the fact that no Peruvian designers were included in the selection of the garments, reinforcing the idea that a fashion system can only exist in the “West.” Instead of focusing on a timeless image of Peru, the inclusion of Peruvian designers in the styling selection could have brought an alternative perspective — and a truer one — to the traditional idea of “Peruvian” fashion and dress. Additionally, the region is usually displayed as being underdeveloped through photographs and rural references that are directly opposed to modernization, and it is through these images that the idea that fashion is not part of these countries still predominates.

Testino, as a Peruvian and therefore an insider, could introduce a new perspective. Instead, his localized knowledge validated the traditional representation of “Peruvian culture.”

The photograph analyzed is a reflection of how his “insider” position as Peruvian is nonetheless a complex issue that blurs the line between the appreciation of cultures around the world and the advancement of a global hierarchy through national stereotypes.

While it was clear that Testino chose to place the photograph in the room dedicated to “foreign” cultures as a way to pay homage to his “roots,” the decision to showcase “Peruvian culture” through a Western fashion lens validated Peru’s global position in the fashion industry as “the Other.” In this way, Testino’s nationality positioned him as “Other”, but his upbringing in urban Lima, and his subsequent worldwide recognition positioned him in the center of the discourse: at once the “Other” as well as one who analyzes the “Other” (Said 1978; Hall 1997; Geczy 2013).

### **“FOLKLORIC TRADITIONAL COSTUMES”: RACE, POWER & THE COMMODIFICATION OF DRESS**

A costume, as defined by Pravina Shukla, is “special dress chosen for extraordinary contexts,” specifying that, while all types of dress show aspects of the wearer’s identity, costume in particular heightens certain elements (Shukla 2015, 249). While Shukla states that a costume is as significant as everyday fashion, Susan B. Kaiser points out that a national costume might eventually depict a country through the lens of exoticism, and, therefore, as the “Other” (Kaiser 2012, 74). This contrast is also reflected in the terminology used to differentiate what has been traditionally referred to as Western dress, as modern, and non-Western dress, as traditional. The terms have an additional meaning when applied to Latin American cultures as this region has a peculiar history: geographically, Latin America is located in the West, but historically it has not been considered as part of the Western world. In 1995, Joanne B. Eicher and Barbara Sumberg proposed, instead, the term “ethnic dress” and defined it as “those items, ensembles and modifications of the body that capture the past of the members of a group, the items of tradition that are worn and displayed to signify cultural heritage” (Eicher and Sumberg 1995). In this essay, I use “traditional dress” to refer to what Eicher and Sumberg defined as “ethnic dress,” and use it to discuss the traditional garments worn by Indigenous communities in Peru.

In fact, in a country as diverse as Peru, traditional dress varies depending on the region. However, there are certain garments that are recognized as the “true” representatives of “Peruvian culture” as a whole. In the “Alta Moda” exhibition, these two aspects of traditional Peruvian dress are explored through its use both as regalia for special occasions and its representation as national dress.

The “Alta Moda” exhibition included sixteen portraits and two mannequins wearing traditional dress from the Cusco region. These garments, as explained in the introductory wall text, are worn during special occasions, such as weddings, funerals, and festivals. The text further explains that “the term itself, ‘alta moda,’ has a double meaning: it is at once ‘high fashion’ (or ‘haute couture’) while alluding further to Cusco’s Andean altitude” (*Alta Moda* 2019), therefore

positioning these designs as fashion originating in the Andes. The introductory text also describes these garments as “folkloric traditional costumes.” The message is ambiguous, and since the garments worn in the portraits are referred to as both fashion and traditional dress, this introduction leaves the visitor speculating about their usage.

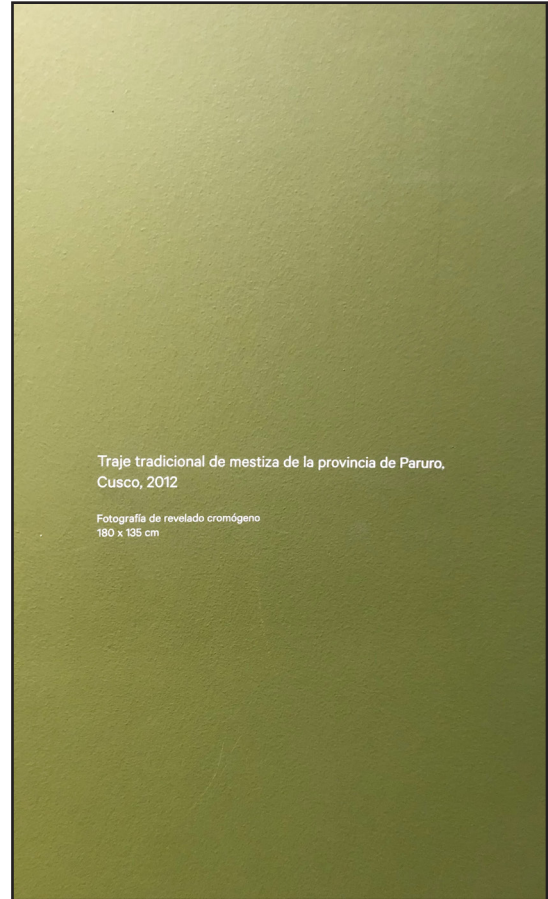
At the beginning of the exhibition, a closeup profile portrait of a brown-skinned woman with braided black hair draws the visitor’s attention (Figure 4). In the image, she is seen wearing a yellow mustard blouse with a white lace trim, a bright, multicolored *manta* fastened at the front by a large silver pin (usually called a *tupu*), a black hat, and earrings. She is depicted against a beige and black blurry backdrop, making her garments difficult to contextualize. The caption reads: “Traditional *mestiza* dress from the province of Paruro, Cusco, 2012. Chromogenic photography, 180 x 135 cms” (Figure 5). While the caption provides the basic information about the garments and the photograph itself, it leaves the portrayed woman in anonymity, in contrast with the first-floor editorial photographs’ captions that included the name of the models.

Therefore, some questions arise: Who is this woman? Why is she wearing this dress? What exactly is this dress? What does she wear in her everyday life?

Her earring, interestingly, stands out, as jewelry was not noticeable in the other photographs of the exhibition. However, the same issue of anonymity appeared in every portrait.



**FIGURE 4** PHOTO OF A PORTRAIT IN THE “ALTA MODA” EXHIBITION TAKEN AT THE MARIO TESTINO MUSEUM, JANUARY 8, 2020.



**FIGURE 5** PHOTO OF THE CAPTION OF THE PHOTOGRAPH IN FIGURE 4 TAKEN AT THE MARIO TESTINO MUSEUM, JANUARY 8, 2020.

Out of the sixteen portraits, the woman in this image was the only one labeled as a *mestiza*, which refers to the children of an interracial marriage between Spanish and Peruvian individuals, or simply as people of mixed blood that can be traced back to the colonial period (Flores Galindo 2005, 161; Bailey 2005, 5). This term does not have one clear definition and, because of this, it is recognized as a word that is uncomfortable to use even today (Zaya 2011, 82-83).

Race is a social construct that has its roots in the late eighteenth century, when it was used to classify and categorize individuals (Wade 2008, 177-181). During this time, these characteristics were seen as scientific explanations for physical differences and behaviors — in other words, as a way to analyze the differences between societies and individuals. This idea constructed a global “racial” hierarchy where Europeans were positioned at the top. The rest of the world, then, was compared in relation to their standards, creating as a consequence discrimination towards them. This classification evolved into the current definition of race as a social construction in the twentieth century (Wade 2008, 177-181). These ideas were very much present in Latin America, where the upper classes were traditionally either European or from European descent. While the latter were considered as *mestizos*, this process of differentiation assumed that the mixture of “races” would result in a “whiter,” and therefore more modern, society (Wade 2008, 177-181). Indeed, by taking the latter definition of this term, everyone is Peru is, in fact, a mestizo, including Testino. Therefore, describing this woman as the only mestiza in the room raises the question of contextualization: What is the caption referring to? What does this term describe? Is it describing her dress, or the woman portrayed? Is it describing her traditions and lifestyle? What made Testino define her as such?

In her research, Joanne Eicher explains that “Western’ dress represents a style with origins in the tailored garments of Euro-Americans, but now, as a way of dress shared by millions of people, it no longer merits that name” (Eicher 1995, 16). She further examines the influence of Western fashion on rural areas and explains that, even if it is not worn by a community, it is still present, making it harder to completely disengage dress and fashion (Eicher 1995). The presence of multicultural influences in Latin America — and Peru — indicate that fashion has been influenced by them. In fact, in “Alta Moda,” the incorporation of Western influence in traditional dress is visible in the portrait of the woman positioned at the entrance of the exhibition and specifically, in her silver pin, the *tupu*.

The *tupu* is a personal ornament that dates back to the pre-Columbian era, and it is used by women to secure garments that are worn over the shoulders, such as *mantas* and shawls. Initially, before colonization, it was also used to differentiate between social classes. For instance, its materials were used to differentiate between them — copper, bronze, silver, and gold — with the upper classes wearing the more intricate ones made of gold. Pre-Columbian *tupus* resembled a long needle (with its length between eight and sixty-five centimeters) and were used vertically. Its top circular or semi-circular forms were decorated, and later on embossed, with geometrical forms, as well as images of birds and fish (Vetter Parodi 2007, 101-128).

During the colonial period, these shapes changed and became varied, adopting several European motifs such as hearts and double-headed eagles. The latter, specifically, was the heraldic symbol of the Habsburg dynasty from Austria. These decorative motifs also changed, incorporating new nationalistic elements such as the sun, the moon, and the llama. Other new figures included flowers and crosses — elements that can also be found on textiles of the same period. During this time, *tupus* became even more intricate and started to be used as decorative pieces rather than functional ones. By the end of the colonial period, *tupus* also started to resemble Spanish brooches, which were worn horizontally instead of vertically. By then, the embossed images represented a combination of Indigenous and Spanish ideologies. In the twenty-first century, *tupus* are still used by some Indigenous communities, usually for special occasions such as weddings, parties, and funerals (Vetter Parodi 2007, 101-128). The *tupu* worn by the woman in the portrait is from the colonial period, showing the link between the past, the present, and the future, as well as a connection to Western civilization. This *tupu*, then, is an early representation of the effects of globalization on dress, and therefore, another example of transculturation through fashion.

As a concept created by Fernando Ortiz through the study of Latin American societies, transculturation is one of the results of globalization, and fashion, as exemplified through the *tupu*, is one of the best ways to analyze both transculturation and the globalization of dress (Ortiz 1947, 102-103). Margaret Maynard builds upon the work of Joanne Eicher and explores the globalization of dress. She explains how traditional dress is commodified by the “West,” highlighting its common use as inspiration.

In Peru, the commodification of national stereotypes usually comes from the Western communities. In her study on upper class *limeños*, Denise Claux explains that in the twenty-first century, upper class *limeños* have adopted a new appreciation and connection to pre-Columbian traditions and with them, for its Indigenous communities (Claux 2015, 5-6). However, a consequence of this new-found appreciation is reflected in the orientalization of its Indigenous communities and, as a consequence, self-commodification. While the issue of self-commodification can be observed through the work of Mario Testino in “Alta Moda,” these stereotypes are more often than not constructed and promoted by the countries themselves, which, in the fashion industry, is translated into the commodification of Peruvian Indigenous communities.

Testino is therefore not creating these stereotypes by himself, but, as a Peruvian fashion photographer, he presents the garments worn by this community as fashion from the Andes, and thus creates discourses about “Peruvian” dress and fashion through them.

The contrast between his extravagant, sensual, and luxurious fashion and celebrity portraits and the “Alta Moda” exhibition adds another layer to the complex message created, especially as Testino — as the curator and photographer — acts as the link between the global and local fashion industries as an insider and is therefore in a position of authority in the construction of a narrative about his culture.

The garments he chose to photograph bring together the pre-Columbian past, the colonial period, and present-day Peru as a visual and material representation of the development of pre-Columbian civilizations throughout time (Bailey 2005, 71). This traditional dress, therefore, has a part of the country’s history embedded in it. While it was clear that Testino aimed to give them value by comparing them to “Western” fashion, this choice resulted in the advancement of the simplistic opposition between Western and non-Western fashion that predominates in the fashion industry. Likewise, Testino’s decision to pay homage to his home country through the exploration and exhibition of Cusco’s Indigenous culture appears to be guided by his own perspective as a born and raised *limeño* based in London, enforcing in this way the commodification of Peruvian stereotypes. As pieces that “capture the past of the members of a group” they are, as shown above, not just a depiction of exoticism: these garments are capable of presenting and revealing further aspects of their cultural heritage (Eicher and Sumberg 1995).

## “THE MOST RENOWNED PERUVIAN PHOTOGRAPHER OF HIS ERA”: LOCAL VALIDATION

The floor where “Alta Moda” was located was divided into two rooms: “Alta Moda” on one side, and portraits of Princess Diana on the other side. The side-by-side comparisons of these two rooms inadvertently came together to construct the identity that Mario Testino has chosen as a photographer: both a Peruvian and an international artist. The differences between the two rooms were noticeable both in the photographs exhibited and the design of each room — thereby constructing further messages about Western and non-Western cultures.

The “Alta Moda” room (Figure 6) constructed an idea of Peru through its green walls and photographs that were bright in color. In addition, the carpet, as explained in the wall text, was inspired by the stone walls from the Sacsayhuamán fortress in Cusco. In contrast, the Princess Diana room (Figure 7) had light grey walls and the portraits were mostly in neutral tones, which are usually linked to elegance. Interestingly, the wall text in this room was written in Spanish and English as a personal letter from Testino to the visitors, where he explained his connection to Princess Diana, and the honor that it was for him to photograph her: “You can imagine how difficult this sort of shoot can be.” The third-person wall text in both Spanish and English in the “Alta Moda” room focused, instead, on the exploration of Testino’s legacy through “Peruvian culture” and dress:

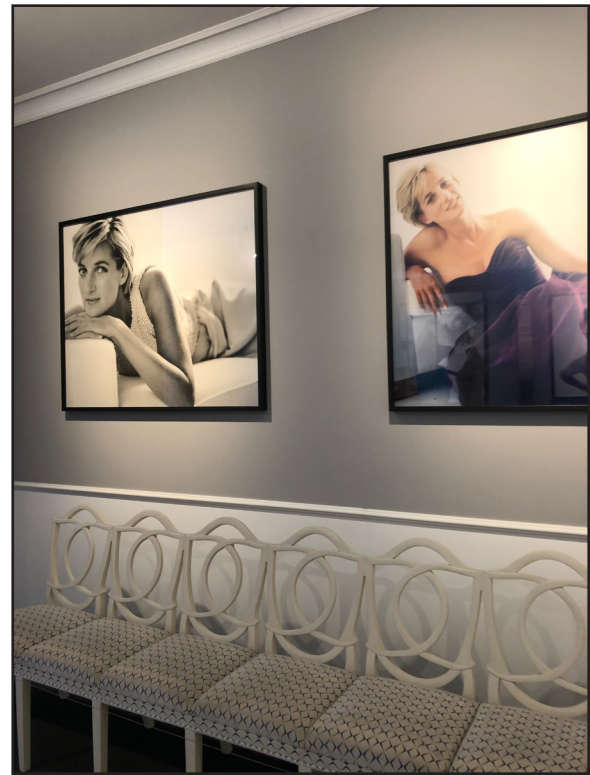
Testino has been travelling to Cusco for many years specifically to portray for posterity — and for the love of it too — these folkloric traditional costumes. Worn during festivals and at significant personal times, such as death in the family or a celebration of marriage, these proclaim vivid, multi-coloured messages to the world, near and far (*Alta Moda* 2019).

The distinction created through the wall texts between the photographs of Princess Diana and the anonymous Andean community in “Alta Moda” created a hierarchy between them, placing “Western culture” in a more powerful position — a position worthy of special recognition. This approach between Western and non-Western civilizations is one that is greatly present in Peru’s internal dynamics, bringing forward internal cultural differences. In Peru, the hierarchy represented through the two rooms at the MATE is visible between the country’s upper classes and Indigenous communities. The idea of internal cultural differences is inextricably linked to Peru’s Indigenous communities, whose differences from the Western world are seen as innate and unchangeable (Wade 2008, 185), issues that have been historically more conspicuous in Lima. In her study on upper class *limeños*, Denise Claux explains that during and after the colonial period, the identities of Lima citizens were constructed in a way that was similar to how Europeans created the idea of “the West”—differentiating themselves from the “Others,” which were the lower classes, including the Indigenous communities (Claux 2005, 35).





**FIGURE 6** PHOTO OF THE “ALTA MODA” EXHIBITION TAKEN AT THE MARIO TESTINO MUSEUM, JANUARY 8, 2020.



**FIGURE 7** PHOTO OF THE PRINCESS DIANA EXHIBITION TAKEN AT THE MARIO TESTINO MUSEUM, JULY 11, 2019.

This “racial” differentiation is part of colonial discourse, which, as Bhabha explains, was conceived as a way to defend and justify the imposition of European norms after colonization. He further argues that this discourse is led by a fixed representation of the “Other” and therefore creates dynamics of power, resistance, domination, and dependence between both sides. Likewise, Bhabha illustrates that these stereotypes rely on a constructed illusion of difference that is accepted by both the colonizer and the colonized (Bhabha 2004, 94-110). The discourse of colonialism is therefore replicated in Lima, where the upper classes adopt the position of power in the “racial” hierarchy as a way to construct their own identities. This is similarly echoed in Testino’s decision to pay homage to his home country through the construction of the first photographic archive of traditional Andean dress. Testino relied on a constructed idea of difference between him and the Andean community, the internal “Other,” to reinforce his Peruvian roots. Through a fixed representation of timelessness, Testino created dynamics of power and domination in which he, as a world-renowned Peruvian photographer, was authorized to document Peruvian heritage.

While Mario Testino is currently the most renowned Peruvian photographer, he is not the first one. Martín Chambi is recognized as the first photographer from Indigenous origins who photographed Indigenous Peruvian communities through an insider lens. In the same way as Testino's nationality validates his perspective on the portrayal of his country's communities, Chambi's own background gave him — and continues to give him — the authority to portray these communities through his lens. Through "Alta Moda," Mario Testino positioned himself as a descendant of Chambi, specifically through the use of Chambi's backdrops for the "Alta Moda" portraits. The wall text explained:

The backdrops against which our colourful subjects arrange themselves once belonged to Martín Chambi (1891-1973), the most renowned Peruvian photographer of his era, who brought the art and the craft of his native land to a far wider audience than he might ever have imagined. The atmosphere evoked in these striking portraits belongs therefore to two photographer-historians, significant Peruvians both. The past and the present working in perfect harmony (*Alta Moda* 2019).

Although both of them are, indeed, renowned Peruvian photographers, their legacies — whether they actively created them or not — are different. Testino, on one hand, is known for photographing models and celebrities, while Chambi, on the other, is known for documenting the everyday life of Indigenous communities of Cusco. In addition, their cities of origin differentiate their own perspectives on the same Indigenous communities. In fact, during Chambi's time, the hierarchy between Cusco and Lima positioned him as the internal "Other," as the city of Cusco was seen as more "primitive" due to colonial ideas of "racial" hierarchy (Penhall 1997, 52). Testino, by choosing to compare himself to Chambi and his background, is choosing to tell a narrative that focuses on the Andean traditions of Peru, which, in turn, are usually considered as its "true essence" through the constructed difference that Bhabha referred to when discussing the discourse of colonialism. While it is clear that Testino aimed to create a link between his legacy and Chambi's given their shared "Peruvian heritage," Testino relied on an aspect of "Peruvian heritage" that actually differentiates him from Chambi.

As a country with an intricate colonial history, Peru's national identity and traditions are currently linked to its pre-Columbian past, which is usually considered as the most "authentic" Peruvian period. However, traditions, as legitimate and long-established as they might seem, are also constructed, and generally assembled to fit a specific narrative (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). By choosing to explore his "Peruvianness" through the lens of Chambi's work, Testino is engaging in a "fixed" tradition that is likely seeking to legitimize his work as a photographer. Through embracing this approach to portraying his own "Peruvian heritage," Testino, rather than capture the complex social reality of Peru, chose instead to stage a traditional image that enforced Peruvian stereotypes. He thus linked the country to the idea of timelessness, in opposition to modernity and fashion. As Peruvian sociologist José Carlos Mariátegui explained, Peruvian tradition is not only composed of Indigenous tradition. It is actually a "triple tradition": Indigenous, Spanish, and African (Mariátegui 2005). And to these three I would also add Asian as, between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, Peru welcomed over 150,000 Asian immigrants (Blanchard 1979; Kennedy and Vandenberg 2019). Therefore, while it is clear that Testino chose to pay homage to Chambi through his work in "Alta Moda" as a way to recognize the more traditional "Peruvian heritage," he missed the opportunity to explore other aspects of his own heritage and share a story that remains to be told.

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## Author Bio



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