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Author: Dra. Atzín Julieta Pérez Monroy, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico

Mail: julieta.perez.monroy@gmail.com

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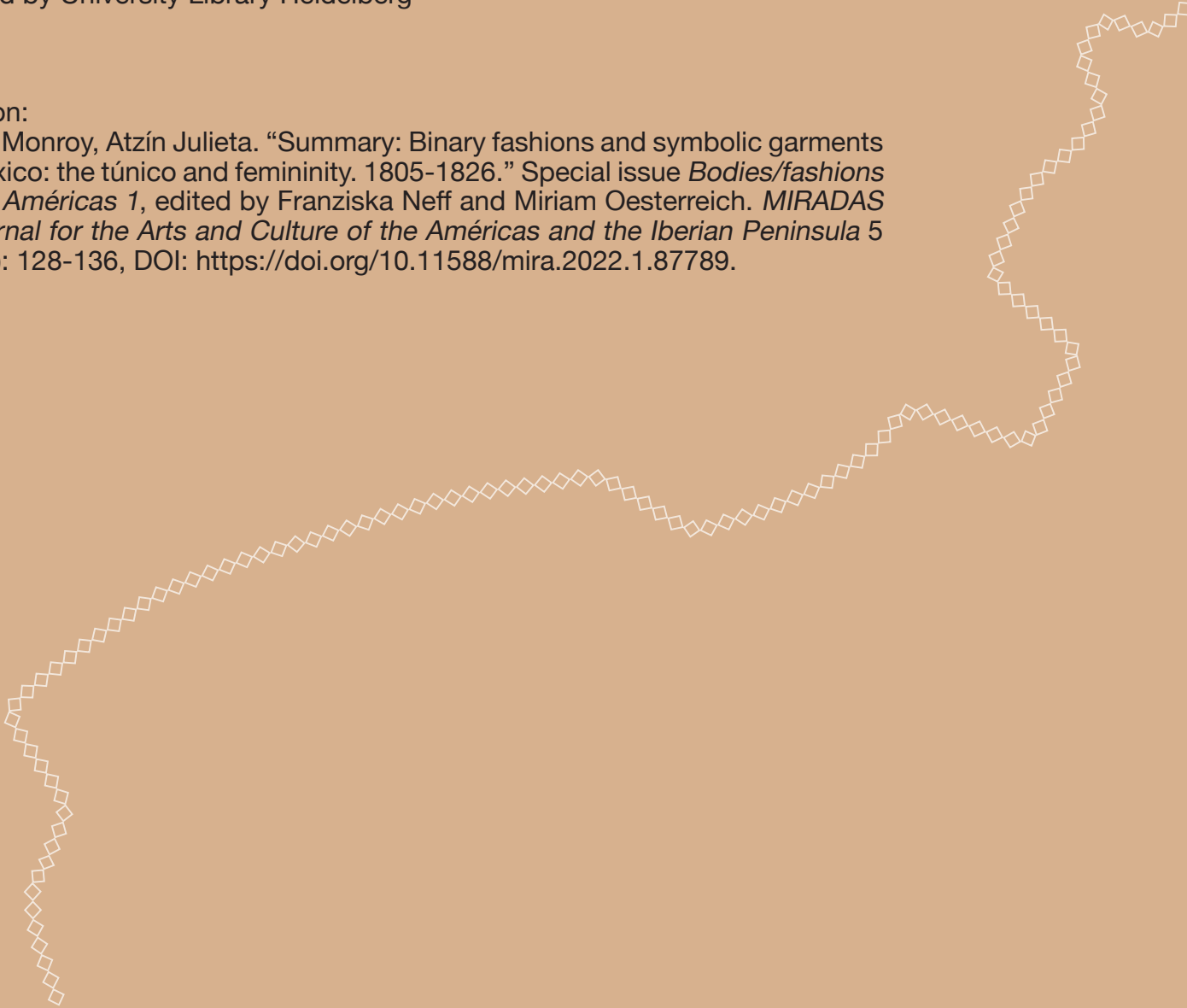
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SUMMARY

Binary fashion and symbolic garments in Mexico: the *túnico* and femininity. 1805–1826

Atzín Julieta Pérez Monroy

Abstract

In the 19th century, the binary gender system was consolidated in Western societies, in which both, the masculine and the feminine had defined functions and representations. This work focuses on the analysis of the feminine through the fashion of the *túnico*, with the purpose of observing the daily life, the identity and the idiosyncrasy of the middle and well-off female sectors, through the lens of the press and literature of the time: criticism, ridicule or praise. The fashion came from France and Spain and was inspired by Greco-Roman art, but what interests here is its use, its versions and the interpretations that occurred in Mexico (New Spain), in relation to tradition and modernity. Modesty, concealment, exhibitionism, seduction and beauty, as categories linked to the female body in relation with the *túnico* dress fashion also occupy a relevant attention.

Keywords: *fashion · gender · woman · body · túnico · New Spain–Mexico*

The present work focuses on the study of a female sector of the middle and upper classes who used the fashion of the *túnico*, a garment that was in force in Mexico from early 800's until the first half of the twenties of the XIX century, and that defined one side of the gender's binary system. The study deals with the subject from different analytical approaches to the feminine world: identity, the body, moral and religious values and imaginary as well. The chronology is defined both by the dynamics of fashion itself, and the information and judgments contained in newspapers of the time, also stated in José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi's novel, *La Quijotita y su prima* (Lizardi 1990), which both constitute the primary sources that provide us an overview to different voices in society.

A first section refers to the subjects who follow the *túnico* fashion, the so-called coquettes, *pirracas*, *currutacas*, *petimetras*, "the naked" and "the hairless", a stereotype of young women dedicated to the consumption of fashions, to the personal grooming and prone to fun; in other words, a lifestyle considered frivolous by certain sectors. And yet writers and editors from the press devote much space to the use of the *túnico* and its meanings, generally to disapprove it, both for its physical characteristics and because of what they consider to be the corruption of customs that accompany it. In particular, the presence of "cortejo" in New Spain has been documented as the form of relationship between a flirt and an entourage of followers who accompanied coquettes to their entertainment activities, complimented them with gifts or advised them on their clothes or hairstyle in the privacy of the very feminine boudoir. On the other hand, the role of an overshadowed husband stands out. Although there was censorship of flirtatious young women, parents and husbands were also criticized, even priests and governments that allowed such 'immoral' behaviors. The study of this phenomenon stands out in the case of Spain (Martín Gaité 1988), while in Mexico few works have been done on the character of Güera Rodríguez, considered a Mexican beauty of the time (Galí Boadella, 2002 and Arrom 2020). The dissenting voices, on the other hand, claimed that coquetry pleased the senses and brought joy in the face of gloomy moralistic ideas.

The coquettes belonged to the circle of the so called *petimetry*, which included young men with attitudes and tastes similar among them, in terms of fashions and entertainment, which placed them in a condition of 'effeminate' that, however, did not imply the qualifier of homosexuals, but an emulation of the lifestyle of their female counterparts. On the other hand, the testimony of transvestism appears in the sources, although in a very limited way, which draws attention, since a record is made in the press, but is rarely observed, as it is a hidden activity.

The main piece of this article, the *túnico*, had spread in Spain at the time of Charles

IV (fig. 1) and has as a precedent the *robe en chemise*, a simple piece with smoky effect with which Queen Marie Antoinette of France was portrayed (fig. 2) and which caused a scandal in court (Bard 2012, 44). There were different types of *túnicos*, but with certain common features, such as being a one-piece suit, with a tubular shape, made of light fabrics (such as muslin or silk) that gave certain transparency. Sometimes the length of the *túnico* showed the ankles, the short sleeves exposed the arms of some ladies, and the pronounced front neckline showed the rise of the breasts, all of which caused corrosive censures that were attributed to the nefarious influence of French Revolution. French and tastes based on images of Greco-Roman art (fig. 3). In the opinion of the moralists, the woman dressed in this way showed a seductive nudity, in such a way that it affected the reputation of the husband and with that criterion and depending on the use or not of 'profane costumes', women were considered as 'good' or 'bad'. In the portrait of the viceroy Iturrigaray's family, his wife and daughter wear robes that, especially in the case of the viceroy Ana Jáuregui, adhere to the censored dress, like that of a coquette (fig. 4). But these young women, through voices in the press, defended the suit with other criteria, that of being simple, fresh, with a naturalness far from the artificiality of previous centuries. Thus, modern aesthetics was based on ideas of the Enlightenment.

Túnicos were not uniform, there were different types of necklines, length of the dress and sleeves, with varied colors (predominantly black and white), different types of fabric designs (plain, striped or squared) and various types of applications (silver or sequin). *Petimetras* chose their *túnico* according to the occasion, be it to go for a walk, to the bulls, to the church, to weddings, funerals or dances and they were not worn at all times. In the privacy of the home, even the most elegant wore *enagua* and *rebozo* (Calderón de la Barca 1981, 73). This fashion condemned, as sinful, lasted until the twenties of the 19th century, as shown during the Iturbide empire in a portrait of his wife, Ana Huarte (fig. 5), although around 1826 there is a tendency to return the size at the waist, as in the past (fig. 6).

The appearance of those who assumed themselves as coquette or *petimetra* was not complete without a series of interior and exterior accessories that created their typical and unique image. *Túnico* was a fashion that projected an appearance of simplicity but had a certain complexity. Some sources suggest that although *túnico* was loose, a type of corset less tight than in previous decades and centuries was used, but that it enhanced the breasts, another reason for scandal, sometimes with arguments of the damage it caused to health (Fernández de Lizardi 1990, 73).

A garment referred as trousers and socks for female use, bifid and flesh-colored, which its users find comfortable and aesthetic, is instead censored by moralists

for whom showing part of the legs, even covered by fabric, was inadmissible, since by imitating the color of the flesh it was like showing them naked. Above average, slippers called *caligas*, a version of Greek sandals, with ribbons knotted in a crisscross fashion over the thighs prevailed, despite the rejection they caused when they were first introduced to New Spain, as odd.

Hairstyles with a tousled toupee, called “a la fury”, with collected or short hair became fashionable. The hair gathered at the back wore curls at the temples, as can be seen in portraits of the time (fig. 4), while the short hair gave much to talk about, referring to the “hairless heads”, but we did not find allusive portraits in Mexico. This last use emulated the cut of women led to the guillotine at the time of the French Revolution (fig. 7).

Women used to cover themselves with different types of veil, be it a *mantilla*, “*rebozo*” or the oriental shawl. But with the *túnico* came the *tápalo*, defined as a large scarf, it caused rejection for coming from the enemy France and for pretending that it imitated the *cogullas* or habits of the bishops (El Pensador Mexicano, February 17, 1814, 403-404).

Two essential accessories were the fan and the handkerchief, which without being novel supported the ways of communicating of the flirtatious ones. To know how to carry it and wave it in a funny way, as well as transmit the correct message, the coquette sector considered that there was a learning process. But at the time, some wanted both accessories to compete, and yet their use continued for decades, and they were irreplaceable in the female portraits of the elites (fig. 8). A complement to the *túnico* was the “ridiculous”, a bag with different shapes — some like Greek amphoras — that became a space for women to deposit and move their personal belongings (compact, fan, rosary, among others).

Cosmetics were also important to achieve the desirable appearance: white and smooth skin, white and uniform teeth, thick hair without gray hair. To achieve the ideal, advertisements for products that were sold in Mexico City or recipes were published in the press. This leads to the topic of beauty, which occupies many spaces in the press, indicating its importance in society. Both genders were included in the beauty category if they matched certain qualities: men do have an athletic body and height; women, with a slim waist, a certain height and fine features. But not only did they count the physical attributes, each gender had to show attitudes without which there was no beauty: men, strength of character, security and at the same time, kindness and being protective; women, modesty, shyness and innocence. The feminine beauty had specific functions, to please the man and to soften his character. With the moral qualities it was considered that

women could have a certain influence on men. The beautiful woman according to this conception was superior to the 'ugly'. But beauty ended when youth gave way to old age. Hence, calls were made so that women were educated and thus had elements, not only to educate their children, but for their entertainment when their youth and their attractiveness ended. There were voices that criticized and mocked women who wanted to expand their youth, considering that in the case of men it was longer. Finally, there was beauty if there was health and here is another argument against the use of the *túnico*: those who exposed themselves with their 'nakedness' to the air and to the light, would cause the skin to dry out and darken, in other words, they would attract in short time to the dreaded old age.



Fig. 1. Francisco de Goya, *The family of Charles IV*, 1800, oil on canvas, 280 x 336 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid, Spain.



Fig. 3. François Gérard, *Juliette Recamier*, 1802-1805, oil on canvas, 257 x 183 cm, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France.



Fig. 2. Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, *Ma. Antonieta*, 1783, oil on canvas, 93 x 73 cm, Hessian House Foundation, Germany.



Fig. 4. Unidentified artist, *Viceroy Iturrigaray with his family*, 1805, oil on canvas, 74 x 58.5 cm, Museo Nacional de Historia, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico.



Fig. 5. Francisco Incháurregui, *Lady (Ana María Huarte de Iturbide)*, 1820-1830, miniature, watercolor on ivory, 7.0x8.3 cm, Museo Nacional de Historia, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico.



Fig. 6. Linati, Galli y Heredia, *El Iris. Periódico Crítico y Literario*, vol. 1 (México: En la Oficina del Iris, 1826), 8. Archivo Fotográfico Manuel Toussaint, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas-UNAM, Collection: Diapositeca, Section Litografía y Grabado en México siglo XIX, Photo: Elisa Vargaslugo, 1954. Identifier: MG001639A.



Fig. 7. Louis Léopold Boille, *Madame Fouler, Comtesse de Relingue*, ca. 1810, oil on canvas, 22 x 17 cm, Fondation Napoleon, Francia.



Fig. 8: Juan Cordero, *Dolores Tosta de Santa Anna*, 1855, oil on canvas, 210 x 154 cm, Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico.

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