

Jardines: A Decolonial approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia

BY ANDRÉS LÓPEZ GALEANO,
DIANA CAROLINA VARÓN, AND
OSCAR CUBILLOS

VOLUME 5
ISSUE 2
ARTICLE 1

Keywords

Fashion
Sustainability
Social transformation
Co-creation

MLA • López Galeano, Andrés, et al. "Jardines: A Decolonial approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia." *Fashion Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2024, pp. 1-25, <https://www.fashionstudies.ca/jardines/>, <https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.

Abstract • The "Jardines" project represents an interdisciplinary intersection between fashion, sustainability, and social transformation in the Colombian context. Born from a collaboration between academic institutions and sustainable brands, with the active participation of the Avanza Cooperative, composed of former FARC guerrilla members, this project aims to reflect on the conventional narratives of the fashion industry. Through a decolonial lens, "Jardines" proposes a discussion regarding design and production practices that move away from Eurocentric patterns. Sustainability, both in terms of ecological practices and social inclusion, is central to this endeavor. The project not only incorporates sustainable techniques in textile production but also promotes co-creation and the active participation of communities through dialogue and recognition of territory. Interdisciplinarity is manifested in the combination of ethnographic methodologies, fashion design, and sociological reflections, culminating in the creation of the "Jardines" documentary and various transmedia content, as image and photography play an important role in this process. This film acts as a visual testimony to the confluence of fashion, sustainability, and reconciliation, offering a unique perspective on social transformation through fashion in Colombia.

Diana Carolina Varón Castiblanco is a research professor specialized in aesthetics of music, social constructions of the body, and qualitative research methodologies. **Andrés López Galeano** is a research professor, fashion designer, and educator with over a decade of teaching experience and a deep passion for sustainable and social innovation in design. **Oscar Cubillos Pinilla** is a professor and photographer passionate about experimental processes of chemical photography and academic outreach related to the image.



INTRODUCING THE CONTEXT OF “JARDINES”

This research experience called “Jardines” is part of an alliance between two fashion academic institutions (Universidad Santo Tomás and Escuela Arturo Tejada Cano), alongside Colombian sustainable fashion labels Tarpui and Manifiesta. This alliance also includes the vital participation of the Avanza Cooperative, a collective that encompasses individuals who have endured the repercussions of armed conflict in Colombia, integrated by former FARC guerrilla members.

Jardines took place in 2021 during the last days of the COVID pandemic.

Jardines is a project that aims to nurture reconciliation and foster social transformation through the intertwined realms of fashion and sustainability. This mission was embarked upon through a series of interconnected experiences that unfolded in Bogota and La Vereda La Fila, located in Icononzo, Tolima.

Spanning the initial year of a three-phase project, the endeavor leveraged co-creation actions that encouraged creation, photographic research methods, and ethnographic methodologies, including the utilization of “historias de vida” (Vasilichis, 2006; Becker, 2008) to spotlight notable individuals and significant spaces, facilitating recognition, acknowledgment, and collaborative creation with others.



Figure 1 Life stories workshop with Tarpui and Manifesta brands. Bogotá, August 2021.

This approach, often attributed to authors such as Daniel Bertaux (2005) and Paul Thompson (2000) who have significantly contributed to the field of life story methodology, encourages a deep dive into personal narratives, fostering a rich understanding of individual experiences within a broader social context. It is a tool that allows for the exploration of the intricate web of relationships between individuals and their environments, providing fertile ground for co-creation and mutual understanding. As Thompson (2000) articulated, life stories offer “a more vivid picture of the past... and a deeper understanding of the structural forces at work” (p. 456).

The “Jardines” project embarked on its inaugural phase with a deep commitment to community engagement in design, fostering workshops in Bogotá and Icononzo that were facilitated by representatives from Arturo Tejada, Tarpui and Manifesta labels from teachers, students, and other places of knowledge. Lina from Tarpui, affectionately referred to as the “Bruja,” spearheaded the ecoprint technique for the development of organic textiles. This process not only epitomizes environmental sustainability but also encapsulates the rich narratives and connections that the community and territory share and maintain with the local flora. On the other hand, Nicolás from Manifesta brought a wealth of empirical knowledge in sewing, a skill honed through a lifetime of experiences, including the tragic loss of his brother during the Colombian conflict. Nicolás seeks healing and purpose through fashion, aiming to positively impact his surroundings.

This collaborative endeavor culminated in the creation of fifteen unique garment pieces, each narrating the deep stories unearthed during the project. The rich tapestry of narratives, approached from a decolonial perspective in the research and creation experience, was further brought to life through a film documentary, encapsulating the collaborative spirit fostered throughout this collective experience.

This documentary aims to reach a wider audience, showcasing how sustainable fashion as a decolonial category in this experience, questions and challenges the dominant narratives of the fashion industry that rely on modernity and mainly economic growth. As Vázquez (2012) emphasizes, “Decolonial critique exposes the presentism/noveltism of modernity in order to illuminate already existing alternative genealogies and paths.” This fosters a deeper understanding of the relationship between fashion, sustainability, academia, and the narratives of conflict and reconciliation in Colombia. The documentary stands as a testament to the power of fashion in giving voice, shifting away from the Eurocentric lens of runways and million-dollar companies, and moving towards a more inclusive representation of Colombian identities and stories. This approach acknowledges the historical injustices perpetuated by colonial systems and centers the voices, practices, and traditions of marginalized communities (Basharat, 2023; Peirson-Smith and Craik, 2020). We have already mentioned Lina, the designer and creator behind the brand Tarpui, guided by the motto “to sow and leave a seed.” Tarpui is a growing label that focuses on fostering relationships with communities of artisans and Indigenous people, supporting them and exchanging knowledge to develop sustainable products that narrate local practices, knowledge, and stories through “comercio justo.” Their work is a testament to their commitment to environmental sustainability and the preservation of local narratives through fashion, that they not only take from communities but engage in a process of mutual growth and discovery.

On the other hand, we have Manifiesta. Led by women, this fashion brand has been collaborating with the Avanza Cooperative for more than seven years. In a context where a peace agreement was signed in Colombia in 2016, ending over fifty years of armed conflict, this label stands out because it is deeply rooted in a very specific historical context. It was one of the first to engage in discussions about fashion within a broader political and social spectrum. As a brand, Manifiesta initiated its design and creation process in partnership with the Avanza Cooperative from scratch, providing opportunities and a platform for collective growth. To this day, Manifiesta has introduced a political context to fashion in Colombia and ignited necessary conversations in this unique context.

Over the years, this collaboration has flourished, with the cooperative becoming one of the most significant sewing workshops employing former combatants, symbolizing a journey of growth and mutual development.

Among the majority of the Colombian fashion industry, which is mainly focused on production and sales, there exists a small yet significant number of fashion companies that stand as beacons of cultural, sustainable, or political work. They champion causes such as environmental sustainability, social justice, peace, and inclusion. These community-based organizations and productive units have carved out a niche where fashion transcends commercial purposes to foster societal transformation.

Tejidos Chakana, for instance, empowers women who experienced the context of armed conflict by providing a platform to showcase their weaving skills, preserving the rich textile tradition of the region (Tejidos Chakana). Creation, in this context, acts as a means to acknowledge communities from a perspective distinct from grief and sorrow, shifting towards colour and the preservation of life. Similarly, Confecciones La Montaña trains and employs people with disabilities, promoting inclusivity and offering a nurturing work environment (Confecciones La Montaña). The “Fundación Acción Interna” takes this transformative approach further by facilitating the reintegration of inmates and ex-inmates into society through various stages of fashion production, offering them a second chance and a hopeful pathway to rebuild their lives (Fundación Acción Interna).

Building on this transformative approach to fashion, which is now resonating as a global movement, there is a deep-rooted emphasis on a decolonial perspective. As Quijano (2014) elucidates:

The coloniality of power is a concept that attempts to establish a unity of phenomena that are verified and reproduced throughout the global space, including the current processes of globalization and the places, nationalities, cultures, and ethnicities that are at its base and that shape its transformations. (p. 826)

In the realm of fashion, this means challenging the Eurocentric and colonialist creation patterns that have long influenced global textile production. The goal is to promote designs inspired by local identity, authentically representing the country’s cultural diversity. Rather than positioning this project as a definitive stance on decolonization or offering a clear-cut answer on how to combat or define creation from this perspective, we delved into reflection. Our aim was to discern and comprehend the inherent dichotomies that were present. For instance, the colonial matrix implies uniformity, suggesting that all bodies — and by extension, all nations — are on an equal footing, disregarding the historical, political, and environmental nuances that set them apart. Consequently, topics like cultural appropriation, sustainability, and other contemporary reflections should not be viewed through a singular, generalized lens. As Walter D. Mignolo posits, “Decoloniality promotes pluriversality as a universal option — which means that what ‘should be’ universal is, in reality, pluriversal, not a single totality” (Mignolo, 2007). This perspective counters the trend to generalize issues, underscoring the need to appreciate the distinct challenges and values of a project, label, or organization within its specific context and associated community.

This principle is particularly relevant in fashion, where labels or brands in Latin America cannot be analyzed or treated in the same manner as their European or Chinese counterparts. Arturo Escobar further emphasizes the environmental dimension, advocating for the differentiation of ecological issues by regions, and cautioning against a “dangerous homogenization of global environmentalism” (Escobar, 1995, p. 83).

Building on this foundation, the fashion industry, deeply embedded within the fabric of modernity, champions modern values. Yet, it frequently neglects the inherent violence and authoritarianism that pervade modern societies, especially in relation to environmental concerns and the categorization of individuals based on race, gender, and status.

Quijano (1989) highlights the deep-rooted power dynamics established through the colonial matrix, where race and gender emerge as primary determinants in societal hierarchies. Fashion, as articulated by Lipovetsky (1994), can be both a subversive force and a potential perpetuator of these entrenched hierarchies. With its roots in the modern western world, fashion’s role transcends mere reflections of modernity; it also interacts with profound colonial structures (Lipovetsky, 1994). This understanding prompts us to contemplate the societal implications of co-creating, purchasing, or consuming fashion produced by former guerrilla combatants. Can this act serve as a challenge to the established order and the roles once ascribed to these individuals during the armed conflict in Colombia?

We propose exploring Tarpui and Manifiesta as social organizations rather than mere businesses. This is because their values regarding sustainable practices and political engagement are not market discourses, but foundational elements for producing fashion and understanding the different roads through which decolonizing can be woven. Colonization accentuates binary thinking, such as wrong /right, male/female, north/south, Black/white and determines a correct versus a wrong way of doing things. This experience highlights what was important for us as a collective, and we encourage you to find your own sense and voice. Overall, these companies oppose traditional fashion businesses centered on modern ideas of success and entrepreneurship in a global context where fashion is one of the most polluting industries (UN, 2018). Therefore, for these companies, fashion is not the end but the means to mobilize social justice politics.

Despite individual efforts, in Colombia, this is still a work in progress. As Latin American researchers and creators, the acknowledgment that fashion is the evidence of the open wound of colonization is fundamental. Eduardo Galeano once said, “History never really says goodbye. History says, ‘See you later.’”

Colonization, traditionally defined as the act of acquiring total or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting its resources (Farrel, 2020), extends beyond mere territorial conquest. It encompasses the pervasive knowledge and power relations that dictate many aspects of society. This domination manifests prominently in the fashion industry, where the western perspective often eclipses local traditions, territories, and unique ways of constructing “sense.” Such overshadowing perpetuates the coloniality of power and knowledge, emphasizing that fashion should be viewed as a catalyst for change, not merely a commercial endeavor.

The discourse surrounding fashion has been significantly enriched by critiques from fashion studies that challenge Eurocentrism and modernity in imposing power on others (Craik, 1994; Eicher & Lutz, 2000). Debates on the implications of globalization for the fashion system, in terms of environmental, labour, and communications, further deepen our understanding (Rabine, 2002; Slade, 2009; Jansen, 2014). Fashion extends beyond mere clothing and style; it is intricately connected with cultural and postcolonial studies. Kaiser (2012) delves into the cultural significance of fashion, analyzing how clothing choices can reflect and shape identity, social hierarchies, and power dynamics. This perspective recognizes that fashion is not solely about personal expression but is also influenced by societal norms and values. On the other hand, Jansen & Craik (2016) explore the postcolonial dimensions of fashion, examining the ways in which fashion can either perpetuate or challenge colonial legacies, cultural appropriation, and unequal power dynamics. Finally, Agudelo, Hernandez and López develop the idea of fashion regarding new challenges and, therefore, the outcome of the end of fashion education as we know it (2022). Through this lens, fashion becomes a critical tool for examining and reflecting global cultural identities. By drawing insights from cultural and postcolonial studies, we gain a deeper understanding of fashion as more than just surface-level aesthetics. Instead, it serves as a lens through which we can analyze and critique societal, cultural, and historical context.

Building on this, the Latin American modernity/coloniality research group, spearheaded by luminaries such as Arturo Escobar, María Lugonez, Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano, has further deepened this conversation in fashion studies. Their extensive work in decolonial studies offers a framework for pinpointing, understanding, and debating the colonial legacies embedded in fashion. Arturo Escobar’s reflection on the concept of the “third world” as a western construct to categorize and give meaning to the world is particularly poignant. Such colonial perspectives not only segment the world through a colonial matrix, but also perpetuate dichotomies like first/third world, advanced/primitive societies, and north/south divisions.

This binary worldview even extends to individuals, suggesting narratives that confine, for instance, ex-guerrilla combatants to specific roles, such as being seen solely as perpetrators of conflict, rather than recognizing their potential contributions to diverse fields like fashion. For cooperatives like *Avanza*, delving into fashion becomes an act of defiance against these generalized and restrictive worldviews, challenging the status quo and redefining narratives. Redefining these narratives requires an understanding of the intricate power dynamics that have shaped Colombia's historical context. The paramilitary phenomenon in Colombia, which emerged in the 1980s, was not only influenced by the dynamics of the armed conflict but also had a profound impact on the political, social, and economic spheres. Notably, both national and international private companies played a pivotal role in financing these paramilitary groups. Such relationships exemplify the power relations within the Colombian armed conflict, benefiting specific economic and social sectors, including the state. The ties between paramilitary groups and multinational companies, such as *Chiquita Brands* and *Drummond*, were established under the guise of security and mutual financial benefits, further entrenching the complex web of interests and power dynamics in the country to this day (Bejarano Reyes, Correa Méndez, & Ospina Cruz, 2018). Recognizing and understanding these historical intricacies is crucial in challenging and reshaping the narratives surrounding Colombia's fashion industry and its broader societal implications as they encourage reflection within the present.

To understand the depth of these collaborations and their impact, we employed a range of methodologies, from personal narratives to deep dives into individual experiences within broader social contexts.

FASHION AND CO-CREATION

In the words of Quijano (2007), “there is no modernity without coloniality.” Also, Gaugele and Tilton (2019) note that since the 2010s, fashion research has increasingly adopted a postcolonial perspective, challenging and reevaluating dominant Eurocentric discourses in fashion. Both insights underscore the importance of revisiting fashion traditions to propose emancipatory forms within the fashion industry and the co-creation of clothing. In the “Jardines” project, our aim was to foster a creation process that was collaborative and inclusive. As highlighted in the documentary, Andrés embraced the philosophy of surrendering to the process rather than fixating on the outcome. This approach embodies a commitment to decolonization, emphasizing the value of collective knowledge and processes over dictatorial creation.

The “Jardines” documentary encapsulates this reflection, emphasizing co-creation and defining it as: “Ceder en lo propio para crecer en lo colectivo” (surrendering the personal to grow in the collective). This perspective challenges the traditional role of the designer as an isolated creator, producing fashion for the masses. Instead, it promotes a model where designers work collaboratively, fostering dialogue and active listening.

Building on this notion of dialogue and listening, it is crucial to integrate the concept of communication for social change, as it was the fundamental method of research for “Jardines.” This approach emerged as a counter to modern communication theories that promote consumption and view local cultures as impediments to development. Gumucio (2011) emphasized the importance of building social change through collective communication processes centered around dialogue. Communication for social change seeks to empower individuals as active agents, promoting development that resonates with their realities rather than a singular economic or social model. Central to this is the role of dialogue, which fosters exchanges, influences, and most importantly active listening (Gumucio & Tufte, 2008, p. 17). This model of communication champions cultural identity, trust, and social empowerment, rejecting linear communication in favor of community-driven interactions. Through this dialogue-centric approach, new meanings emerge, and within these meanings lies a profound decolonial commitment.

Building on the themes of decoloniality and communication for social change, our initial research phase centered on diagnosing the labels *Manifiesta* and *Tarpui*. We assessed how they communicate their political and environmental perspectives, and how this aligns with their products. A social listening analysis of their social networks provided insights into their history. Both labels challenge traditional fashion norms, from *Tarpui*'s sustainable practices and materials to *Manifiesta*'s runways that not only showcase fashion but also carry “pancartas” (banners) reflecting on the political context of peace in Colombia. These initiatives question dominant discourses in Colombian fashion, challenging conventional notions of communication in *PAZarelas* and the environmental impact of fashion production.



Figure 2 Fieldwork, *Tarpui* sewing workshop, June 2021.

To delve deeper, semi-structured interviews (Smith, 2019) were conducted with key members from both labels, including Lina Bermeo from *Tarpui* and Sara García, Ángela Herrera, and four other members from *Manifiesta*. These interviews, combined with a visit to Lina Bermeo's workshop, employed Visual Anthropology as a methodology. As Ruby (2002) posits:

Culture manifests through visible symbols embedded in gestures, ceremonies, rituals, and artifacts situated in natural or constructed environments... If one can observe culture, researchers should be able to use audiovisual technology to record it as data subject to analysis and presentation. (p. 155)

During the workshop visit, we documented Lina's creative process, highlighting her gender-neutral and size-flexible designs and her research into ecoprinting. In Icononzo, where *Manifiesta* collaborates with ex-FARC combatants, interviews centered on their positive experiences, future dreams and their newfound connection to fashion. This exploration emphasized fashion's potential to foster empathy and give voice to marginalized individuals, challenging modern fashion conceptions.

Subsequently, our visit to Icononzo, Tolima, incorporated an ethnographic perspective and the life story method, especially with the ex-FARC combatants associated with Manifiesta. The aim was to understand the space, techniques, and challenges of the co-creation process. Through design interpretations and interviews, we gained a deeper understanding of the territory. As a result, an audiovisual documentation guide was created, drawing on Pink's (2016) visual ethnography and design anthropology. The Co-Creation Laboratories in Bogotá, in collaboration with Tarpui and Manifiesta, adopted the methodology proposed by Kirby Ferguson centered on remix culture. This methodology values the process of "copying, transforming, and combining" (Ferguson, 2011). The selection of this approach was based on the intention to redefine the act of "copying," not in terms of intellectual property, but in the context of "piracy" as a driver of design knowledge for informal markets and communities involved in fashion, such as former FARC combatants and non-designers. The goal was to simulate how people approach and resolve design processes without a foundation in design or creation. Exploration routes such as the exquisite corpse and deconstruction of fashion silhouettes for prototypes were implemented.

This framework contributes to what has been recognized as global calls for sustainability, diversity, equity, and inclusion in an industry seeking social transformation, but at a local level.



Figure 3 Cooperativa Avanza and Manifiesta sewing workshop Icononzo- Tolima, September. 2021.

Photography, as an interdisciplinary tool, was central to our project. Roland Barthes' insights into photography, likening it to language with terms such as operador, espectro, espectador, studium, momentum, and punctum (Barthes, 1989), provided a framework for this research. Viewing photography as a universal language, it becomes a medium for human communication, grounded in universally accepted visual codes.

The Fotovoz methodology further emphasized the power of imagery to convey endemic realities. Our collaboration with Manifiesta and the Icononzo cooperative leaned heavily on video documentation, capturing conversations to understand the context. This passive observation allowed the community to become accustomed to external presence. The material gathered was segmented into three categories: 1) physical and social territory, 2) participative work dynamics, and 3) life stories from unstructured video interviews. Pierre Bourdieu's emphasis on the image's emotive power and its role in interpersonal relations (Bourdieu, 1988) resonated with our approach. Photography's role in highlighting social phenomena has been acknowledged since the 1970s. As Gisele Freund (1986) articulated:

The lens, the so-called impartial eye, actually permits every possible distortion of reality: the character of the image is determined by the photographer's point of view and the demands of his patrons. The importance of photography does not rest primarily in its potential as an art form, but rather in its ability to shape our ideas, to influence our behavior, and to define our society. (p. 8)

During the third fieldwork phase, a second set of interviews aimed to nourish creative results. Concurrently, the research team devised a co-creation laboratory methodology for project stakeholders, tailored to interview findings. This was informed by Boaventura de Sousa's (2014) knowledge ecology concepts and the procedures of co-creation as a horizontal dialogue between designers and non-designers, emphasizing frugal design.

To further bolster this approach, the project also drew inspiration from other interdisciplinary perspectives similar to knowledge ecology. These perspectives, like transdisciplinarity (Nicolescu, 1997), emphasize the integration of diverse fields of knowledge to address complex problems. This interdisciplinary approach is a fundamental asset of the project in terms of its decolonial commitment. It allows for a richer, more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand, ensuring that the project's decolonial aspirations are deeply embedded in every aspect of its execution. By integrating these diverse perspectives, the project not only challenges colonial legacies but also paves the way for more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable solutions in the world of fashion.

JARDINES DOCUMENTARY

To bring these discussions from theory into practice, the documentary serves as a visual representation, capturing the essence of our project's objectives and achievements. The “Jardines” project delves deep into the tapestry of life stories, offering insight into how individuals perceive their social surroundings. These narratives, rooted in a phenomenological perspective, reflected in our experience as stories of abandonment, loneliness, violence contrasted with hope, love, and also the fascination for fashion and what it can do for others. Gonzalo, the leader of the cooperative, manifests in the “Jardines” documentary: “I feel proud when someone from the community, or someone else, when I see them wearing the clothes I make, that is a source of pride for me.”

The documentary spotlights Lina and Nicolas, individuals marked like many other Colombians by personal losses due to conflict and war who are now navigating new realities within ETCRs (Territorial Spaces for Training and Reintegration in Colombia, pivotal for post-conflict peacebuilding). Rather than overtly discussing decoloniality or directly narrating their tales, the film chose a more subtle approach. The stories shared during the Icononzo workshop and in Bogota, became a mirror of collective pain but also collective interest and admiration for what fashion can do to transform and create impact within the right context.

While life stories played a pivotal role in identifying creative elements, they also fostered deeper connections, facilitated healing through dialogue, and promoted mutual growth. This methodology, which prioritized acknowledging personal milestones and envisioning collective futures, transcended fashion. It was about constructing a shared vision for the future. As of 2023, we are continuing to collaborate as a team and have proposed a nine-step route to co-creation, which includes the following stages: Backstage; Superhero/Fashion Icon; Moldery; Diseñadores Somos Todes; Academic Role and Support; Pattern and How Could We; Runway Show; Spill the Tea; and Hands at Work. We aim to refine this approach further in our future research. In 2022, we embarked on another phase of this project, primarily collaborating with artisans in Iza, Boyacá, where we tested our methodological approach. We plan to return to Icononzo in November 2023, alongside Lina from Tarpui and Jorge from Guzo Atelier — a brand based in Córdoba, Montería — to work with Manifiesta and Avanza again. The objective is to allow the community to decide the fate of the pieces crafted during the “Jardines” project, laying the groundwork for a more expansive collective creation where they determine the direction.



Figure 4 Co-creation process with plants between Tarpui and Manifiesta brands. Icononzo, Tolima, September 2021.

We believed that the culmination of these narratives would lead to the creation of textile products, but in reality it enabled trust and cleared a path for further conversation on what it means to move away from a colonial matrix, from which it seems nothing can escape. In the final phase of the 2021 “Jardines” project, the creations came to the forefront as a fashion editorial process was initiated, capturing the essence of the project through professional imagery which can be found at the end of the documentary. This endeavor, captured by fashion photographer Farith Lara, was not just about garments but about narrating a journey towards peace and reconciliation within people and their different stories. The “Jardines” documentary, proving to be more than just a fashion film, became a testament to this journey, weaving together stories of pain, hope, and transformation.

CONCLUSION

We firmly believe that social design holds both the power and responsibility to address the myriad of social, environmental, and cultural crises we face.

Design is not merely a discipline serving economic enterprises (Papanek, 2022). A cornerstone of our approach is the fusion of critical transdisciplinary thinking and practices both within and outside academia. This involves integrating sociology, anthropology, design, and cultural studies with the practical knowledge of former guerrilla members and fashion creators within experiences, workshops, and discussions. Moreover, participatory design, when centered on political agendas, can elevate the fashion system beyond its conventional narratives, transforming products from mere accessible goods to reflections of cultural, environmental, or political contexts. In the case of “Jardines,” the 15 garments were unique pieces exposed as a means to start conversation and dialogue. The pieces will be sold after two years and the income will go to the Cooperativa Avanza.

Regarding transdisciplinary thinking, the roles of design, communication, and sustainability in contemporary fashion can be reimagined from “the south” through local actions that prioritize its people, territories, and cultures. This ethos is embodied in our video, where “Jardines” is presented as a fashion collection, and Tarpui and Manifiesta are portrayed as social organizations rather than mere brands. Their cultural conversations are evident in the fact that the garments were predominantly showcased in museums and fashion shows, rather than storefronts. They were also featured in political events, such as the congressional inauguration in Colombia, represented by Jennifer Pedraza, an advocate for life preservation and women’s empowerment. As brands, this political engagement provides economic opportunities for peace agreement signatories, victims, designers and others, exemplifying how traditional roles in fashion can be subverted through dialogue and co-creation. This framework prompts us to reevaluate how dominant fashion is produced, marketed, and discussed, challenging the intrinsic ties between fashion and capitalism. While we sometimes grapple with the constraints of the colonial matrix within a capitalist world, our endeavor serves as a beacon of hope for concepts, authors, and terms that delve into the decolonization of fashion and broader experiences.

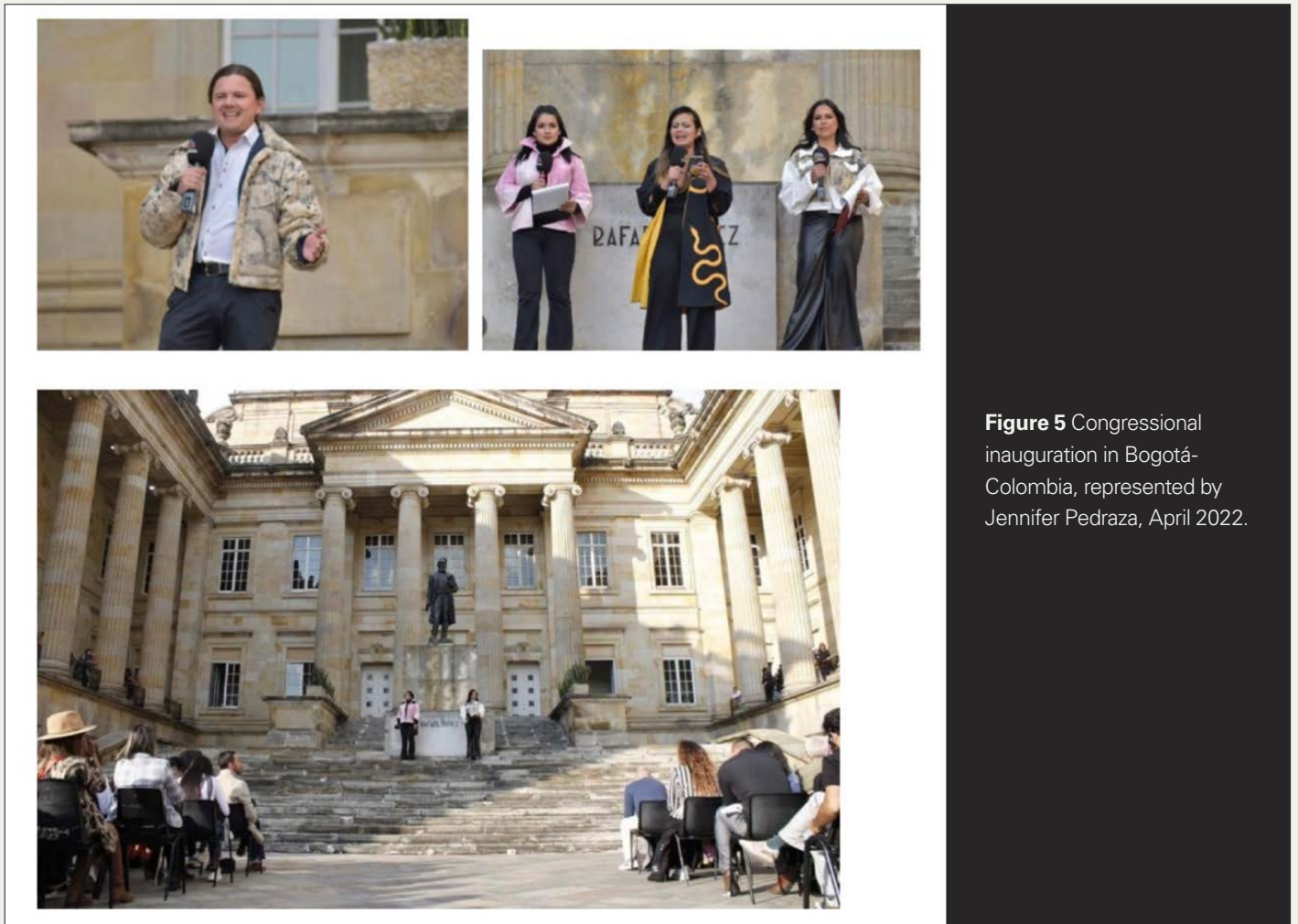


Figure 5 Congressional inauguration in Bogotá-Colombia, represented by Jennifer Pedraza, April 2022.

In our project, the focus on decolonizing fashion is about forging a novel co-creation model both inside and outside the conventional fashion system. These fashion-centric social organizations champion life through environmental, social, and economic sustainability, viewing the body as a living territory and vice versa. Former guerrilla members utilized organic cotton, imprinting it with the endemic flora of their region using techniques imparted by a fashion designer steeped in Indigenous practices. One such plant, the “guagua,” historically used for healing wounds and known for its reddish hue, features prominently in this collection, carrying new meaning, perspectives, and sense for its use, very similar to the sacred “coca” plant, which is actually being researched in Colombia for dyeing and fabric purposes.



Figure 6 “Guagua” plant, Fieldwork Iconzo Tolima, 2021.

In a symbolic act of reconciliation, a victim from the guerrilla’s wartime now sews alongside former ex combatants that live and work in Icononzo Tolima. Later, a naturally printed blazer from the “Jardines” collection was donned by a feminist congresswoman during the inauguration of Colombia’s first left-leaning president.

As a testament to this journey, we’ve crafted a documentary essay that chronicles both the research and creative processes behind the collection. Our aspiration is for this documentary to stand as a testament to knowledge production, paralleling the insights presented in academic papers traditionally recognized in publication systems. The fashion garments, designed and crafted collectively, serve as tangible representations of the ongoing efforts to implement peace agreements. Here, sustainability is not an afterthought, but a means to champion peace in defense of all life forms. By showcasing the collection and documentary in various public venues, we want to emphasize that politicized material and visual culture are pivotal in redefining fashion as a catalyst for social transformation and sparkling dialogue.

Co-creation manifested itself through workshops in Bogotá and Icononzo, employing the ecoprint technique to develop organic textiles that resonated with species from Icononzo and others from various peripheries. This included the cochineal, originally from Mexico, and indigo, symbolizing the power of the Colombian national denim industry. This highlights the intrinsic connection between the community and the territory across time and in multiple contexts, and how it can serve as a means to engage in conversations about sustainability or colonization.



Figure 7 Ecoprint process records recorded in field work, 2021

The remix methodology, inspired by Kirby Ferguson's documentary, was adapted and applied within the project's context, addressing themes like "piracy" and the redefinition of "copying." In this light, copying becomes a tool for transgression and appropriation, especially in contexts like Colombia, where copying is a common practice in the informal market. García Canclini (1995) in *Hybrid Cultures* discusses how cultures intertwine and transform in globalization contexts, strongly correlating with the idea of remix and copying in fashion. Piracy essentially emerges as a response to the inability to afford or engage in a conversation with a brand or product due to cost or luxury "unreachable value." It is the outcome of an incomplete globalization process that imposes dominant aesthetics on others, and a response from the masses to reach the "unreachable."

At this point, by working with others we have redefined and transformed this process into a practical application for fashion creation that communities can navigate through. We hope to continue weaving meaning around this matter and applying this method in various formats, such as video, post design, and other forms of media and creation.

What value or meaning does fashion produced by ex-combatants carry? In Colombia, this is not just an artistic expression but also a political and social act. It requires introspection and acknowledgment of one's history to understand the value and importance this fashion approach might have for different individuals. However, by recognizing these individuals, listening to them, consuming, and supporting their fashion, society challenges traditional narratives and the roles these individuals played in the armed conflict. The ethnographic approach of this research reconnected these individuals not just with their stories but with their territories and their intrinsic value. It served as a way to acknowledge and validate their existence, their struggles, and their desire for societal reintegration.

We are still far from producing “decolonial fashion” products or projects. We have just managed to sow a path and invite others to work locally with us, and from this, we have all grown. We have certainly discovered that interdisciplinary approaches are essential when decolonizing, as they involve dialogue and communication as processes that lead to transformation. Our experience combined design techniques, personal narratives, and sociopolitical reflections. The tools and methodologies used, from recording life stories to the remix methodology, have been pivotal for the project’s success due to their ease of appropriation and replication or “copying.” We invite others to copy whatever they wish from this experience, or to engage in conversation with us so we can remix together, as well as delve deeper into the references and sources described here, anchoring them to their own context.

As the project evolves, continuous reflection on the implications and impacts of the methodologies employed becomes paramount. It is essential to consider their adaptability and applicability to future creative endeavors. There might be instances where drawing complements or even supersedes photography, or where diverse spaces emerge to explore avenues that have been broadened from ethnography to other contexts. For instance we have expanded to other scenarios like Biodanza (Toro, 2004) that serves as a method to foster empathy and recognize the “body” of another individual through dancing, a pivotal concept in decolonial settings. The interdisciplinary approach not only enhanced the project but also introduced novel perspectives. Such approaches are invaluable when delving into discussions about fashion, peace, and reconciliation in the context of Colombia and the broader Latin American region.



Follow the button below to watch the film, *Glove and Touch Studies*, or copy and paste the link below in your browser.

<https://fashionstudies.ca/jardines>

CLICK HERE TO WATCH

Bibliography

- Agudelo, C., Hernández, J., & López, A. (2022). El fin de la educación en moda. In E. Salazar et al. (Eds.), *Estudios de la moda en Colombia. Recorridos de una pregunta en construcción* (pp. 261-387-xx). UTADEO.
<https://doi.org/10.15332/li.lib.2022.00300>
- Baldé, G. (2018). El fast fashion, emergencia medioambiental según la ONU. Retrieved from <http://www.itfashion.com/moda/el-fast-fashion-emergencia-medioambiental-segun-la-onu/>.
- Bejarano Reyes, L. M., Correa Méndez, J. D., & Ospina Cruz, J. J. (2018). Paramilitarismo, multinacionales y modelo económico en Colombia 1997-2005: amenaza armada o afinidad ideológica. Universidad de La Salle, Bogotá. Retrieved from https://ciencia.lasalle.edu.co/negocios_relaciones/108.
- Berteaux, D. (2005). *Los relatos de vida. Perspectiva etnosociológica*. Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra.
- Canclini, N. G., Chiappari, C. L., & López, S. L. (1995). *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (NED-New edition). University of Minnesota Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.cttts9sz>
- Confecciones La Montaña. (n.d.). Retrieved from Website.: <https://www.confeccioneslamontana.com/nosotros/>
- Craik, J. (2015). Challenges for Australian Fashion. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 19(1), 56–68.
- Eicher, J. B., & Lutz, H. A. (2000). *The Visible Self: Global Perspectives on Dress, Culture, and Society* (2nd ed.). New York: Fairchild.
- Empowerment Plan. (n.d.). About. Retrieved from <http://www.empowermentplan.org/about>.
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press. p. 83.
- Ferguson, K. (2011). Everything is a Remix. [Video Series]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9RYuvPCQUA>.
- Fundación Acción Interna. (n.d.). Retrieved from Website.: <https://fundacionaccioninterna.org/#>
- Freund, Gisèle. *La fotografía como documento social*. 4º edición. Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1986.
- Gumucio, A. (2011). Comunicación para el cambio social: Clave del desarrollo participativo. *Signo y pensamiento*, 30(58), 26–39.
- Gumucio, A., & Tufte, T. (2008). *Antología de la comunicación para el cambio social. Lecturas históricas y contemporáneas*. La Paz: Plural.

- Jansen, M. A. (2014). *Moroccan Fashion: Design, Tradition and Modernity*.
- Jansen, M. A., & Craik, J. (2016). *Modern Fashion Traditions: Negotiating Tradition and Modernity through Fashion*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Kaiser, S. (2012). *Fashion and Cultural Studies*. New York: Berg.
- Lipovetsky, G. (1994). El imperio de lo efímero. [Nombre de la editorial].
- Lipovetsky, G. (1994). *The empire of fashion: Dressing modern democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2007). DELINKING: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 449-514.
- Nicolescu, B. (1997). The transdisciplinary evolution of the university condition for sustainable development. In *International Congress on University's Mission in the 21st Century*, Locarno.
- Quijano, A. (1989). La nueva heterogeneidad estructural de América Latina. In H. R. Sonntag (Ed.), *¿Nuevos Temas Nuevos Contenidos? Las Ciencias Sociales de América Latina y El Caribe ante El Nuevo Siglo*. Editorial Nueva Sociedad y UNESCO.
- Quijano, A. (2014). Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina. En *Cuestiones y horizontes: de la dependencia histórico-estructural a la colonialidad/descolonialidad del poder*. CLACSO. <http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/se/20140507042402/eje3-8.pdf>
- Rabine, L. (2002). *The Global Circulation of African Fashion*. Oxford: Berg.
- Retana, C. (2009). Las artimañas de la moda: la ética colonial/imperial y sus vínculos con el vestido moderno. *Rev. Filosofía Univ. Costa Rica*, 47(122), 87-96
- Slade, T. (2009). *Japanese Fashion: A Cultural History*. Oxford: Berg.
- Smith, J. (2019). *Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews*. Oxford University Press.
- Sonntag, H. R. (Ed.). (1989). *¿Nuevos Temas Nuevos Contenidos? Las Ciencias Sociales de América Latina y El Caribe ante El Nuevo Siglo*. Editorial Nueva Sociedad y UNESCO.
- Tejidos Chakana. (n.d.). Retrieved from Website: <https://www.instagram.com/tejidoschakana/?hl=es>
- Toro, R. (2008). *Biodanza*. Editorial Cuarto Propio.
- Vasilachis de Gialdino, I. (Coord) (2006). *Estrategias de Investigación cualitativa*. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Bejarano Reyes, L. M., Correa Méndez, J. D., & Ospina Cruz, J. J. (2018). *Paramilitarismo, multinacionales y modelo económico en Colombia 1997-2005: amenaza armada o afinidad ideológica*. Universidad.



Author Bio

Diana Carolina Varón Castiblanco

is a research professor specialized in aesthetics of music, social constructions of the body, and qualitative research methodologies. She holds a Master's degree in Cultural Studies from Universidad Javeriana and a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Universidad Santo Tomás. She has published her work in academic journals such as the *Latin American Journal of Studies on Bodies, Emotions, and Society*, and has contributed as an author to the book *Fashion Studies in Colombia: Journeys of an Evolving Question* (2022). She received the award as a research professor at Universidad Santo Tomás (2022) and recognition as an outstanding teacher in artistic creation and culture at Universidad Santo Tomás (2021), and is a researcher in the group "Social Conflicts and Territories, Thematic Line: Subjectivities, Collective Action, and Social Transformation." Currently, she is a full-time professor in the Faculty of Sociology at Universidad Santo Tomás, teaching in the areas of research, Sociology of Music, and Sociology of Culture.

Article Citations

MLA • López Galeano, Andrés, et al. "Jardines: A Decolonial approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia." *Fashion Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2024, pp. 1-25, <https://www.fashionstudies.ca/jardines/>, <https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.

APA • López Galeano, A., Cubillos Pinilla, O., & Varón Castiblanco, D. C. (2024). Jardines: A Decolonial approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia. *Fashion Studies*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.

Chicago • López Galeano, Andrés, Oscar Cubillos Pinilla, and Diana Carolina Varón Castiblanco. "Jardines: A Decolonial Approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia." *Fashion Studies* 5, no. 2 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.



Author Bio

Andrés López Galeano is a research professor, fashion designer, and educator with over a decade of teaching experience and a deep passion for sustainable and social innovation in design. He has a keen interest in cultural expressions, fashion curation, and production, emphasizing interdisciplinary approaches and creative method development. Andrés holds a Master's in Communication and Development for Social Change from Universidad Santo Tomás and a Bachelor's degree in Fashion Design. He has work un curatorial fashion experiences, leads resiliente a communication brand and has published research on sustainability, remix culture, and fashion education in Colombian academic journals and has contributed to books such as *Ecocity, and Urban Experience* (2020) and *Fashion Studies in Colombia: Journeys of an Evolving Question* (2022). Currently, he is a full-time professor in the Graphic Design Faculty at Universidad Santo Tomás. Outside the classroom, Andrés is an enthusiast of collage, salsa, and reggaeton.

Article Citations

MLA • López Galeano, Andrés, et al. "Jardines: A Decolonial approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia." *Fashion Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2024, pp. 1-25, <https://www.fashionstudies.ca/jardines/>, <https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.

APA • López Galeano, A., Cubillos Pinilla, O., & Varón Castiblanco, D. C. (2024). Jardines: A Decolonial approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia. *Fashion Studies*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.

Chicago • López Galeano, Andrés, Oscar Cubillos Pinilla, and Diana Carolina Varón Castiblanco. "Jardines: A Decolonial Approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia." *Fashion Studies* 5, no. 2 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.



Author Bio

Oscar Cubillos Pinilla is a professor and photographer passionate about experimental processes of chemical photography and academic outreach related to the image. With eleven years of experience teaching photography and art theory, he is interested in the intersections of various photographic production languages, including digital, chemical, experimental, and new developments in synthetic images generated by artificial intelligence. Oscar has a specialization in photography and is pursuing a Master's degree in Art History and Theory. He currently works as a full-time professor at the Universidad Santo Tomás and coordinates the photography research group at the Faculty of Graphic Design, where he has been involved in various research and outreach activities related to the techniques and language of this medium.

Article Citations

MLA • López Galeano, Andrés, et al. "Jardines: A Decolonial approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia." *Fashion Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2024, pp. 1-25, <https://www.fashionstudies.ca/jardines/>, <https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.

APA • López Galeano, A., Cubillos Pinilla, O., & Varón Castiblanco, D. C. (2024). Jardines: A Decolonial approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia. *Fashion Studies*, 5(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.

Chicago • López Galeano, Andrés, Oscar Cubillos Pinilla, and Diana Carolina Varón Castiblanco. "Jardines: A Decolonial Approach at Fashion and Reconciliation in Colombia." *Fashion Studies* 5, no. 2 (2024). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38055/FS050201>.

Toronto
Metropolitan
University

Fashion

at The Creative School



FASHION5 STUDIES



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

ISSN 2371-3453

Copyright © 2024 Fashion Studies - All Rights Reserved

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BYNC-ND 4.0) license
(see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)