Revista Culturales

# "The conqueror who dances is a little fearsome conqueror": three graphic representations of the dance during the French Intervention in Mexico

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**ABSTRACT:** In the paper, three French lithographs that show scenes of dance during the French Intervention in Mexico are analyzed iconographically and iconotextually: a caricature published by the newspaper Le Charivari and two prints included in a plate of the Nouvelle imagery. The images were contrasted with letters, memoirs, song lyrics, journalistic information, and pictures of illustrated albums, Mexican and foreign, with the aim of exposing some references, speeches, and French graphic languages with which Mexican women and their relations with the foreign troops were identified, represented, and made known.

**KEYWORDS:** French Intervention; illustrations; dance; iconography; fashion.

**RECEIVED**
October 10, 2022

**APROVED**
November 17, 2022

**PUBLISHED**
December 14, 2022

# "El conquistador que danza es un conquistador poco temible": tres representaciones gráficas del baile durante la Intervención Francesa en México

**TRANSLATION OF SUMMARY**
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**RESUMEN:** En el artículo se analizan iconográfica e iconotextualmente tres litografías francesas que muestran escenas de baile durante la Intervención Francesa en México: una caricatura publicada por el diario Le Charivari y dos estampas incluidas en una lámina de la imaginería Nouvelle. Las imágenes se contrastaron con cartas, memorias, letras de canciones, información periodística y estampas de álbumes ilustrados, mexicanos y extranjeros, con el objetivo de exponer algunos referentes, discursos y lenguajes gráficos galos con que se identificó, representó y dio a conocer a las mujeres mexicanas y sus relaciones con las tropas extranjeras.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Intervención Francesa; ilustraciones; danza; iconografía; moda.



**HOW TO QUOTE**
Mena, A. (2022). "The conqueror who dances is a little fearsome conqueror": three graphic representations of the dance during the French Intervention in Mexico. *Culturales*, 10, e721. https://doi.org/10.22234/recu.20221001.e721

## Introduction

At the beginning of 1862, the Parisian newspaper *Le Charivari*[1] , with caricatures, warned on its front pages about how the London Convention did not allude to the projects that tried to make Mexico a kingdom for Maximilian or for a Spanish Bourbon, and only highlighted the wrongs committed by Mexico against the affected countries (Caraguel, January 29, 1862, p. 1). Sarcastically it noted that, among the numerous candidates, "Spain enjoys a collection of infantes that it places in the ranks [toward the throne]; its pretension is very natural, it should not be blamed for it nor accused of culpable ambition" (Caraguel, February 14, 1862, p. 1), even if the Iberian applicants had to resort to chance to choose who would be the lucky bearer of the crown (Brémond, February 17, 1862, pp. 2-4). The publication had clearly stated its political stance against the French Intervention in Mexico in the editorial entitled "La reparación del daño", written by Henri Rochefort and printed in the issue of February 26, 1862. The author lamented the application of what is currently called "gunboat diplomacy," as he pointed out how "nowadays, when we complain about a regime, [it is enough to] go and change its form of government and all is said and done" (p. 1).

In mid-April, the newspaper announced that the Spanish government had stopped its idea of reestablishing the monarchy in Mexico, declaring that "it would be content to receive the legitimate satisfaction due to it for past grievances"; in doing so, it would abstain from "spreading blood and wasting its resources for the support of a policy that does not concern it" (Caraguel, April 18, 1862, p. 1). The editorial referred to the preliminary treaties of La Soledad that had emerged from diplomatic negotiations in which it was put in writing, among other matters, that France, Spain, and England did not intend to violate the sovereignty, independence, and integrity of the Mexican territory. When approved and signed on February 19, 1862, by Mexico and the three European states, the agreements implied the explicit recognition of the constitutional government of Juarez; however, the French minister, Dubois de Saligny, did not make any clarification, signed and three days

[1] It circulated between 1832 and 1937. Given its international success and innovation, it served as the basis for the models of newspapers such as *Punch* in England or *La Orquesta* in Mexico. After the government of Louis Napoleon decreed the prohibition of publishing political caricatures in 1835, the newspaper turned to satire on everyday life issues. It featured the works of renowned artists such as CHAM (Amédée Charles Henri, Comte de Noé), Honoré Daumier and Charles Vernier.

later retracted, formally initiating the unilateral intervention of France in Mexico (Villegas, 1990). Subsequently, on May 7, 1862, *Le Charivari* published a caricature entitled "-But look! Here is the only thing the Mexicans wanted to keep from the Spaniards! /- And no fools! ..." (Figure 1). Although it was not accompanied by text, the date of edition and the caption suggest that the lithograph was inserted in the context of the newspaper's mockery of Spanish monarchist pretensions in Mexico; however, its visual narrative took a different path.

**Figure 1.** "-Tiens!... vois-tu..., voilà-là seule chose que les Mexicains aient voulu garder des Espagnols!.... -Et eux pas bêtes!...". Charles Vernier. *Le Charivari*, May 7, 1862, year 31, p. 16. Lithograph by Destouches, Paris.


**Source:** gallica.bnf.fr / National Library of France.

In the left part of the composition, created by Charles Vernier, we can see a Zouave[2] with his infantry rifle resting on the ground and another one carrying his knapsack on his back; in the last shot, we can see a soldier with a mustache wearing a jacket with a pompom that could identify him as an officer of the African hunters, or as part of a Mexican infantry battalion or member of the National Guard, since their uniforms were distinguished by the number of the unit to which they belonged on the black leather jacket and a green or red pompom (Johnson, 1994, p. 40). They all surround from the left a dancing couple in the foreground: she wears a frilly skirt, light-colored stockings and dark shoes fastened at the extremities with leather ribbons, while her head was adorned with some flowers at the temples; he, on the other hand, wears a *catite*, light-colored shirt and vest, dark jacket and pants and what could be boots.

If we focus our attention on the clothing and attitudes of the characters, what we observe in the lithograph is, then, a trio of soldiers who have stopped to contemplate a couple of "*majos*" who are dancing a curious version of a *bolera*. Although the caricature lacks a detailed background —as was usual in that form of graphic representation— the upper part of the sheet specified that the scene took place *au Mexique*, insinuating that the Gallic expeditionary corps could have encountered similar scenes on their way to the Mexican capital and supposing that the Spanish types of the "majo" and the "maja" were part of the Iberian legacy in Mexico.

Therefore, in this paper, we wonder about the references and stereotypes, graphic and literary, of Mexico and Spain that the artist may have had —and shared with a generous part of the French population so that the message could be properly decoded— in order to find an explanation for the presence of Iberian characters in a Parisian caricature that deals with the beginning of the war between Mexico and France in 1862.

Taking into account the content of the image, we have opted for a formal, iconographic, and icontextual analysis focused on the representation of the costume and the dance; as a counterpoint, the caricature was put in dialogue with a pair of lithographs

[2] Elite corps of the infantry regiment of the French army. Originally formed in Algeria in the early 1830s, it achieved international fame during the Second French Empire, having fought in the Crimean, Italian, Mexican, and Franco-Prussian campaigns.

published at the time by the French imagery *Nouvelle*, based on the similarity of its content and the wide circulation that its plates also enjoyed in France. In all three cases, the observations were made with the support of diverse Mexican and foreign sources, such as illustrated albums of popular types, song lyrics, memoirs, and letters.

In general terms, we start from the idea that fashion and its representation have historically been used as tools to make visible and distinguish specific social groups and that, in the nineteenth-century universe bent on "finding the inner truth behind the mask of appearance", morals and clothing were seen as revealing people's "real" identity (Entwistle, 2002, pp. 136-141).

Likewise, we propose the representations of dance as topics and visual languages that, since Modernity, have been used in certain costumbrist scenes to denote and emphasize national, class, and hierarchical origins linked to strata historically questioned by the political and economic elites (Gombrich, 2012, pp. 384-385). Both variables were interpellated by the gender analysis since, as we will see, the discourse of the trio of images fell on the moral and sexual behavior of the female characters around the supposed relationships they established with the invading soldiers.

Who, then, "were" those "Mexicans" who danced so well?

## Majas and majos or chinas and rancheros?

As Sazatornil and Lasheras (2002) point out, it is "in France where the image of Spain as an exotic nation within Europe is consolidated", with the aim of generating an essentialist image that would contribute to the knowledge, albeit partial, of the other (paras. 4-9). From the first decades of the 19$^{th}$ century, through the writings of English and French travelers, the simplification of "what is Spanish" was established around "what is Andalusian". For example, it was criticized at the time that in the Spanish installations of the Universal Exhibitions

> [...] everyone expects strong emotions, based on bullfighters and pimps, dancers, historical costumes of Andalusia and Castile since the time of El Cid; and all set by Spanish music, half Arabic, half European (p. 19).

Such topics were visually accentuated through the romantic painting of Spanish customs due to their high demand by local buyers and international travelers (Museo Carmen Thysssen Málaga, p. 4). Specifically, the "majo" and "maja" types had already been explored by artists such as José Domínguez Bécquer in his watercolors of 1836 or in illustrated albums such as the *Álbum sevillano* published by Vicente Mamerto in 1838 and *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* of 1851. In France, on the other hand, Pharamond Blanchard had included engravings of the "manola madrileña" and the "majo de Jerez, Mexico" in the *Musée de Costumes* of 1850. In all of them, it can be seen that mantillas, fans, wide skirts with ruffles, floral headdresses, boots, and *catites* had become attributes with which the Spaniards and, in the case of the "majo de Jerez", the Mexicans began to be generically identified.

It is possible that the Mexican type that can be most closely related to that of the "maja" is that of the "china" due to their origins located in urban and modest socioeconomic environments, as well as the cleanliness and taste for grooming that was attributed to them. They also agree in their regular and frequent attendance to divine offices, in their predilection for walks and bullfighting performances and in their taste for dances in which they used to consume alcoholic beverages and "lend an ear" to the flattery of men -despite their marital commitments-, causing the celebrations in which they were present to become battlefields (*Los españoles pintados por sí mismos*, 1851, pp. 89-98; Vázquez, 2000).

Another point of convergence between the two can be found in their clothing, since their costumes acquired the status of "national" in their respective countries. On the European side, Manuel M. de Santa Ana (1852) described in *Los españoles pintados por sí mismos* that the majas went "with their short and graceful *leg-guards*, their white stockings, their colored slippers and their mantillas de tira"; he also pointed out that they used to reduce "their dresser to the old chestnut and the big curls crossed with numerous hairpins" (p. 214).

From the Mexican perspective, the link between the two was evident and explicit for some literati. For example, the author of the article on the "china" published in *Los*

*mexicanos pintados por sí mismos* (1854) urged Spanish "majas" and "manolas" and French "grisettes" to "make way" for his "china" (p. 90). Likewise, Niceto de Zamacois wrote in *México y sus alrededores* (1855-1856) that the "chinas" of the Iturbide market seemed to him similar to the Iberian "manolas" because of their "Arabian eyes" and their dress of

> [...] petticoats with sequins up to half a leg [...], a green satin shoe, her narrow waist girded by a crimson sash; her provocative bosom poorly covered by a subtle linen shirt, whimsically embroidered with colored silks, gracefully tied with a calendered shawl of openwork and points, and with the wide braids of her black hair falling backward, and joined with two wide blue satin ribbons (p. 31).

At this point, it is necessary to note that, throughout the 19th century in Spain, it was considered that "just as the *manola* was born from the *maja*, the *chula* was born from the manola. They look like the phoenix rising from its own ashes." That is to say, they are the same popular type whose difference, according to Rodríguez Solís in 1886, lies mainly in the change of their names according to the time. For the writer, the "maja" is the representation of the last third of the 18th century, the "manola" arises with the Napoleonic invasion and the Constitution of Cadiz, and the "chula" after the Vergara Agreement of 1839 (p. 170).

However, such differences seem to have blurred in the Mexican literary imaginary since, as we have seen, in the second half of the century, the author of the article on the "china" in *Los mexicanos pintados por sí mismos*, speaks equally of "majas" and "manolas"; something similar happened with the plate of the "manola madrileña" that Blanchard included in the *Musée de Costumes*, since the character was represented with similar gestures and wearing similar clothing to that of the "maja."

Regarding their interpersonal relationships, the three also coincide in their haughtiness, in having sharp tongues with which they articulated "graphic sayings," in that they often went out for walks "alone" with their beaus, and in the "misfortune" in which they were often immersed for having trusted a man who did not know how to reciprocate and who forced them to "accept" the love affairs of certain characters in order to survive in the face of their low income.

On the other hand, it is necessary to keep in mind that certain Mexican women's clothing had been linked to some Spanish garments in the appraisals of some foreign travelers who toured Mexico during the first decades of the 19th century. For example, in the plate entitled *La joven obrera (The young worker)* that was part of the album *Trajes civiles, militares y religiosos de México (Civil, military and religious costumes of Mexico)* published in 1828, Linati shows us a woman wearing a skirt with ruffles in the Iberian manner; her "coquetry" is manifested in the small foot "imprisoned in a satin shoe" and in the "constant arrangement of her mantilla [that] allows her turned arms the faculty of taking on the most seductive attitudes" (1956, p. 71).

Eight years later, Nebel indicated in his *Voyage pittoresque (*1836), in the article on the mantilla, that, the costume being so Spanish, "it will be useless to speak of it" (p. 17), probably referring to the comb, the fan and the floral headdress with which one of the female characters was portrayed. In the image, the women's shoes are tied with ribbons at the ankles, as shown in the representations of some Spanish women.

Regarding the "Spanish" aspect of the male costume worn by the character between the two Mexican ladies,[3] it is possible that Nebel had as a reference the plates portraying the "*Campesinos del corregimiento de Salamanca*" that were published in 1809 in the English album "Sketches of the country, character, and costume in Portugal and Spain." In its descriptive article, it was commented that

> The costume [...] consists of a dark brown jerkin, having a sort of open stomacher, ornamented with curiously wrought buttons of silver, a sash or girdle round the waist, short cloth breeches, reaching half way down the thigh, with stockings of the same materials meeting them, and buskins tied round the feet and ancles with leathern thongs. A large cloak is drawn over the whole person, or worn folded on the shoulder, not without some attention to graceful effect (Bradford, 1809, p. 18).

Thus, Nebel would have transformed the Salamancan peasant into an elegant city dweller of the Mexican capital, changing the buckle of his shoes for ribbons, his underpants

[3] The image is available at https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8553011d/f95.item

for pants, making him wear a tie and chain and adding a background —in this case, an urban one— which the English image lacked.

In addition to some chromatic coincidences and the *contrapposto* that the figures share, the similarities that exist between some elements of the "charra" clothing described by the English publication and that of the Mexican "rancheros" made by the German traveling artist are also significant. For example, the carved silver buttons worn by the Salamancan man on his dungarees and by the *ranchero* on his breeches, the form and manner of wearing the cape, which in Mexico has been transformed into a *sarape*, as well as the wide-brimmed hats and the textile belts (Nebel, 1836, p. 5).

It is important to note that the types of the Salamancan "charro" and the Andalusian "majo," as well as the Mexican "ranchero," "chinaco," and "charro," also began to emerge as national heroes from the 19th century onwards, having become guerrilla fighters and taking part in the battles against foreign invaders in their respective countries.[4] Likewise, they can be associated due to the romanticization of the equestrian, ranching (Medina, 2011), and bullfighting spheres in which they were placed and the success in banditry and amorous dalliances with young girls and young ladies that were attributed to them.

On this last aspect, as already noted, the small feet, the narrow waist, or the skirts whose height allowed showing part of the calves were iconographic and literary resources that Mexican and Spanish authors used to reflect the erotic charge of the clothing of the "poblana," the "china," the "maja" and the "manola." Likewise, it is possible that in some of their representations, it was visually implied that they could perform as providers of sexual services to the "rancheros," "majos," and "arrieros."

This is how it could have been expressed in the *Poblanas* plate since Nebel captured the precise moment in which a "ranchero" arrives at the farm where three of them are waiting —under the doorway— for the rider to finish removing one of his spurs to allow him to pass. The meeting of glances between the "ranchero" and the "poblana" in the yellow

[4] Consider, for example, the character of Julián Sánchez in *La Batalla de los Arapiles (*1875) by Benito Pérez Galdós or the novel *Astucia (*1866) by Luis G. Inclán.

skirt, and the fact that she is the only one holding the cigar close to her mouth, can be interpreted as sexual symbols (Figure 2).[5]

**Figure 2**. "Poblanas". 1836. Carl Nebel. *Voyage pittoresque et archéologique dans la partie la plus intéressante du Mexique.* Lithograph.

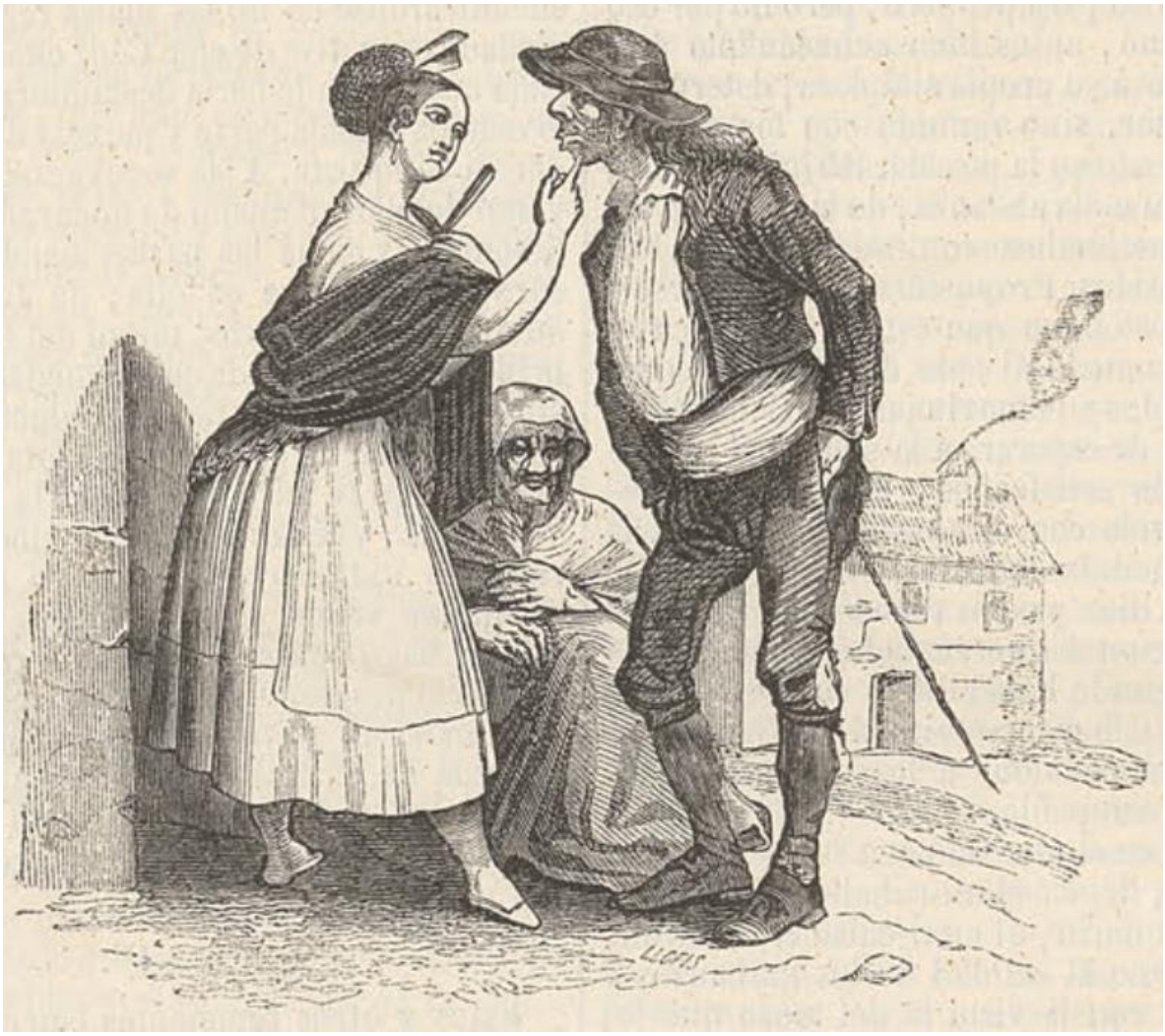

**Source:** gallica.bnf.fr / National Library of France.

On his side, erotic symbolism was portrayed more explicitly in the untitled engraving that accompanied the text "El recién venido" (The Newcomer), published in the *Escenas matritenses* of 1851. The text narrates that the male protagonist —a muleteer from Avila— on a stroll through the Spanish capital, saw two figures "sitting at the door" of a house: a "maja" who put one of her fingers close to the muleteer's chin to "enrapture" him,

[5] In the 19th century-Mexican painting, erotic associations between the two characters were explored by artists such as Agustín Arrieta in *Cocina poblana (*1865) or *Un matrimonio feliz*, as studied by Fausto Ramírez (2009) and Angélica Velázquez (2018).

and the typical "celestina", an old woman wrapped in her cloak, in charge of arranging the "encounters" (Mesonero, 1851, p. 173) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**. Untitled. Anonymous. *Escenas matritenses*, Biblioteca de Gaspar y Boig, 1851, fifth edition, p. 174. Engraving.



**Source:** Digital Library of the Community of Madrid.

Thus, due to the lack of knowledge and the historical link between Mexico and Spain, it was feasible for *Le Charivari* to use the type of the "maja" as a substitute for the "china"; however, it is necessary to keep in mind that France had a similar typology of its own: the "grisette." She was a city worker in her twenties, working in the textile industry or as a sales clerk, neat and very inclined towards coquetry in her hairstyle and grooming, even though her low income would only allow her to live in a garret. Like her counterparts,

she used to attract "the admiration and love of men" when she proudly presented herself at the parties and theaters she frequented. However, her suitors were not the similes of "rancheros" or "majos", but young students of law, medicine or some other lieutenant, painter or poet, for whom she posed as a model or acted as muse. Her description also shares with the "china" and the "maja" certain allusions to her economic independence, dalliances, and prostitution (Janin, 1840, pp. 9-16).

Her representation in French graphics began at least since the late 18th century, and she is identified because she is usually dressed in wide skirts that accentuate her tiny waist and, falling above the ankles, allow the viewer to contemplate her tiny and stylized feet shod with cloth shoes. The eroticization of the character is also manifested in the settings of the scenes in which she was commonly placed, such as rooms where the bed occupies a preponderant part of the composition, chairs or stools on which some of her or her companion's clothes have been placed, or more or less evident phallic symbols.

However, Mexico was very far from France in many ways, so the closest and clearest visual reference Vernier could resort to was that of the "maja," in addition to the fact that the Iberian type worked to convey the sarcasm pointed out in the image's caption. Another graphic resource Vernier employed to emphasize the sexual connotations of his caricature is the posture of the sitter. Although the raised arms and the gestures of the hands of both dancers may correspond to the representation of the circular arabesque movements associated with the castanets, both in the documentary references of the time —more focused on the steps and moves— (Carrión, 2011, pp. 166-167), as well as in the visual records, it is difficult to find that the dancers place their legs in the posture chosen by the French artist.

More similar to a *battement devant* with the base leg in *demi plié* typical of the *balé*, the posture of the female character can be placed in the context of the deployment of Spanish dances in the theaters of European capitals —centered mainly in Paris, London, and St. Petersburg— which began in 1830. By being included in the great theaters, Andalusian dance became a commercial strategy to attract the "cultured" public eager for novelties; however, it was the "foreign dancers who mimicked the Spanish aesthetic [...],

producing important contagions between ballet and Spanish dances" (Carrión, 2011, pp. 83-86).

However, the posture with which Vernier drew the dancer allows him to create a right angle with her left leg to turn it into a signpost that veiledly guides the viewer's eye towards the genital area of the "majo" and the zouaves. As Julián Carrión points out, the use of the foot in Andalusian dances was considered at the time as "an extension of the natural disposition for dance and the flattery of its women" (Carrión, 2011, p. 115).

Therefore, understanding that Vernier considered that one of the best ways to convey his message to the French public adequately was to dress the Mexican female character as a "maja", the discourse of the lithograph had at least a couple of messages and implications: one political, since the only Spanish heritage that Mexicans wanted to preserve after their independence was the dancing "majas" and not the monarchic regime —in agreement with the editorial stance of the newspaper—; and the other erotic, since the "majas" had been conceived as women of dubious morals and hence the "no-nonsense" Mexicans were determined to preserve them. We are, then, in the presence of bodies "dressed" by social conventions and systems of representation (Entwistle, 2002, p. 13).

From this perspective, although they appear as passive observers, the figures of the French soldiers play an active role in the narrative and contextualization of the image, not only because their clothing emphasizes the militaristic character of the intervention that brought them to Mexico but also because they exercise a dual role as voyeurs of the erotic action taking place in the scene and as intermediaries of the Gallic reader who watches what happens through the printed page of the newspaper.

Likewise, it is possible that the observer could easily identify with the Zouaves and enter the scene through them due to the greater proximity in the foreground with which they were placed and the fact that they are visibly taller than the pair of "majos," according to the hierarchical perspective. They are the ones who guide him through the discursive content of the image by means of the dialogue that appears at the bottom of the caricature.

The artist and *Le Charivari* took advantage of the international political situation to exhibit the types and stereotypes that existed at the time concerning the appearance of Mexicans and Spaniards, the transformations and survival of their relationships, and the behavior of their inhabitants. Similarly, it is feasible that, given its political affiliation and the censorship that had been imposed on it, the newspaper used such graphic resources to covertly evidence the lack of knowledge of Mexico that prevailed in France, to question the honor and discipline of the soldiers of the French army and, with this, to question the executors of Louis Napoleon's civilizing project.

In turn, they cryptically depicted the seductive "dances" that the Zouaves "were to encounter" during their stay in Mexico, highlighting Romanticism's obsession with physical love, at once ubiquitous and hidden, present in the literary devices of novels and poems, as in "the 'frank' and 'healthy' joy [that] serves as a pretext for the 'spicy,' the 'daring joke.'" the riddle allowed to mask the intention, emphasizing sexual evocations through imagination (Ariès & Duby, 2017, p. 499).

## Between quadrilles and can-cans

Similar elements were called to form part of the lithograph entitled "After the meal, the dance. What a choreographic disposition these Mexican girls have, uh! Would you believe it at the Valentino? J'ai un pied que r'mue...". Although we do not know its date of publication, the print created by the *Imagerie Nouvelle*, led by Elie Haguenthal,[6] was integrated into a plate with nine images that showed, also in a satirical way, some eventualities and obstacles that the Gallic soldiers would have "faced" during the expedition in Mexico (Figure 4).

[6] Since the 18th century, *imageries played* an important role in France in the transmission of popular knowledge, political and historical events, religious culture, entertainment (with the printing of playing cards and board games), and children's education. In particular, Élie Haguenthal (1822-1881) came to employ around 160 workers who produced up to 1,000 different plates each year that enjoyed wide circulation (École nationale des Chartes, n.d.).

**Figure 4**. "Nos troupiers au Mexique. Après le repas, la danse. Comme ces petites Biches Mexicaines ont des dispositions chorégraphiques, hein! Ne se croirait-on pas à Valentino? J'ai un pied qui r'mue…". *Imagerie Nouvelle*, series 8, plate 59. Lithograph.


**Source:** Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (MuCEM) / Franck Raux, France.

In addition to identifying the women depicted as "Mexicans," the caption refers to the then-famous *Bal Valentino* or *Salle Valentino*, a dance hall located on the Parisian street of Saint-Honoré. According to the *Revue de Paris* of 1865, the establishment had acquired its name because the academic musician Henri Valentino had conducted "with Conservatoire perfection" the symphonic concerts that were offered three times a week there until he retired in 1840 after feeling displaced by the dance rhythms that followed the chamber music he conducted (1865, p. 110).

From 1841 onwards —the magazine stated— the owner turned the place into a "haven of more or less low-cut choreographic exercises," possibly alluding not only to the clothing of the women who attended to dance but to the fact that the commercialization

of sex was spreading throughout the century in places such as baths, singing cafés and dance halls (Duby & Perrot, 2018, p. 393).[7]

> Thus, the salon of the rue Saint-Honoré began in sin and ended in sin, supposing that the quadrille and the waltz were the inevitable prelude to the great symphony of eternal damnation (1865, p. 110).

It is likely that the leaps and widely extended arms used to portray Zouaves and "Mexicans" may have been based on the manner in which the postures performed by dancers in the dances of *candil* were represented, spontaneous Andalusian and Extremaduran entertainments held in the inner courtyard of some taverns or houses in which the stomping and stamping of *rondeños* and tangos stood out (Atencia, 2015, pp. 140-141). According to some sources, like the Mexican fandangos, such parties usually ended in a brawl with women running for the door, men handing out sticks in the air, chairs rolling, and a polyphony of "voices not stamped in any dictionary" (Mesonero, 1851, p. 59).

For example, in the engraving entitled "El baile del candil" that accompanied the text "La capa vieja y el baile del candil" included in the *Escenas matritenses, the* "manolos" and "manolas" can be seen "improvising some *manchegas* [and] *boleras*" (Mesonero, 1851, p. 59), with their arms, raised high and their hands holding castanets, while bending their legs and lifting their heels off the ground.

The French lithography, on the other hand, shows the Zouaves performing similar movements and the "Mexican" female characters sharing with the Iberians the wasp waist, the hairstyle, the floral headdress, and the length and flounce of the skirt. However, Abbé Aristide Pierard —expeditionary chaplain at the service of the French army during the intervention— mentioned in his memoirs that the Mexican women faced "with courage the rays of the midday sun, bareheaded, their hair adorned with flowers and arranged in two long braids, finished by two colored ribbons" (Meyer, 2009, p. 321), and not with their hair tied up on the nape of the neck and a flower on the temple as shown in the European image.

[7] Baudelaire also commented that in the *Valentino* was the figure of the courtesan, "the perfect image of the savage that hides in the heart of civilization" (Cordero and Sáenz, 2001, p. 267).

It is also possible that the Gallic print shows the representation of a quadrille due to the quadrangular arrangement of the two couples in the foreground, the correspondence of their movements on either side of the axis of symmetry, the mention in the caption of the *Valentino* salon and the song "L'pied qui r'mue" that was composed precisely as a quadrille. However, if so, it would be a caricatured dance that would have little to do with the basic movements that the participants performed according to the dance manuals of the time.

For example, based on the *Guide de la danse* published in Paris in 1870, there were two types of quadrilles: the French and the *des lanciers.* However, in none of the figures prescribed for each —*pantalon, été*, *poule*, *pastourelle,* and *finale*, for the former; and *Dorset*, *Victoria*, *moulinet*, *visites,* and *lanciers*, for the second— are there such wide, open and pronounced jumps and gesticulations with the legs and arms as can be seen in the image, since the choreographies were configured around rhythmic and symmetrical movements that would allow "pleasant" chats between the participants, "the gentlemen to show off their spirit and the ladies their adornments" (Gawlikowski, 1870, p. 22).

At the time, *Larousse's Dictionary* considered that the "real" quadrilles were those performed with large orchestras in theaters and salons such as the Valentino, as opposed to those performed at popular dances, "where eight or ten poor musicians toil scratching and blowing [their instruments] to entertain the legs of some peasants or soldiers who dance with ugly and clumsy girls." He further noted that the quadrilles only acquired their poetic, original, and brilliant character when the dancers wore singular, brilliant, and dazzling costumes (Larousse, 1875, p. 486).

In contrast, the illustrators of the plate placed their scene in an open-air space, substituting the high ornate walls of the salons for the shade of the trees, the parquet for the earth and undergrowth, and the tails and dresses for the two-tone shoes and bloomers of the lower-ranking zouaves and the female skirts and blouses of the daily newspaper. They also dispensed with musical instruments, exchanging them for a melody, "L'pied qui r'mue", which could be easily hummed and accompanied with the palms of the hands.

The lyrics of the song written by Paul Avenel are about the failed courtship with which a man —probably a peasant or soldier with a motor disability resulting from some campaign— tries to seduce a woman, despite her constant refusals, since she is already in love with someone else:

**I have a foot that moves (*J'ai un pied qui r'mue*)**
**and another that no longer does.**

Ah! Tell me, who gave you
that beautiful bouquet you have?
Sir, it was my boyfriend.
When I see it, it makes my heart happy.
[...]
Ah! Tell me, who gave you
that beautiful fichu you have? [...]
that mischievous look? [...].
that fresh and rosy complexion? [...].

Ah! Tell me if I could give you
all the gifts you have been given?
Sir, no one but my boyfriend
can give me something that satisfies me.
[...]
But if I were to offer you
my flute, my heart, my flageolet?
Sir, no one but my boyfriend
can give me something that satisfies me [...]
His flute, his heart, his flageolet.
I reject everything, you are very ugly.

(*Chansons de Paul Avenel*, 1869, pp. 3-6.)

Thus, the message of gallantry underlying the icontext was reflected in the very choice of the song and in the phallic symbolism that might exist in the reiteration of the possessive pronoun "my" in reference to the flute and the flageolet, as well as in the fact that in the caption the Zouaves portrayed refer to the "Mexicans" as "chiquillas" or "cariños." Likewise, the erotic symbolism was transferred to the lower area of the image's composition because, although none of the four dancers crosses their gaze, the soldier and the *maja* in the foreground were drawn about to join their feet in a dance step, establishing contact between the two from one of the most eroticized female body parts of the time.

At the same time, the contrast between the "disposition" to "dance" of the portrayed "Mexicans" and the expectation of the honorable behavior of the French protagonist of the song's verses, who does not yield to flattery, although her fiancé —sent, perhaps, to the Mexican expedition? — is not present, resorting to the erotic-war metaphors that prevailed at the time, is highlighted.

In this sense, some documentary sources indicate that the French and Austrian high ranks shared a similar vision to that expressed in the texts and images analyzed here. For example, the Austrian prince Khevenhüller recalled that

> [...] the [Mexican] women and girls are still formal in front of the Austrian officers, but they become loquacious after having spun them around for half an hour in the habanera, a slow dance similar to the csárdás, which they perform with passion, but which is actually quite indecent (Hamann, 1992, p. 139).

The eroticization of the scene was also reinforced by choosing to dress the dancers as "majas" —as *Le Charivari* did in his caricature—with their white stockings, low-cut blouses, and red roses as part of the headdresses. It is also worth noting the ambiguity with which the illustrators portrayed their way of dancing: Are they gathering their skirts as part of some choreographic figure, or do they do it to "show" their feet and calves? It is equally possible that the number of male characters doubles the number of female characters to symbolize that the soldiers behind them are waiting their turn to dance, as well as to

emphasize that the narrative of the image was crafted from a male perspective. As Entwistle (2002) has pointed out:

> What is striking about the attitude of female exhibitionism as a weapon of seduction is that it not only holds women responsible for their own sexual behavior but also for that of men: if a man succumbs to sexual temptation in thought or deed, it is considered the woman's fault for having provoked him with clothing (p. 172).

Particularly striking is the shortness of the skirt of the female figure in the background in front of the tree, even in comparison with the representations of the other "majas" or the "china" mentioned above and, even more so, with the fashionable figurines of the illustrated magazines of the time. At the same time, since the greenish shawl was placed around her torso, the transformation of the mantilla into a veil hanging from her head makes the portrayed woman recognizable as an Arab type, accentuating the orientalist vision that the illustrators had of Spain and Mexico, thus adding another layer of meaning to the image.[8]

Likewise, her location under the shade of the foliage and relatively distant from the rest of the characters makes us think of the marginal and liminal character with which the "maja" of the *Escenas matritenses*, the "poblanas" of Nebel or the "china" of the *Mexicanos pintados por sí mismos* had been represented, with whom she also seems to share having been pointed out by the authors as the materialization of the "destruction" of the male when he disobeys his values and gives in to the lack of control of his emotions.

In any case, it is possible that French readers found the scene strange or were amused to imagine Zouaves and "Mexicans" dancing a French quadrille —like those composed by Fessy, Strauss, or Antony Lamothe— (Larousse, 1875, p. 486), with steps and postures of an Andalusian *bolera*. Equally laughable would have been for the most knowledgeable public or for the Mexicans who would have known the stamp, to visualize

[8] It is necessary to keep in mind that, for most Europeans who were in the country at that time, Mexico was a mixture of Spain and the Middle East with Aztecs and Mayas. That orientalist perspective made, for example, characters such as Countess Kolonitz (1984) perceive that the indigenous mexicans danced the popular *jarabe* played with "national instruments" that seemed to have "something in common with those of our gypsies" (p. 152).

the Mexicans changing the spicy verses of the *jarabes* for the lyrics of "L'pied qui r'mue" and transforming the movement of the skirts and the *zapateado* of the *palomos* and *espinados* for the chains and the *balancé* of the quadrilles.

On the other hand, the circular compositions and the way of distributing the characters used by Vernier and Haguenthal in their images, borrowed from the scenes in which Spanish folk dances had been historically represented, constructed in such a way that the dancers occupy the focal point of the composition, while the spectators, portrayed in different poses and attitudes, gather around them.

From a broader perspective and as part of the *pathos*, at least since the 16th century, in some costumbrist scenes of dance, the serfs and peasants were represented with contorted, exaggerated and unrhythmic movements —atectonic, in Wölfflin's terms—, while the moderate and refined steps were reserved for the nobles (Elías, 2019, p. 308). Examples of this type of visual resources can be seen in *The Peasant Wedding,* painted by Bruegel in 1566, in some woodcuts by Hans Sebald Beham from 1546, and in the gigantic figures with affected postures produced by Jacques Callot around 1622. Subsequently, during the 18th and 19th centuries, the tradition of representing the peasant as a grotesque or savage being was replaced by the ethnographic gaze of the artist, interested in the faithful reproduction of costumes and customs (Burke, 2005, p. 174), as can be seen in works such as those of Alexandre-Marie Colin and his representation of a popular dance on the island of Ischia in 1833.

On the other hand, it is important to point out that in the lithograph of the *Imagerie Nouvelle,* some elements were incorporated that suggest the clandestine spirit of the event. Graphically, the background of the composition was arranged so that it is not possible to glimpse any architectural profile or feature that would indicate the proximity of the place to any settlement or camp; likewise, the height of the grass and the dense foliage surrounding the characters seem to be offering shelter and protection to the dancers and their companions from the eyes of others. If this is the case, the artists wanted the spectator to be an accomplice of the scene, having placed the point of view in such a way that he could be observing the action, hidden among some of the bushes that surround the

place. Textually, when the caption indicates that the dance took place "after lunch," it seems to indicate that, once the military work was concluded at dusk, while some Zouaves digested their food, others "danced" clandestinely.

This character was also expressed in another of the vignettes belonging to the same Haguenthal series. Entitled "A Surprise" (Figure 5), on its left side appears a high-ranking officer who observes from the front how a couple, walking arm in arm, approaches him, formed by a Zouave and a woman also dressed in "maja" style, with a green veil hanging from the center of her head, identical to the character located under the shade of the tree in "After the meal, the dance."

**Figure 5**. "Nos troupiers au Mexique. Une surprise. Gare! Mon Colonel! Dis-lui que je suis ton élève, que t'es maitresse quoi! Pour m'apprendre le patois du pays". *Imagerie Nouvelle*, series 8, plate 59. Lithograph.


**Source:** Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (MuCEM) / Franck Raux, France.

The soldier, upon seeing his superior, is very surprised because he has been caught *in fraganti* walking outside the camp in the company of a woman. Then, to get out of trouble, he tries to cover his face with his cap while he murmurs to the woman —as the caption of the image indicates—: "Tell him that I am your pupil and you are the governess who teaches me the dialect of the country." Although she hears him, she seems unfazed and smiles at the colonel.

It is possible that the pair of images is intended to portray the occasional encounters that may have taken place between French soldiers and Mexican women. In this sense, it is necessary to keep in mind that "the soldiers mixed more with the town than their officers did with the elite: more than a thousand soldiers stayed in Mexico [...], and no officer stayed [in the country], although several married Mexican women". In order to communicate, we know that, in the five years that the intervention lasted, some officers made an effort to understand and make themselves understood, so they acquired grammars and dictionaries "and ended up speaking Spanish" (Meyer, 2009, p. 434) or even learning Nahuatl, like Colonel Éloi Lussan (Meyer, 2009, p. 318).

It was also the case of Paul Laurent (1867), who affirmed that "conversation guides" were also acquired for such purposes. In a conversation transcribed and recreated in his memoirs, similar to the one noted in the lithograph —but in reverse— the officer affirmed that life was short and the dances very opportune and asked his interlocutor, after learning to say "daughter of my soul, precious one of my eyes," "let me teach you French quickly; who knows if I will be able to give you lessons for long?" (pp. 90-91).

The environment in which the artists placed the scene resorts again to the bushes that we already saw in "After the meal, the dance" and adds a palm tree in the third plane to iconographically reinforce its location in a tropical environment such as Mexico. Likewise, since nothing can be seen in the surroundings but vegetation, the image could imply that the couple comes from a secluded, solitary place hidden from the gaze of others.

It is important to keep in mind that most of the officers between 30 and 35 years of age who came to Mexico were single and that many *troupiers* between 40 and 50 years of age did not marry until the time of their retirement "not to have children but to have a

home, often in their hometown or small town" (Meyer, 2009, p. 324). The reason responded to administrative imperatives:

> Between 1843 and 1900, a French officer could not marry freely; he needed the authorization of the Secretary of Defense [...]; he had to prepare a dossier, reviewed and approved by the head of his unit or by his superior, in the case of staff officers and orderlies. The bureaucracy carried out a double inquiry on the "morality" of the two eventual spouses; the intended spouse had to provide a dowry, providing an annual income of 1,200 francs, which corresponded to a capital of 24,000 francs [...]. The dowry obligation corresponded to the idea that the salary of an officer, without any other personal fortune, did not allow him to live decently, if he had to assume the expenses of a family, with or without children (Meyer, 2009, p. 324).

Thus, while 51.5% of the officers who came to Mexico remained single, the national average in France for those born between 1821 and 1845 varied only between 11.4% and 13.3%. As Meyer (2009) notes, "there is no doubt that the military profession favors celibacy" (p. 326).

However, bachelorhood did not necessarily have to do with celibacy since what also concerned the French militia —and that is probably why the soldier in the lithograph covers his face— was the control and prevention of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially syphilis, which in their eyes was transmitted —almost exclusively— by prostitutes. For example, a Gallic manual on military hygiene published in 1896 emphasized the efforts that, since the mid-1840s, had been made to eradicate what was called "forest prostitution": a typology commonly established around the camps, formed by "marauders of the lowest rank and eminently fertile in venereal contagions of all kinds" (Viry, 1896, p. 606). Such health proposals prompted governments to establish controls and surveillance over certain practices in this regard. One of them was the registry of public women that appeared in Mexico in 1862 under the Juarez administration and which was postponed due to the state of war until it was resumed in January 1865 under the *Prostitution Regulation* established by the Second Empire (Cano and Aguilar, 2003).

With all of the above, it is possible that the lithographers devised their images from a set of binary oppositions with which they tried to communicate in a satirical way the contrasts between the social hierarchies that were perceived at the time: an ornate salon like the *Valentino*, versus the wild nature of the Mexican countryside; the rhythmic dancing of the quadrilles, versus the rough and tumble of the *boleras*; the tails and elegant dresses, versus the campaign uniforms and short skirts; the rest after the ranch, versus the licentious dances; the modesty and virtue, versus the debauchery.

Even if the image established that this type of behavior was typical of the lower ranks of the French militia, the truth is that testimonies report that it had spread throughout the hierarchy. For example, Kolonitz (1984) wrote about a ball organized by Bazaine in 1864, to which the wives had been invited without inviting their husbands and the sisters without their brothers. In the face of the rudeness —the countess recounted— when the court withdrew, all the guests left with it, and "later it was heard that those who remained there were nothing but Frenchmen, and that they closed the ball with a can-can" (p. 133).

Regarding the same event, Iglesias (1987) pointed out that the invitations had specified the dress to be worn, "being mandatory for the ladies to be low-cut"; "We do not understand how, after such indications, anyone could attend [...] although, according to public voice and fame, as many French dressmakers and grisettes were present in the capital" (p. 518). As can be seen, these types of evaluations —impregnated, moreover, with nationalist overtones— followed a two-way street, for if the analyzed French editions portrayed the Mexican women as women of dubious morals, Mexican pens such as Iglesias' made similar comments about the French immigrants working in Mexico.

Precisely, Larousse's *Dictionnaire Universel du XIXè siècle (*1867) explained that the word *cancan* meant a "very free dance, accompanied by indecent gestures [...] born on a night of orgy on Parisian soil [...] [characterized by] the absence of rules." Despite the value judgments in the gloss, Larousse denounced the moral double standard by which the gatherings where these dances took place were judged, asking whether "is it not a great contradiction to observe how a woman is expelled from a public dance for having raised

her leg, while two hundred dancers in short dresses raise it even higher than she does to the applause of the entire opera house?" (p. 251).

As Velázquez (2018) has pointed out, this genre of images highlights both the empowered status conferred to the male figures by the military uniform, making them believe that they had the right to court women in public and the fact that the suitors belonged to a higher social stratum than the female characters.[9] It is also characteristic that the women of the town were represented through visual and literary details about their bodies, conceiving them as "public goods" and national, "in sight and reach of *all*, hence their constant presence in the street as the natural scenario of their daily life" (p. 20).

In this sense, no matter how caricatured or satirical the image may be, it is necessary to keep in mind that after the popular revolutions and the cholera epidemic that occurred in Europe between 1830 and 1840, sanitary reformers became obsessed with the social disorder and immorality emanating from the "rabble." In this context, the prostitute was considered "both literally and figuratively, to be the route of infection of respectable society [...], a pestilence, an ulcer" (Duby & Perrot, 2018, p. 397). Likewise, "as a permanent cause of anguish, female sexuality is controlled by the church [which] encloses girls in a network of practices and prohibitions designed to protect their virginity. Mercy combats the world and dancing. 'Above all, no dancing'" (Ariès & Duby, 2017, p. 272).

Thus, it is possible that European observers of the images could have interpreted the presence of the portrayed women from this sanitary and religious perspective but also from a hierarchical, racist, and condescending perspective since prostitutes were understood as "bodies" in charge of attending to the physical needs of men (Duby & Perrot, 2018, p. 397). Under this sexualized and asymmetrical gaze, "Mexican women" were represented in this way to reflect their willingness to provide sexual services to French soldiers, evidencing the colonial imaginary of the environment that staged "the fantasies and unfulfilled desires of the Western white [male]" (Courbin, Courtine, & Vigarello, 2005, p. 182).

[9] In 19th century-Mexican plastic art, "the siege in the public sphere that military men and *donjuanes* belonging to the middle and/or upper classes planted on the women of the town had been a recurring theme in the scenes painted by Arrieta since the 1840s" (Velázquez, 2018, pp. 247 and 256-257).

Although they were drawn veiled, readers' eyes could also "see" their nudity. In the context of the significant influence exerted by pictorial and literary orientalism in the first half of the century, illustrators showed Mexican women wearing Spanish garments because, although they chose not to copy the appearance of women in the harems and baths of Algeria, Istanbul, and the Maghreb —institutionalized by brushes such as those of Ingres or Gérôme—, it was in Spain where they found enough orientalist references to associate them with Mexico, given "their" past —and present— characterized by fundamentalism and despotism, attachment to religious traditions, cities plagued by ruins, fiery climates (Sazatornil & Lasheras, 2002) and, of course, veiled women.[10]

This top-down view also applied to French privates. For example, Colonel Bourdeau commented that Mexicans living in towns and small cities did not usually distinguish the military hierarchy. For that reason, at a ball offered only to the high ranks, some Gallic military men "disguised" themselves as officers in order to enter the celebration; however, one of them —the colonel's cook— was discovered just "at the moment when carried away by emotion and forgetting all prudence, he was executing a *cavalier seul*[11] which was the admiration of the Mexican women." For his "reproachable" conduct, the soldier was seized by the guard and taken back to the camp (Bourdeau, 1907, p. 13). In this vein, Prieto would ironically point out in his *Impresiones de viaje (*2020) the French soldiers' "facility" for dancing as a political issue that, in his view, would lubricate the encounter between invaders and invaded uncivilized people to pave the way for French victory. Passing off his letters as those written in the diary of a Zouave, the writer pointed out that:

> [...] it was necessary to treat these savages as friends, and we began to dance a stormy *cancan* to assure the natives of our peaceful intentions. The conqueror who dances is a little fearsome conqueror (p. 81).

[10] In a similar courtship scene and with similar clothing, although with less short skirts, a trio of "Mexicans" were represented in plate no. 465 of the *Imagerie d'Epinal* entitled "Les français au Mexique". The orientalist vision of the print was also reflected in the domes and minarets in the background of the image, reminiscent of Islamic architecture.

[11] Refers to a figure that is performed in quadrilles, executed by a single dancer.

## Final thoughts

In the representations analyzed, a marked nationalist tension persists, which is used to distinguish the characters in a generic way and to narrate the events: the Mexicans who, when they do not appear as "chinas" and "rancheros," are confused with "majas" and "majos" because of their Iberian heritage, or the Spanish *boleras* and the Mexican *jarabes* that are intermingled with French quadrilles. In the same way, class representations are confronted: *balé* and ballroom dances versus fandangos and cancans, as well as the conceptions of the body associated with the behavior assigned to each social stratum and the spaces and ways in which they "should" perform: an acclaimed "professional" dancer who lifts her leg in the context of a theatrical performance, versus a town dancer who does it at a party and is censured for it.

With this in mind, both *Le Charivari*'s caricature and the lithographs of Haguenthal's imagery used a specific dress code —"maja" style— to identify the Mexican women portrayed as members of the humble class who used to exhibit their sexual attributes in popular celebrations and who were willing to "dance" and flirt with French soldiers of lower ranks. Due to such references to the "insurmountable" barriers that attempted to situate, define and separate the spaces, activities, and behaviors of one and the other group, it is possible to think that what underlies the images is a mocking and ridiculed vision of the Mexican popular classes and the lower-ranking French soldiers, by placing them in activities, contexts, and spaces very different from those in which the elite were involved, according to the representations.

The purpose of using two such differentiated plastic languages was to indicate all that was contrary and detrimental to the prescriptions, on one side, of bourgeois morality, continually anguished by the containment of emotions in public and, on the other, of the military code, based on honor, virtue, and discipline. Even if they used different codes, such representations seem to start from the logic that only "a trustworthy and practical person has its [two] feet on the ground" (The Archive, 2011, p. 424). In any case, the women's perspectives and their versions of events are stories that remain to be told.

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