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SUMMARY
Bodies, Fashion, and Gender in the Viceroyalty of New Granada: The *Pollera* and the *Faldellín*

Laura Beltrán-Rubio

Abstract

The constant comparison of fashion in the Spanish American colonies with their European counterparts has resulted in a simplified narration of a more complex phenomenon that responds to the necessities, ideologies, and shared anxieties of the context where it emerges. Although colonial Spanish American fashions cannot be disintegrated from their European counterparts, they did acquire a local character that responded to the confluence of social, political, economic, and cultural factors that arose with the Spanish invasion of the Americas. Based on the analysis of the pollera and the *faldellín*, this essay focuses on the particularities of fashion in the Viceroyalty of New Granada during the second half of the eighteenth century. Through the study of visual sources, archival documents, and chronicles, I argue that the preference for these garments reveals conceptions about the body, fashion, and gender that are specific to New Granada.

Keywords: fashion • gender • Audiencia de Quito • Viceroyalty of New Granada • Century XVIII

Some of the most commonly invoked works of art from eighteenth-century Spanish America were signed in 1783 by Vicente Albán. Consisting of six paintings, the series represents three male Indigenous subjects and four different racial/ethnic types of women: a white 'noble' woman with an enslaved black woman (fig. 1), a *yapanga* from Quito (likely a woman of mixed race, fig. 2), and an Indigenous woman in fine dress (fig. 3). The first three are dressed with lavish ensembles of luxurious textiles and fine jewelry, including flared or possibly pleated, calf-length skirts with rich trimmings that sit relatively low on the hips, below a sash with an apron-like garment tied around the waist. This peculiar attire seems to correspond to the style of the *faldellín*, which became fashionable in the Andes during the second half of the eighteenth century. This is a local expression of fashion that was "very different from European [dress], which [was] only tolerable in that country even though it might seem indecorous to Spaniards," as the traveling scientists Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa wrote in 1748 (2nd part, vol 3º 72, author's translation).

Vicente Albán's painted series serves as a point of departure for the study of the *faldellín* as a fashionable style endemic to South America and, in particular, as an expression of fashion in the Audiencia de Quito. While most discussions of the series have focused on its relationship with discourses of the Enlightenment, only a few have attempted to provide a better understanding of Albán's depictions of dress. However, Vicente Albán's carefully executed depictions of dress are arguably the strongest element contributing to the visual impact of the series. As such, these paintings provide valuable information about fashion in the particular context in which they were created, especially when studied in conjunction with written archival records. In this essay, I propose a multi-methodological analysis of the female figures in Albán's series in order to understand fashion in New Granada as a "situated bodily practice" (Entwistle 2000). This reveals ideologies about ethnicity and gender, discourses about imperial power through bodily control, and the agency of women in their self-fashioning practices.

The Question of Fashion in the Spanish American Colonies

My research adopts the methodology introduced by Margaret Maynard (1994) to understand the local character of colonial fashions in the Australian context. Although this context was different from that of New Granada, Maynard's approach opens up a new model through which to consider fashion as a term, both past and present, in Latin America and beyond. This also constitutes a rejection of the "European-dictator" model of fashion, as Jennifer Craik has termed it, which has limited the study of fashion history (2004). By focusing on the Viceroyalty of New

Granada in the second half of the eighteenth century, my work contributes to new debates on fashion studies and responds to Craik's call to dissolve and reconstitute the term "fashion". The word "fashion" has often been understood in relation to ideas about change and modernity, particularly in Europe and North America. This model excludes several expressions and iterations of fashion outside 'the West' and its direct sphere of influence and before the so-called Age of Revolutions. However, in 1734, the word "moda" ("fashion" in Spanish) was already defined as a "usage, mode, or costume […] newly introduced, especially with regards dress and style" (*Diccionario de autoridades*, author's translation). Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa also write about "fashionable dress" ("la moda del traje", *ibid.*, 72) in the Spanish American colonies. And archival documents from the time also evidence the use of the word "moda" to refer to fashionable styles of clothing.

For these reasons, and as an act of resistance towards the exclusion of the Americas from traditional histories of fashion, I adopt the word "fashion"— or "moda"— to refer to the dress practices executed over the human body in the Viceroyalty of New Granada, even when they do not seem to correspond to European fashions of the time. The body is closely related to fashion and reveals Imperial discourses about power of its particular context. Fashion in New Granada can therefore be understood as a mediator between individuals and the social, natural, and cultural environments, which reflects ideas about gender, caste, and power specific to its context.

The *Pollera*

Upon disembarking in the port city of Cartagena, Juan and Ulloa documented their encounter with the *pollera*. They describe it as a sort of skirt that pends from the waist, made with taffeta without lining, and with trimmings in fine textiles, lace, or metallic threads (Juan and Ulloa 1748, 1ª parte, tomo 1°, 45). While the *pollera* does not seem to have been unique to the Americas, its use as an outer skirt was. Juan and Ulloa attribute this particular fashion to the hot and humid weather of the coastal cities, but they also identify the use of the *pollera* as an outer skirt in the colder regions of higher altitude in the Andes. This opens up questions about the use of the *pollera* in relation to the particular conceptions of the body in New Granada. To begin providing some answers, I propose to study the relationship between fashion and the body through two garments that accompanied the *pollera*: the *camisa* (shift or chemise) and the *faja* (or sash that held the *pollera* around the waist) (fig. 4).

The shift was the key to the "regime of bodily care" preferred by early modern Europeans (Brown 2009). It protected the body from illnesses while, at the same

time, signifying purity and representing the shared anxieties around the interactions between human and natural bodies. These representations had gendered connotations that resulted in the personification of the close relationship between white shifts and cleanliness by the figure of the laundress. Early modern laundresses were at times equated with prostitutes, as they offered their body labors in exchange for money. The use of the chemise as an outer garment enforced this connection, as did the fashion of the *faldellín* in New Granada, as will be seen below.

The *faja* created a round, fleshy silhouette that contrasted with the rigid, disciplined torso achieved through the use of stays that were fashionable in Europe at the time. It is worth questioning whether the term "*faja*" was used to refer to stays in the Spanish Americas, although the absence of a specific explanation for the term in Juan and Ulloa's account (1748) does not suggest so. Rather, the preference for the *faja* and the bodily silhouette that it created were the legacy of Andean fashion and conceptions about the body. As the representations of Indigenous women in Vicente Albán series show, there was a direct correspondence between the colonial *faja* and pre-Hispanic chumbi that fastened Indigenous garments around the waist (fig. 5). Moreover, the emphasis on the torso afforded by the use of the *faja* might have been related to Andean ideas about the body. According to Andean cosmologies, the center of the body was the intersection between the complementary feminine and masculine forces, symbolized life and the present, and mediated between the head as a symbol of the past and the feet as symbols of the future (Classen 1993). That women of New Granada chose to emphasize this part of the body above others was not a mere coincidence.

The *Faldellín*

Upon their arrival to Guayaquil, Juan and Ulloa note the presence of one of the most distinct fashions to develop in colonial Spanish America: the *faldellín*. Particularly noticeable in their description is the wealth it seems to have afforded, featuring fine lace trimmings, gold and silver fringes, and ribbons, and accessorized with layer upon layer of jewelry. Like the *pollera*, the hem of the *faldellín* was above the ankle and was worn with a *faja* of some 'superior' fabric. Unlike the *pollera*, the *faldellín* had an opening down the front, suggesting that the garment was not cut and sewn to form a skirt, but rather consisted of a length of fabric wrapped around the waist (Juan and Ulloa 1748, first part, vol 1º). Juan and Ulloa's description of the *faldellín* corresponds to the outfits represented by Vicente Albán in his depictions of the *yapanga* (fig. 2), the *Señora principal* and the Black enslaved woman that accompanies her (fig. 1).

The outfits of the three female types in question consist of a white lace shift and a *faldellín*, wrapped around the waist with a *faja*, over which a lacy apron-like garment (*bolsicón?*) is fastened. All three women wear lavish jewels, made up of fine metals, pearls, and gemstones. It is only in the details of their jewelry and the textiles of their outfits that the differentiation between these female racial types may be seen. The seemingly 'superior' race of the white woman, represented in her fine jewelry that alludes to her Christianity and the rich trimmings that adorn her outfit contrast with the simpler styles worn by the Black enslaved woman. It is worth noting that the Black woman does not wear a *faja*, unlike the other two.

The *yapanga* seems to stand somewhat in-between the *Señora principal* and her Black companion in terms of quality of textiles and jewelry. In fact, the term *yapanga* has been used to refer to a Mestiza, or woman of mixed Spanish and Indigenous descent. Since at least the nineteenth century, the *faldellín* has become the characteristic garment worn by *yapangas*. Wrapped around the body and overlapping at the front, the *faldellín* seems to have developed from the *anaku* or *aksu* worn by Andean women before the Spanish invasion. James Middleton (2018) has already written about the apparently 'hybrid' nature of the *faldellín*. However, rather than simply highlighting the hybridity of fashion, it is important to take into account the violence of the Spanish invasion and the interplay of forces participating in the process of colonization. Only in doing so can we uncover the reasons behind the adoption, adaptation, and dissemination of the *faldellín* throughout the Andes. I propose, therefore, a more detailed study of the connotations of the term *yapanga*, whose identity is so closely related to the *faldellín*.

The figure of the *yapanga* has been hyper sexualized throughout history (Estebaranz 2007; Bouysse-Cassagne 1996). As a result, the *faldellín* acquires a close connection with a strong — perhaps 'loose' — sensuality of the women who wore it. In fact, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (1615/16), a self-proclaimed Inca noble, described the "yndias hecha putas" (Indian women who have become prostitutes) and wear the *faldellín* (1115). In this account, the *faldellín* was the equivalent of an indecent Indigenous woman; it signified and perhaps even embodied the women who betrayed their race. To the eyes of Spanish viewers, the *faldellín* would have also been indecent, if not outright scandalous: the skirt was too short, the cleavage too low, and the torso too loose.

In a colonial society obsessed with appearances, where clothes were taken to signify the identity of their wearer, certain garments came to function as a sort of metonymy for the biological and moral character of the person who wore them. If the *faldellín* was considered a metonym for *yapanga*, and the *yapanga* was a

woman 'who seeked to please' in exchange for money — that is, a prostitute — then all women who wore the *faldellín* could be considered prostitutes. But why would women in the Viceroyalty of New Granada choose to wear the fashionable *faldellín* so often?

Conclusion

From the start of the Spanish invasion of the Americas, Indigenous bodies — both physical and cosmological — were systematically destructed to almost extinction. Women, in particular, were victims of this violence, as their bodies were directly used by the Spaniards in their conquest (Classen 1993, 118). However, women also adopted different strategies to perform and effect their agency. In the eighteenth century, when women became more visible in public spaces (Molina and Vega 2004, 87), fashion became a particularly fruitful site for the expression of this agency, especially when understood in relation to the body.

From the European perspective, the body was a site for scrutiny that was also used to promulgate Imperial politics. From the Andean perspective, the body was a presentation of the cosmos. Looking at the intersection of these two conceptions of the body through the lens of the Quechua term of *tinkuy* (that is, the meeting point between complementary opposites), it is possible to claim that the preference for the peculiar outfits of the shift, sash, and *faldellín* or *pollera* was more than a metaphor for the mediation of the body between the sacred and the profane, the masculine and the feminine. The fashion of the *faldellín*, which included the *faja*, allowed Andean women to position themselves at the center of their society: as mediators, regenerators, and givers of life. At the same time, Andean women were able to self-fashion their own identities as mestizas through Andean conceptions of the body within an oppressive colonial society. A more thorough study of women's agency through fashion in the Viceroyalty of New Granada, however, still remains to be written.

Fig. 1. *Señora principal con su negra esclava*, Vicente Albán, 1783, oil on canvas, 80 × 109 cm, Museo de América, Madrid, Spain. Photo: Joaquín Otero Úbeda © Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte – Gobierno de España.

Fig. 2. *Yapanga de Quito con el trage que vsa este tipo de Mugeres que tratan de agradar*, Vicente Albán, 1783, oil on canvas, 80 × 109 cm, Museo de América, Madrid, Spain. Photo: Joaquín Otero Úbeda © Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte – Gobierno de España.

Fig. 3. *Yndia en trage de gala*, Vicente Albán, 1783, oil on canvas, 80 × 109 cm, Museo de América, Madrid, Spain. Photo: Joaquín Otero Úbeda © Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte – Gobierno de España.

Fig. 4. *Portrait of María Margarita Carrión and Antonio Flores de Vergara, Marqueses de Miraflores*, unidentified artist, ca. 1742. Collection of Iván Cruz Cevallos, Quito. Photo: Christoph Hirtz.

Fig. 5. *Yndia del Campo, detail of Yndia en trage de gala*, Vicente Albán, 1783, oil on canvas, 80 × 109 cm, Museo de América, Madrid, Spain. Photo: Joaquín Otero Úbeda © Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte – Gobierno de España.

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