The Argentine Tango As A Discursive Instrument And Agent Of Social Empowerment: Buenos Aires, 1880-1955

Lorena Elizabeth Tabares

University of Texas at El Paso, ltabares@miners.utep.edu

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THE ARGENTINE TANGO AS A DISCURSIVE INSTRUMENT AND AGENT OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT: BUENOS AIRES, 1880-1955

LORENA ELIZABETH TABARES
Center for Inter-American and Border Studies

APPROVED:

Sandra McGee Deutsch, Ph.D., Chair

Sandra Garabano, Ph.D.

Aileen El-Kadi, Ph.D.

Charles Ambler, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School
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Lorena Elizabeth Tabares

2014
To my family,
with love and gratitude,
for teaching me that with God all things are possible.

In loving memory of Moira Murphy,
mentor and friend.
THE ARGENTINE TANGO AS A DISCURSIVE INSTRUMENT AND AGENT OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT: BUENOS AIRES, 1880-1955

by

LORENA ELIZABETH TABARES, B.A.
BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE IN LATIN AMERICAN AND BORDER STUDIES
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Center for Inter-American and Border Studies
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
December 2014
Acknowledgements

I want to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to all those who directly and indirectly contributed to this academic effort. Foremost I want to thank my thesis director Dr. Sandra McGee Deutsch whose rigorous advice, understanding, and patience motivated me to study the topic of tango and Argentine social history. I would also like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Sandra Garabano and Dr. Aileen El-Kadi for their insightful advice and constructive criticism. I want to give a special thanks to my academic advisor Dr. Meredith Abarca and the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies for always supporting my efforts. I am greatly indebted to the Pauline Family in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for their hospitality and protection when I was far from home doing my research. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Father Agustín Cortéz, Provincial Superior of the Society of Saint Paul in Argentina for his support and friendship, and for making me feel a true member of the Pauline Family. I also want to thank Father Aderico Dolzani, Editorial Director of Editorial San Pablo in Argentina for sharing his knowledge and experience on the topics of tango and Argentine music. Next I would like to thank the staffs of the Biblioteca Nacional de la República Argentina and the Biblioteca del Congreso for their kindness and assistance. The instructors at El Amague Tango Academy: Manuel González, Ana Sánchez, and Patricia Demkura, for all the good time and for teaching me to dance the tango. I want to thank Bernardo Gurvanov for his guidance and advice and for helping me find the right sources for this work. I want to give a special thanks to Sister Esperanza Díaz and the Dominican Sisters of Christian Doctrine for their friendship, prayer, and unconditional support throughout the writing process of this thesis. Last, but not least, I want to thank my family, especially my parents, for their patience, tolerance, love and support, and for teaching me that with God all things are possible.
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Introduction

When most people think about the tango, they usually think of it as an exotic Latin dance from Argentina, characteristic for its passionate steps, melancholic lyrics, and dramatic music, just as mass media has pictured it for years. While this perception may result true to a certain extent, it is rather simplistic and often emphasizes stereotypes that satisfy the market’s demand for an exotic product for consumers around the world. As a result, the association of the tango with images like those of sensual couples tangoing in front of the Obelisco, or with the colorful façades of Caminito in the background, is not strange or surprising, but rather expected and even anticipated by many tourists and the non-specialist public. However, although romantic and even fulfilling to some, this limited conception of the tango has long overlooked the socio-political and historical background and meaning that have made the tango such an indisputable and transcendental element of Argentine popular culture. Indeed, since its early years, the tango was much more than just an artistic expression or a recreational activity: it was the manifestation of a collective ideology and idiosyncrasy.

The study of tango has long functioned as a point of departure of scholars who seek to inquire into Argentina’s social, cultural, and political dynamics. As Donald S. Castro pointed out in his classic work, The Argentine Tango as Social History, 1880-1955: The Soul of the People, the study of tango offers a “thematic entry way into Argentine social relations and social history since 1880.” Certainly, since its emergence in the late 19th century, in the midst of the socio-political structural changes and the massive European migration that altered the capital’s social map forever, the tango acted as a reflecting mirror of the identity integration and development conflicts experienced by the immigrants that settled in the Porteña capital. The development of the tango as a “song of the people” and “social history,” however, was not merely the result of
a matter of identification but, more importantly, the fact that the tango, in its “tridimensionality” comprised of music, dance, and lyrics, provided the milieu for the existence of the people that identified with it. In other words, the tango gave voice to the voiceless, allowing them to develop an identity of their own as a collectivity, but also made possible the empowerment of specific groups and individuals. Based on this premise, the present thesis project analyzes how the tango functioned as a Discursive instrument that provided the means for the development of different social identities in Buenos Aires during the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. “Discursive” is written with a capital “D” to signify the fact that instead of focusing on a literal use of a discourse comprised simply of words, it refers to the communication of a given set of ideas and conceptions that, as James Paul Gee explains, enact specific identities and activities. Gee argues that Discourses “always involve more than language. They always involve coordinating language with ways of acting, interacting, valuing, believing, feeling, and with bodies, non-linguistic symbols, objects, tools, technologies, times, and places.” Thus, this work presents the tango as a communicational vehicle since it not only functioned as a transmitter of ideas, but also allowed individuals to move within a given social spectrum.\footnote{6}

Taking Harold Lasswell’s definition of the concepts of communication and politics as the theoretical basis for this study, I will analyze how the tango acted as a form of dialectic Discourse for specific social actors and, therefore, as a catalytic element of agency and contestation. Lasswell defines communication with the formula “Who, what, whom, what channel, what effect.”\footnote{7} This paper addresses these questions, applying them to the social subjects analyzed. While the “who, what and whom” may vary according to the social composition, the channel will always be the tango and the intended effect refers to the attainment of a determined degree of agency and/or empowerment. In a similar fashion, Lasswell defines politics with
another formula: “who gets what, when, and how.” This concept is employed in this work to analyze any changes in the power relations between individuals and social groups.

Before continuing, it is important to note that, for the purpose of this work, the term “dialectic” is here considered in two connotative aspects: first, as the establishment of a dialogue or conversation between two or more parties; second, as related to the Hegelian philosophical theory according to which any process is the result of the action of opposite forces. Working on this philosophical principle, the “opposite forces” represent the different social groups present in Buenos Aires at the turn of the 20th century, expressed in a series of dichotomies: foreign immigrants/migrants from the rural interior (race); men/women (gender); lower classes/upper classes (class). The “process” taking place refers to the emergence and development of social identities, while the “action of the opposite forces” results from the interaction of these social groups in the tango scene (the arrabal, the brothel, the street.)

This study, thus, explores the ways in which the tango impacted the lives of individuals under the categories of race, gender, and class in Buenos Aires. It also examines how the tango contributed to break down the conception of a “collective other” into different others (identities) while at the same time contributing to the creation of a national identity. As a whole, this work addresses the following questions: How did these social actors become initially related to the tango? Why was the tango their most suitable communicational instrument? What kinds of dialogues did the tango establish? What ideas were contested? How did the “use” of tango by these groups encourage and made possible the negotiation of symbolic spaces in the social spectrum? How did the identities empowered by the tango converge in the creation of a national identity?

Even though this analysis is multidisciplinary in nature ---ranging from a Cultural Studies
and Communications approach, to a sociological and political context--- it has a special focus on history. The time frame for this research will cover the period between 1880 and 1955. During these years, the tango not only emerged and evolved to become a definite musical genre, but also passed from being a popular expression identified with the lower and criminal classes to being a widely accepted form of Argentine and, specifically, porteño culture nationally and internationally.

Studies about the tango as a discursive tool and its effects on identity construction tend to focus on the concept of identity as a whole, as a metaphor of the country. By focusing instead on its effects on different specific groups in terms of race, gender, and class, it is possible to develop a better understanding of the interactions between these groups as well as their contributions to the creation of a national identity. The aim of this study thus, is to offer a more complete picture of the influence of the tango in the construction of identities within the social spectrum.

This work differs from existing books, scholarly papers and articles that address the topics of tango and identity in two main aspects. First, as previously mentioned, instead of focusing solely on the effects of the tango in the construction of a national identity in general, or, on its effects on a single social group, this work examines in depth the effects of this form of popular culture in the identity construction of individuals and several social groups. Second, this work adds to the limited number of sources about the topic of the tango and identity construction written in English. An important example of such sources is Pablo Vila’s journal article “Tango to Folk: Hegemony Construction and Popular Identities in Argentina.” In this article, Vila analyzes how music “helps to construct a hegemonic process, not merely reflect it.” He argues that the tango (and folk music) operated as an “interpellative discourse that proposed determined types of identification.” Based on these ideas inspired by the “Gramcian tradition,” he also
proposes “the process of hegemony construction implies transaction and negotiation between the social actors involved in a particular social formation.” Although Vila recognizes that the tango functioned as a form of Discourse that contributed to the establishment of a dialogue or “negotiation” as he calls it, between different and, even opposite social actors, he argues that this dialogue only “proposed determined types of identification,” that is, that the tango discourse remained only an idea, a proposition, and not a direct instrument that made possible the existence of diverse social identities, as the present study suggests. In a similar fashion, the “types of identification” proposed, as described by Vila, are limited to class (rich/poor) and geographically based (urban/rural interior) identities, leaving out important categories such as gender and race. Finally, by arguing that the end, or final purpose, of this dialectic tango Discourse was the construction of hegemony, Vila is implying the preponderance of some of the parties involved in the conversation. Instead, the present study argues that the discourse derived from the tango made possible the establishment of an unprecedented dialogue between dichotomous factions, bringing them together even if briefly, and to a certain degree, in a common ideological space propitious for the development of a national identity.

Daniel Lago’s article “Las letras de tango como género discursivo complejo,” examines, as the title suggests, the transformations of tango lyrics into a discourse and informative source, alternative to the official information sources, such as newspapers, magazines, and books. However, although he analyzes tango lyrics as a channel of communication, he does not focus on identity construction. In a more ample way, Carlos Mina’s book *Tango, la mezcla milagrosa (1917-1956)* offers a comprehensive analysis of hundreds of tango lyrics as a retrospective study of the influence of the tango in contemporary Argentine national identity, but it does so in a general way, focusing mostly on hypothetical assumptions.
The sources used in the present work include a wide variety of materials. The primary sources consist of books, photographs, original documents, and newspaper articles from the 19th century to the mid-1950’s. Besides providing information about the origins and the development of tango, the books used as primary sources reflect the contemporary perception of the tango of the population of that time. In a similar way, the newspaper articles provide a first-hand account of the social debates that emerged as the tango Discourse began to contest long-held traditional social norms. The original documents consist mainly of population censuses conducted in the late 1800’s showing the demographic changes in Argentina during the period of mass migration. Tango lyrics constitute a central primary source of this study. They not only portray everyday life in Buenos Aires, but also present a literal discourse of the identity construction process. The secondary sources comprise a series of key books and articles that provide an integral account of the role and influence of tango in the population, as well as a general background of the development of tango through history.

The organization of this thesis is thematic instead of chronological. The first chapter focuses on the encounter of foreigners and rural migrants in the margins of Buenos Aires. It explores how in the midst of a collision of cultures and races in an unknown territory, these individuals found in the tango not only a sense of belonging and rootedness, but also the foundation for the development of a new identity of their own. Chapter 2 addresses the role of women in the tango scene. It analyzes the way in which the tango empowered women and their contribution to the world of the tango. Finally, chapter 3 explores the ways in which the tango, as a discursive instrument, contested class paradigms allowing the members of both the lower and upper class to enter new spaces in society. These chapters are preceded by a general overview of the tango’s genesis.
A Brief History of Tango

After a series of wars and sociopolitical conflicts, in the second half of the 19th century Argentina underwent a restructuring process focused on the development of a national project suitable to the modern world of that time. In the contemporary ideological context of economic liberalism and positivism, the Argentine Congress developed a constitution based on Juan Bautista Alberdi’s organizational scheme known as *Las Bases* (1852), a set of points that sought the consolidation of an official government system and strategies to achieve social and economic development. Inspired by Domingo F. Sarmiento’s idea that “territorial expanse [was] the malady that [affected] the Argentine Republic,” Alberdi’s scheme presented mass European migration as the means for progress and culture for South America. Like Sarmiento, Alberdi considered migration essential for national development for three main reasons. First, immigrants would settle throughout the country, thus closing the territorial gap and prompting national integration. Second, they would constitute a substantial trained labor force that would increase the national production of goods, which would help place the Argentine economy in the international market. Finally, and perhaps most important, was the idea that the incorporation of European immigrants, with their “inherent” habits of industry, order, discipline and freedom, would eventually civilize the country. Thus, following Alberdi’s aphorism “to govern is to populate,” in 1855 the 25th article of the Constitution of the Argentine Confederation made official its aim to promote European migration to the country without any restrictions on those interested in working the land, improving the industries and introducing and teaching sciences and art.

Shortly after the promulgation of the law, Argentina became the receptacle for thousands of European immigrants avid to “*hacer la América*,” and Buenos Aires, the national capital,
taking advantage of its "enviable geographic position," became the "civilizing" epicenter of the nation. As a result, Argentine society experienced a tremendous transformation. In 1855, European immigrants constituted 29 percent of the total national population. By the end of the 19th century, between 1885 and 1895, there were 670,000 new arrivals, and immigrants constituted 30 percent of the total population of Buenos Aires province. In general terms, between 1870 and 1914, about 6 million European immigrants arrived in Argentina, out of whom close to 3.3 million settled permanently in the country.

The incorporation of this mass of immigrants into the basic structures of porteño society soon resulted in an interesting and unexpected cultural melting pot incongruous with the scheme anticipated by the ruling elite, for they expected a different kind of immigrants. Certainly the millions of immigrants that arrived in Argentina came from European countries; however, the vast majority came from the Mediterranean zone and were not educated professionals, industrious entrepreneurs or rich investors, as the elite expected. Instead, most immigrants were poor and uneducated proletarian men. The result was a collective disenchantment. While the ruling elite lamented the immigrants' condition, the latter resented the impossibility of becoming landowners.

In the midst of the cultural shock, the newly arrived immigrants settled in the outskirts of Buenos Aires alongside the thousands of national migrants from the rural interior who moved to the nation's capital to alleviate the demand for labor force in a growing industrialized and competitive city. The arrabal then, became the locus for gender, class, and racial convergence, with a marginal identity of its own, comprised of a mixture of different cultural elements, completely opposite to the elite's ideal. By the end of the 19th century the interaction between these elements of the social construct bore fruit in a genuine form of popular expression: the
The tango is an expression of tension and friction produced by the people’s confrontations in the environment of the arrabal and the trauma it represented to all the parties involved. The tango, thus, acted as a sort of reflecting mirror of the identity integration and development conflicts experienced by the national and foreign migrants who settled in the porteño capital’s periphery.

Notwithstanding, while the tango expressed the friction between seemingly incompatible social factions, at the same time it constituted a point of convergence, encounter and dialogue between these social groups, becoming a sort of common existential ground. Regarding this aspect, Carlos Mina asserts that the tango was “one of the tools that contributed to the creation of a common symbolic space by becoming everyone’s word and allowing the acceptance of human differences.” [“El tango fue una de las herramientas que contribuyó a la creación de un espacio simbólico común al convertirse en la palabra de todos y permitir la aceptación de las diferencias humanas.”] The aim of this study is to present the ways in which the tango contributed not only to the acceptance of these differences but also to the construction of such differences.
Chapter 1

A Song of Encounter: Race and Ethnicity in the Tango

Often described as “a hybrid product of the arrabal porteño” [producto híbrido del arrabal porteño],¹ the tango was the result of the clash between “persons who were displaced from their origins by choice or force and who did not find life in the city an improvement.”² Marta Savigliano describes the emergence of the tango as “an encounter, a catalyst of racial and class tensions augmented by the European migration avalanche.”³ While the arrabal represented the spatial and existential canvas where the tango would develop, there were three main social elements that comprised the fundamental creative materials of the tango: the Afro-Argentine, the compadrito or criollo, and the immigrant. Naturally, the tango was not the result of spontaneous generation. It emerged from the gradual mixture of rhythms, choreographies, and circumstances.

Even though, like in most popular forms of art and expression, the exact origins of the tango remain unclear, scholars and tango historians agree that the tango was born in the Río de la Plata [the River Plate] region, most likely in the outskirts of the port city of Buenos Aires, between the late 1870’s and early 1880’s. In his book Breve historia crítica del tango, tango expert José Gobello attributes the creation of the tango to the compadritos and the Afro-Argentines: “…It can be affirmed that compadritos and Afro-Argentines intervened in the creation of what we now know as tango, which before was known as milonga”[Puede admitirse, pues, que la creación del que ahora se llama tango y entonces se llamaba milonga ervinieron los compadritos y los negros.] Gobello continues to point out that candombe societies were the birthplace of the tango.⁴ The candombe was an African rhythm and dance born in the margins of the Río de la Plata, between the late 18th century and the early 19th century, and is considered by many the earliest musical antecedent of the tango, often referred to as “El abuelo negro del
"tango" [the tango’s “black grandfather”]. In his renowned book *Cosas de negros* (1926), Vicente Rossi presents an interesting account of the birth of the first *candombe*, which he describes as a fortuitous event:

> It must have been on the occasion of a “happy royal birth,” or the saint’s day of an “aristocrat,” or the arrival of a “military leader” who had to be adulated [...] The thing is that every aristocrat went out to the street with his group of slaves [...] and while their masters were congregated in a solemn religious event [...] the slaves gathered outdoors (it could not have been any other way), for the first time in a large number and with so much liberality [...] That was, without any doubt, the innocent and curious scene in which the [black slaves] employed their providential day off. That is how the first *candombe* must have been born in the Río de la Plata.

> Poco a poco fue aplicada a todo acontecimiento o regocijo popular, y tiempos vinieron en que era el principal número del programa. Just as the *candombe* became the central part of popular celebrations in colonial Buenos Aires, the Afro-Argentine became the protagonist of these events and also of porteño society, at least for the event’s duration. It is
possible that such protagonism, even if it was in a subordinate level, might have awakened a sense of agency and self-identity among the Afro-Argentine community, since the *candombe* not only allowed them to build an inter-tribal form of racial unity based on universal forms of communication such as dance and music, but also because being a product of their experience as slaves or descendants of slaves, the *candombe*, by becoming a tradition, became a bond to Buenos Aires as well. The sense of belonging provoked by the *candombe* also influenced the white population, which, by considering it an expression locally generated, saw the *candombe* as a patriotic symbol. As Rossi explains, “the *candombe* was the first and only religious feast that filled with sounds and joy the Moorish colonial settlement; the first and only feast of patriotic character: for the blacks because of its origin, for the whites because of atavism.” [...*Y fue así el *candombe* la primera y única fiesta [sic] religiosa que llenó de ruidos y alegría al rancherío maruno de la colonia; la primera y única fiesta de carácter patriótico: para los negros por [sic] orijen, para los blancos por atavismo.*]⁹ Taking this into consideration, the *candombe* can thus be considered one of the first contributions to the foundation of the Argentine national identity.

It is important to note the condescendence with which the white aristocracy saw the *candombe* in its early years. Indeed, although considered a popular expression, enjoyable to a certain degree, not quite to the standards of the higher class, and not as innocent as it appeared to be (the *candombe*, in its dance form, included a series of sensual and suggestive movements), the *candombe* was not initially considered as much a moral social threat, as the tango would later be seen. Certainly there were social sectors that considered it lascivious but still the authorities allowed it.¹⁰ The two main reasons for this have to do with religion and social perception. On one side, as mentioned before, the *candombe* took place mainly on religious Catholic celebrations. Therefore, a link was established between *candombe* and Catholic solemnities, and
since the Church allowed it, it had to be good, or at least that was the logic behind it. As Rossi points out, “the friars allowed this spree as a debt to the Afro-Argentines for their example of sincere and edifying religiosity, their fidelity and ingenuity, and for kinship. The friars did not oppose the institution of the candombe, instead, they associated it with religious celebrations.”

The main example of this association between the candombe and the Church was the pre-Lenten carnival, where candombe comparsas danced and played candombe all day long in prelude to the upcoming forty days of Lent.

On the other side was the fact that, as mentioned before, the candombe constituted an important popular celebration in colonial Buenos Aires, which the viceroyalty saw favorably because, as George Reid Andrews points out, “[the candombe functioned as] a release for the community’s frustrations and dissatisfactions.” Besides, it inspired a sense of belonging. However, the favorable perception of the candombe and the Afro-Argentines experienced a negative turn when the Afro-Argentine community joined in support of the dictatorial government of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1835-1852). Rosas favored the interests of the rural elite of landowners in the provinces of the interior over the political and economic interests of the urban Buenos Aires elite. As Matthew B. Karush explains, the support of the population of African descent for the Rosas regime resulted “particularly galling to the liberals [the Buenos Aires elite.]” As a result, Afro-Argentines, as well as their popular expressions, began to be rejected. Suddenly, the candombe became a lascivious activity and was condemned by the upper
class. Despite the disapproval of the aristocracy, the Afro-Argentines continued holding *candombe* gatherings in public spaces, encouraged by the dictator Rosas.\textsuperscript{15} Andrews describes the Rosista period as the “Golden Age of *candombe.*”\textsuperscript{16} However, after a series of civil wars in which hundreds of Afro-Argentines perished, Rosas was overthrown. The incoming government of the new *Confederación Argentina* (the Argentine Confederation) re-organized the country under the Constitution of 1853, which, as part of a series of political and social reforms, decreed the abolition of slavery, affecting not only the Afro-argentine population but the development of the *candombe* as well.\textsuperscript{17}

Once freed, the Afro-Argentine population dispersed. While some Afro-Argentines moved to the countryside to find work as peons in *estancias*, many others settled in the *arrabal*, the Buenos Aires suburbs, on the far south of the city. There, as Gobello explains, Afro-Argentines settled on *sitios*, lots given by their ex-masters, where they established *candombe* societies and performed their dances, which were “then called *tangos.*”\textsuperscript{18} Early etymological references relate the term “tango” to the languages used by the African slaves of Buenos Aires. Jo Baim indicates that the term was “linked to the word *tambo*, the African term for the pens and markets where slaves were sold.”\textsuperscript{19} Another version states that “the word ‘tango’ comes from the Bantú term ‘tangó,’ which means ‘drum.’”\textsuperscript{20} The term is also considered to be an onomatopoeic form of the sound of the drums used by Afro-Argentine societies and dances. Eventually, the word “tango” came to signify, according to the “white and ethnocentric interpretation, a gathering of blacks or a dance of blacks.”\textsuperscript{21}

These *sitios* or *tangos* were located on the “Tambor [drum] or Mondongo neighborhoods on Mexico and Chile streets, from Buen Orden Street (now Bernardo de Irigoyen) to the West.”
It was precisely in these tangos that the Afro-Argentine and the compadrito met, generating the tango as a dance and musical genre. Gobello points out that “the compadritos must have yearned for the “candombe callejero” [street candombe]; thus, when it was confined to the sitios [tangos], after Rosas’s deposition, they followed it there.”

It is important to mention that by then, the geographic and spatial gap between the aristocracy and not only the Afro-Argentines, but the entire marginal population, had widened. The main reason for this was the yellow fever epidemic that struck Buenos Aires in 1871. In an attempt to avoid the contagion, the aristocracy moved to higher land, forming the Recoleta and Palermo neighborhoods in the northern part of the city, thus creating a social and urban polarization based on class and race. As a consequence, the north became the pinnacle of aristocratic life while the south, the arrabal, became its opposite, synonymous with crime, prostitution, immorality and poverty. One should note that the yellow fever further decimated the Afro-Argentine population, which, since the wars and the abolition of slavery, had been decreasing almost to extinction. Gobello points out four reasons that led to a dramatic decrease of the Afro-Argentine population:

The blacks [Afro-Argentines] basically disappeared for various reasons: 1) because in 1813 it was decreed that the children of slaves born in the Provincias Unidas were free; 2) because the war took away the black men and the black women united with the white men; 3) because Urquiza sent the shipments of black slaves taken from Brazil, during the war against that country, to the ranches of the Entre Rios province; 4) because the constitution of 1853 abolished slavery long before the United States and Brasil. The mestizos [mulatos] ended up diluting in the immigration flood.
Returning to the second social element that contributed to the creation of the tango, we have the *compadrito*, definitely one of its most emblematic characters. Researchers and authors ranging from popular writers like journalist José S. Álvarez, known to his public as “Fray Mocho,” his penname, to intellectuals like Jorge Luis Borges, dedicated pages and complete literary works to this character. But who exactly was the *compadrito*? Gobello describes him as: “the young man of modest social condition who lived in the *orillas*, that is the city outskirts [...] The *compadrito* was something like a *gauc*ho who had unsaddled.”

The *gauc*ho was the mestizo man of the pampa, characterized for his singular equestrian abilities and a semi-nomad lifestyle. His mestizo origin could have resulted from the mixture of Spanish, indigenous and African blood. As Savigliano points out, they were “men of different skin shades.” The growing presence of Italian and other European immigrants, and the rapid transformation of agriculture, eventually “drove the free *gauchos* to the far periphery,” forcing them to move to the capital in search of a living, “where they rapidly disappeared as an identifiable social group.” As Baim explains, “most of the gauchos of the pampas had by 1880 suffered one of three fates: conscription into the army, isolation on the ranch of some wealthy European *terrenteniente* (landholder), or assimilation into *conventillos* in the poorer sections of Buenos Aires.” The *compadrito* descends from this last group.

The sudden exposure of the *gauc*ho to the urban and cosmopolitan lifestyle of the national capital drove him to undergo an identity transformation, which functioned as a sort of survival adaptive mechanism. The resulting initial identity was that of the *compadre*, the
forerunner of the *compadrito*. The *compadre* was the *gacho* who first arrived in the urban region. Unable to return to his previous lifestyle in the pampa, he felt trapped within the geographic and social limits of the *capital porteña*. Although often described as coarse, yet noble and proud, the *compadre* was also depicted as a hostile and even violent man. Divested from his horse, the *compadre*’s inseparable friend and signature defense weapon in that new environment became the *cuchillo* (knife). As Daniel Lago points out, “when the *gacho* unsaddled, he found his knife, but without an *hacienda*’s flock to slaughter, he only had his knife, and he used it to fight.” [Cuando el *gaucho* se bajó del caballo, se encontró con el *cuchillo*, pero sin *hacienda* que desgarrar, tiene el *cuchillo* y lo usa para pelear.]29 Certainly, the *compadre* had reasonable motives to fight. His singular dress style and speech vocabulary, a syncretism of rural and urban elements, were occasionally a cause of mockery to some in and beyond the *arrabal*, as shown in Spanish writer Manuel Gil de Oto’s derogatory poem “*El compadre*” (1914):

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<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>El color alquitranado,</em></td>
<td><em>Tar color,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El pelo todo vedijas,</em></td>
<td><em>Matted hair,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Los andares vacilantes</em></td>
<td><em>Unsteady pace,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Y las actitudes simias.</em></td>
<td><em>And simian-like attitude.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Llamativo el indumento,</em></td>
<td><em>Garish dress,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Terciada la galerita,</em></td>
<td><em>A medium size top hat,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>de pura chafalonía.</em></td>
<td><em>Just worn-out adornment.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Habla a golpes, desgranando</td>
<td><em>He speaks harshly, spelling out</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Torpes gracias aprendidas,</em></td>
<td><em>Stupid learned jokes,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Con el ingenio en modorra</em></td>
<td><em>With a drowsy intelligence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Y la palabra cansina...</em></td>
<td><em>And weary word...</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A man of few words, used to the silence and solitude of the pampa, it is possible that the *compadre* experienced some initial difficulty communicating in the *arrabal*, causing that “weary word” to which Manuel Gil de Oto refers.

These negative views about the *compadre* reflected the positivist ideas of the time,
epitomized earlier in Domingo F. Sarmiento’s *Facundo o Civilización y Barbarie* (1845). In his work, written while exiled in Chile, Sarmiento establishes a dichotomous categorization of Argentine society where, as the title suggests, European-influenced Buenos Aires is presented as the paradigm of civilization, while the rural interior and its inhabitants are stigmatized as backward, unable to be civilized, and even barbaric:

...The progress of civilization concentrates only in Buenos Aires: the Pampa is a terrible conductor to distribute it [civilization] in the provinces, and we will see what comes out of this. [...] *Los progresos de la civilización se acumulan en Buenos-Aires* [sic] *solo: la Pampa es un malísimo conductor para llevarla e [sic] distribuiría en las provincias, e [sic] ya veremos lo que de aquí resulta.*

However, the notion of the capital city as the source of civilization did not apply to the *arrabal*, which, although geographically a part of the city, constituted a heterogeneous social conglomerate, a medley of marginalized individuals who represented the opposite of the elite’s ideal image of Buenos Aires as a wealthy and cultural metropolis. Alfredo Mascia describes the *arrabal* as an “undefined zone, not urban nor rural [...] a zone characterized by its gambling dens, cockpits, brothels, bars attended by waitresses, game rooms, dances, Chinese theatres, bargain and bazaars, etc.” *[una zona indefinida, que no era ciudad ni campo... zona caracterizada por garitos, reñideros de gallos, prostíbulos, bares con camareras, salas de diversiones, bailongos, teatros chinescos, casas de remate, cambalaches, etc.]* Thus the population of the *arrabal* was as “undefined” as the zone it inhabited. For this reason, this population constituted an “uncivilized other” in the eyes of the ruling elite, an “undesirable other” identifiable only with that gray zone that was the *arrabal*.

In the midst of this irregular and perhaps even chaotic environment, severely contrasting with the uniform calm and vastness of his former home, the pampa, the *compadre* adopted an “aggressive attitude” towards his new social and geographic circumstances. An attack to his
deep sense of honor and masculinity constituted not only an affront to seemingly irrelevant personality traits, but instead, it was a direct attack to the core of his identity, the only thing he had left from his previous life in the pampa. Whenever his honor and manhood seemed compromised he promptly reacted to defend them. His accustomed method to defend his honor and manliness was the knife duel. The outcome of the duel was decisive to the compadre not only because it was a matter of death or life, but because his reputation depended on it. If victorious, he would gain the respect and admiration of the people of the arrabal; if defeated, he would be scorned and considered a coward. Mascia points out that “when he [the compadre] assume[d] an aggressive attitude or kill[ed], he [did] so believing that he [was] defending a cause.” [Cuando asume una actitud agresiva o mata, lo hace creyendo que defiende una causa.] Therefore, the duel not only functioned as a way to defend his identity but also as a means to strengthen and construct it, now as a new individual in the arrabal.

The knife duel, however, was not the only method the compadre employed to defend his honor. Being a gaucho implanted in the city, the compadre brought the payada to the arrabal. In general terms, the payada was a verse duel, consisting of an intercalated exchange of ten-line stanzas (décimas) between two or more people. These verses were sung accompanied with a guitar. The man with the best ability to improvise a clever and quick response to his opponent’s verse was the victor. José Hernández presents a perfect example of a payada in his epic poem La vuelta de Martín Fierro (The Return of Martín Fierro, 1879) where the protagonist, the gaucho Martín Fierro, faces off “el moreno” (the mulatto), the brother of a man he had previously killed in a knife duel. Instead of getting involved in a knife fight, they face off in a payada, which Fierro wins at the end.

Things were not very different during the compadre’s first years in the arrabal. The
payada was still a popular alternative to the violent knife fight. In his poem “En el barrio” (1908), 34 Evaristo Carriego presents a faithful portrayal of a payada in an arrabal neighborhood:

The neighbors are gathering, 
in that hidden spot of the patio covered with the vine, 
and the barrio troubadour sits down, tempering, 
with a nervous hand, his sweet guitar.

The same guitar that still shows in its neck 
The indelible mark, the savage mark 
Of that resentful man who dreamed to slit the throat 
Of that dammed rival who cut the cordage.

And the song comes: a rhymed missive 
In long stanzas, of devoted fierceness, 
Which the insensible girl listened with disdain, 
Without coming out of her room.

In his sullen face the guitarist has 
old scars of opalescent shine; 
In his chest, a quarrelsome deep resentment, 
And in his black eyes, the light of a knife.

Since his angry pride 
Wants to silence all the rumors! 
He feels so capable of doing a manly deed 
That will keep the barrio talking for days!

And with the roughness of a rhymed gesture, 
The song that tells the young man’s sorrow, 
Ends up in a hoarse anguished moan, 
Like a threat that ends in a sob.

Even though the payada was not violent in itself, but a contest of creativity and mental acuteness, it did not lack the deep sense of rivalry and tension of a knife duel, as shown in the poem (“...In his sullen face the guitarist has old scars of opalescent shine; in his chest, a quarrelsome deep resentment...”). Carriego notes that the purpose of the troubadour is to “silence all the rumors.” Indeed, most knife duels and payadas originated in verbal fights in which the courage or the manhood of those involved was questioned. This quickness to get involved in “honor fights” would later become a characteristic trait of the compadrito. It is important to note that not all payadas took place in a hostile and antagonistic context or environment. In fact, in
most cases, the payada was a lively source of entertainment.

Eventually, the payada incorporated some African elements, becoming a more rhythmic music, passing from being a verse duel to a danceable song. This new rhythm came to be known as milonga, an African term meaning “words” or “verbiage” in reference to the original verses sung by the payadores. Thus, by the end of the 19th century, the terms milonga and tango were used interchangeably to refer to the dance and the place it was danced. Mascia explains that, by the turn of the century, the term milonga was also synonymous with a “brothel with dance” [burdel con baile]. By this time the compadre began to disappear, in part as the result of his integration in the new environment, in part because of the passage of time and the coming of new generations. Mónica A. Ogando points out that “by the end of the [19th century] the compadre, that gaucho expelled from the pampa, [...] was disappearing. He would be succeeded by the compadrito.” [Hacia el fin del siglo pasado, el compadre, aquel gaacho expulsado del campo [...] estaba desapareciendo. El compadrito lo sucederá.]

The compadrito was the social product of the arrabal. He was, as Gobello describes him, “the young man of humble social condition that lived in the city outskirts.” Characterized by his exaggerated mannerisms and dress, he still maintained the characteristic toughness and sense of honor of his predecessor, the compadre. Nonetheless, Mascia points out that the compadrito was “a diminution of the compadre,” a diluted version of its “predecessor,” evident even in the diminutive term compadrito. Mascia argues that the compadrito suffered the frustration of not being able to “achieve the personality and projection of the compadre.” Thus, as a response the compadrito developed other “survival methods” that would grant him social acceptance and exaltation: his excellent dancing abilities and his viveza (sharpness). Indeed, above everything the compadrito was an excellent dancer. He frequented academias and perigundines, places of ill
repute where dancing, alcohol and prostitution were common. In these places, Gobello explains, the *compadrito* enjoyed the dances of his time: “lanceros, waltzes, *habaneras*, *polkas*, and mazurkas.”39 Being a dance enthusiast, the *compadrito* also frequented the *milongas*.

According to Gobello, the tango emerged in these places as the result of the superposition of the dance steps of the *compadritos* over the *milonga*. He points out that the *compadritos* “introduced in their dances [especially the mazurka] the *cortes* and *quebradas*, which constituted the central choreography of the *candombe*.40 With the passage of time, Afro-Argentine musicians adapted the music of the *milonga* and other rhythms like the *habanera* and the Spanish *tango andaluz*, different from the Argentine tango, brought by sailors and immigrants to this peculiar choreography, creating an original music and dance: the tango.

Notwithstanding, the avalanche of immigrants that arrived in the country by the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century would contribute to the development of the tango with much more than just foreign rhythms. They would provide their circumstance and with this, a mood and a plot that would eventually develop the tango as we know it today.

Life in the *arrabal* during the first years of the tango, known as *La Guardia Vieja* (“the Old Guard,” 1880-1916), was marked by the increasing diversity of its inhabitants. Such diversity was comprised of a plethora of marginalized social actors: anarchists; prostitutes; blacks, mulattos and mulattas; pimps; women factory workers and seamstresses; stevedores, newsvendors, alcoholics, the mentally ill, *compadritos* and the newly arrived immigrants.41 The latter would cause a dramatic demographic and cultural impact on Argentine society and especially on the *arrabal*, and therefore on the tango as well. Between 1881 and 1914, close to 4,200,000 immigrants arrived in Argentina42 as a response to the sociopolitical reorganization scheme proposed by Juan Bautista Alberdi and later adopted by the 1853 constitution. It was
thought that European migration would contribute not only to the economic progress of the country in terms of an increasing labor force, but that these European immigrants would plant the seed of civilization in the vast Argentine nation. The ruling elite saw Northern Europeans as the paradigm of hard work, intellect, and inventiveness, traits that would definitively transform the country, putting it at the same level of the great powers like Europe and the United States. To the elite’s disappointment, the vast majority of the immigrants that arrived in Argentina did not come from Northern European countries, but from the Mediterranean region.

Although eager to work and “hacer la América” (move upward economically), these newcomers were mostly proletarian men, not investors or intellectuals as the ruling elite had planned. Italians comprised the largest foreign group with a population of close to 2,000,000 between 1881 and 1914. They were followed by the Spaniards with a population of 1,400,000; then came the French with 170,000 and the Russians with 160,000 people, respectively. Even though in some cases immigrants became successful and achieved “swift social mobility,” mostly by means of hard work in the Pampa region as farmers, they constituted a minority nonetheless. In fact, the conditions they faced upon their arrival were far from ideal. The main problem was economic underdevelopment and scanty infrastructure. This situation not only was reflected in the lack of proper housing, which eventually forced them to move to the arrabales or conventillos (tenement houses), which were closer to the center. I was also reflected in the hostile reception of the locals due, in part, to the rising unemployment, most evident during the economic depression of 1913-1917, caused by the fall of the foreign investment in 1913, a period of bad crops, and the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

Having surpassed by far the government’s expectations, the sudden growth of an increasingly heterogeneous population led the country to a state of social tension and
confrontation that brought up a series of questions pertaining to national citizenship and identity. The initial openness to the reception of European immigrants as civilizing agents of progress began to experience a setback. Some no longer saw immigrants as the nation’s guests, but as a threat to the national identity and a latent peril in political terms. This reaction partly resulted from the increasing feeling of displacement among Argentine rural workers by the recently arrived European immigrants, mainly Italian farmers. The imminent change of the life and the geography they had known until then, personified in the figure of the immigrant, awakened xenophobic feelings in some native-born Argentines. As Richard W. Slatta points out, “the foreigner personified the rapid, bewildering changes that altered forever the nature of pampean life.”

On occasions, the xenophobic feeling reached extreme violent outcomes, as in the Tandil massacre of 1872, in which a mob of gauchos and native-born rural workers murdered seventeen foreigners, including children and women. On the other hand, the elite began to fear that immigrants would import radical anarchist and communist ideas, which could cause a revolt that could remove them from power and challenge the capitalist system. This situation would eventually prompt the emergence of the Hispanist movement or Hispanism [movimiento hispanista or hispanismo], which not only fomented the acceptance of the Hispanic heritage, but also promoted xenophobia. Eventually, this movement would lead to the development of a nationalist education system and the prohibition of the Italian language in the schools in order to accelerate the process of assimilation of the immigrants into the Argentine Hispanic culture.

Gradually, then, the idealistic concept about immigrants began to diminish. Some even ascribed negative attributes to the immigrants, which they considered were inherent in their nature. This determinist attitude influenced nativist contemporary thought, as is evident in Eugenio Cambaceres’s novel, En la sangre (1887), literally “in the blood,” the story of the young
Genaro Piazza, son of Italian immigrants, who intends to ascend the social scale by pursuing an education, funded by his father’s inheritance. Unable to do so according to the accepted social norms, he resorts to dishonest actions such as cheating in the university, transgressing the law, and pretending to be someone else, with the purpose of finally accelerating his upward social mobility by marrying a wealthy woman. Nonetheless, he ends up dilapidating his wife’s wealth, which ultimately leads them to a miserable life immersed in domestic violence incited by Genaro’s inherent inferiority complex. Cambaceres portrays Genaro’s failure as inevitable, one that was predisposed by his Italian origins since, as the title suggests, failure was in his blood. In a similar way, in his study *Las multitudes argentinas* (1899), hygienist, writer, and politician José M. Ramos Mejía, one of the most determined promoters of positivism in Argentina, says about the immigrant that “Any vertebrate is more intelligent than the immigrant who has just arrived to our shores” [*Cualquier craneota inmediato, es más inteligente que el inmigrante recién desembarcado en nuestra playa.*]48

Struggling to fit in the existing Argentine social scheme, repudiated by an increasingly nationalist ruling elite and middle class, and facing the broken promise of a better life, many of these immigrants settled in the city outskirts, the *arrabales*, where they converged with the city’s marginal population, alongside the Afro-Argentine and the *compadrito*. Besides the cultural shock and the struggle to find a source of livelihood, the immigrant, and the suburban man in general, faced the problem of solitude due to the shortage of women. The mass arrival of thousands of immigrants, consisting mainly of young men avid to work, produced an unprecedented asymmetry in the sex ratio. According to INDEC censuses, the masculinity rate gradually increased from 105 in 1869, to 113 in 1895, and finally 118 in 1914.49 As Alfredo Mascia points out, “the high masculinity rate that resulted from mass migration propelled the
installation of brothels which proliferated with the complicity and sponsorship of Argentine and European politicians, government officials, and human traffickers in charge of white slavery networks." In the arrabal, men had access to these women, naturally in bordellos, which had operated legally since 1875, but also in the academias de baile [dance halls], and especially in the milongas which, as previously mentioned, during this period were synonymous with “brothel with dance.” Thus, the tango as musical genre and dance flourished in the milongas and bordellos of the arrabal, as an entertainment source for prostitutes and their clients. The brothels became the locus for gender, racial, and later class convergence. There, these men, the immigrant, the Afro-Argentine and the compadrito, not only competed to define their identity in their new environment, but most importantly they competed against each other to establish a reputation of masculinity and strength in order to have more chances to attract women. The best way to display these qualities was the tango dance. About this, Mascia points out that “women had a pathologic admiration for the tango dancer.” Pathologic or not, women certainly felt attracted to the men who best danced the tango. For this reason, the men, who lived in constant stress and competition, had to develop excellent dance skills, since tango matches were the usual method to dispute the attention and perhaps the affection of women. However, in many occasions, a knife fight followed the tango match whenever the man felt his honor was compromised or, worse, that another man could take away “his” woman, or simply to reaffirm his manliness.

In conjunction with the social antagonism between nationals and foreigners, the collective clash with modernity affected all of them in terms beyond those of national origin. The unprecedented encounter with modernization impacted conventional social roles. As Adriana Bergero explains:
Modernity unleashed unprecedented laws of exchange. It was a new social construction, and it altered so many patterns of daily life, that it gave rise to perplexity, hilarity and pain, but above all to excess: An excess of social interaction, uncontrollable by traditional frames and boundaries.\textsuperscript{52}

This “excess of social interaction” translated into the increasing transgression of traditional and defined identities and spaces. It contested existing social roles, breaking the paradigmatic boundaries of race, gender and class, and producing a “profound identitary dislocation.”\textsuperscript{53}

The dislocation of identity prompted the emergence of a series of dichotomous power structures at different levels of the social spectrum. In the contemporary context of positivism and determinism, such power structures were primarily evident through the antagonistic concepts of civilization and barbarism, where the first represented the oligarchy and the educated urban middle class, and the latter the rest of the population. Projected in the urban geography of Buenos Aires, this dichotomy traced the territory where both would exist, the center and the periphery. Incongruous with the ruling class’ ideal image of Buenos Aires as a wealthy and cultured metropolis, the lower classes, whose conventional social roles underwent the most radical changes, had to be contained in such a way that they would not alter the status quo. Thus they were confined to the arrabal, the city’s suburban area, so that, as Bergero explains, “the Buenos Aires of the Centennial could present...an image of opulence and wealth because it set out to erase from public view whatever remained of its immerse, underground, undervalued social diversity.”\textsuperscript{54}

The sudden encounter between mutual “others” personified in the form of the immigrant, the Afro-Argentine and the compadrito who, despite their differences formed, a “collective marginal other” in the eyes of the elite and the middle class, was not peaceful or smooth, but rather, a violent encounter between confronting individuals. Indeed, the arrabal became the
point of convergence of social actors who, although entirely different, shared the fact of having been displaced. Cultural assimilation, during the first years of this encounter, was not an option since it would have implied the renunciation of their cultural identity, for many the only thing they had left, in order to be absorbed in the core culture of their new environment, the arrabal and Buenos Aires. However, such a “core culture” did not exist, since, as John Lynch points out, there was not a defined Argentine national identity.

Without a core culture into which they could merge, assimilation could only mean the gradual adaptation and development of these individuals into their new social and geographic circumstances, which would lead to the eventual creation of a new national identity. Here is where the tango, as a “hybrid product of the arrabal porteño” [producto híbrido del arrabal porteño], emerged as the purest expression of the condition of the inhabitant of the arrabal. Through its music, the tango functioned as a complex communicational vehicle, a reflecting mirror of the realidad porteña, porteño reality, portraying not only the social inner workings of the arrabal where it originated, but also the social interaction between the suburban periphery and the oligarchic center. It expressed the melancholy, anger and frustration of these characters, subjugated by the political and economic circumstances imposed by the ruling class. In Ernesto Sábato’s words, the tango synthesized:

“The violent and tumultuous growth of Buenos Aires, the arrival of millions of hopeful humans and their almost invariable frustration, the nostalgia for the distant homeland, the natives’ resentment against the invasion, the sense of insecurity and fragility in a world undergoing a vertiginous transformation, not finding a sense to one’s existence, the lack of absolute hierarchies.”

[El crecimiento violento y tumultuoso de Buenos Aires, la llegada de millones de seres humanos esperanzados y su casi invariable frustración, la nostalgia de la patria lejana, el resentimiento de los nativos contra la invasión, la sensación de inseguridad y de fragilidad en un mundo que se transformaba vertiginosamente, el no encontrar un sentido seguro a la existencia, la falta de jerarquías absolutas.]
In sum, the tango communicated the continuous revival of a broken promise of a better life. As had the candombe, the tango functioned as the most suitable communication for these individuals since it consisted of universal languages such as dance and music, which allowed the establishment of a communication that transcended the boundaries of their original different spoken languages, focusing on something they all had in common: the capacity to engage in physical contact through the dance.

Besides functioning as a communicational vehicle, the tango constituted a Discursive instrument as well. James Paul Gee defines “Discourse” as “a ‘dance’ that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times and places, and in the here-and-now as a performance that is recognizable as just such a coordination.” Based on this premise, it is evident that the tango was indeed a Discourse itself. It comprised lyrics (words), dance and music (deeds), pride (values and beliefs), and musical instruments (symbols, tools and objects). It was related with a specific time, the night, and places, the arrabal, the brothel, the academia de baile, the milonga, and the cabaret.

The individuals of the arrabal not only constructed the tango Discourse, the Discourse constructed them as well since it generated an environment propitious for the development of new identities through the establishment of a series of dialogues pertaining the question of identity, masculinity, belonging, and territoriality. As mentioned before, the tango, as a novelty and syncretism of the cultures that created it, echoed the emergence of the new identity of the individual of the arrabal. Through the dance, these individuals had the opportunity to excel at something valued by their social surroundings that would eventually grant them recognition and even admiration. For the men, such a reputation (constructed identity) signified the means to have one or more women; to women, it provided the possibility of finding protection and even
financial support from such men (the topic of gender relations in the tango will be treated in depth in chapter 2.)

The construction and consolidation of a determined identity promoted a sense of security, since it provided individuals with a notion of where they came from. In this case, the arrabal, the tango scene, constituted this geographic and existential point of departure, for which its inhabitants developed a deep sense of belonging and territoriality. They were no longer “uprooted” [desarraigados], or the result of displacement provoked by a foreign social force in the form of the ruling class. The tango, in its contribution as Discursive instrument, allowed them to exert agency through a self-proclaimed identity of which they could be proud, and through a popular cultural expression that would call the attention of that “other,” the aristocrats, making possible the interaction between other symbolic spaces in the social spectrum in terms of gender and class, bringing closer their social actors, as it did in the arrabal.
Chapter 2
Tango: A Song of Gender

The massive arrival of immigrants, in conjunction with the rapid modernization of the city, the increasing development of the national industry, and the struggle for social adjustment, altogether raised the question of national identity or what it meant to be Argentine. Such identity would be as much the result of these socio-political and economic changes, as well as a response to the growing necessity of the country’s inhabitants to self-define themselves within the new context they had created. Although apparently the main conflict in regards to the construction of the lineaments of a national identity was the incorporation of the masses of immigrants into the basic social structures of the country, in fact, this was just the tip of the iceberg. Actually, the bottom line was the interaction conflicts in terms of race, class, age and especially gender.

These social and political changes were reflected in different forms of popular culture such as the circus or the *sainete criollo* – a one act comical play. However, the tango became their maximum channel of expression; after all, as Alfredo Mascia points out, the tango was the “dramatic synthesis of porteño life” [*síntesis dramática del vivir porteño*].\(^1\) Beyond being a simple artistic expression or a recreational activity, the tango was a social Discourse. As explained in the previous section, the tango Discourse constituted an existential atmosphere with its own places, time, symbols, words, and set of values. In other words, it was a “way of being” within its specific context. However, the tango Discourse was not self-generating, but rather the result of a mutual feedback process. As mentioned before, the tango emerged as the product of the syncretism of various different cultures. While the tango provided these social actors with a common point of reference, first as a form of entertainment, later as an existential Discourse, they “nourished” it with the experiences, thoughts, ideas, and feelings they acquired as they lived

and coped with new situations. Among such circumstances is the emerging interaction conflicts between men and women, the growing gap between traditional and new gender roles at the turn of the century, as well as the growing gap between the actual lifestyle of porteños and the ideal lifestyle proposed by the ruling class which considered the family as the foundational unit of the new Argentine nation. Parting from this, the present chapter focuses on the development of gender relations within the tango Discourse. It explores the ways in which the tango Discourse propitiated the creation and development of diverse social identities in terms of gender. It also analyzes the ways in which the tango acted as a catalytic element of agency and contestation in regards to existing traditional roles. Finally, this chapter studies the ways in which the tango propitiated the establishment of a dialogue between the sexes in terms of equity.

In the previous chapter we partially saw how the sex ratio asymmetry produced by the large numbers of men that arrived in Argentina between the late 19th century and the early 20th century altered social and gender relations. The 1895 National Census shows that the number of immigrant men tripled that of Argentine nationals, and that there was a total of 2,088,919 men against 1,865,992 women.² This situation not only prompted the proliferation of brothels, but also led to the legalization of prostitution in 1875.³ Besides seeking to calm the sexual anxieties of men, the legalization of female prostitution sought to “isolate and control the social and medical consequences of commercial sex.”⁴ Legal prostitution was thus regulated and limited to certain hours and locations. It also required prostitutes to have medical examinations periodically to avoid the spread of venereal disease. The legal acceptance of prostitution fomented the emergence of international human trafficking (white slavery) networks dedicated basically to the “importation” of European women to work in the brothels. While many of these women worked in government-regulated places, many others ended up working in illegal and clandestine
establishments such as dance halls (*academias de baile*), cafés with waitresses, and the cabaret. Either legal or illegal, the tango was consolidated as a musical genre in these establishments. There, it was the main source of entertainment of prostitutes and their clients. During this time, the tango consisted mainly of music and, as Archetti points out, it “was for dancing and not for listening.” Certainly, more than entertainment, the tango had the “social function” of bringing men and women to the intimate and physical closeness of the tango’s embrace, as a sort of prelude to the sexual act. On this, Mascia comments: “sometimes the dance was the means, at other times the end (sexual act), and generally both.” [De ahi que el baile a veces era el medio, otras un fin, and generalmente ambas cosas].

However, in order to get to the point of the tango embrace, being able to pay the prostitute’s services was not sufficient. In a place where men abounded and women were scarce, competition among men to get women’s attention and favors was common and even inevitable. In Sandra Gayol’s words, “the scarcity of women increased their value, and at the same time raised conflicts about ‘who had the right to possess [them]’” [La escasez femenina aumentaba su cotización, pero al mismo tiempo acrecentaba los conflictos “acerca de quién tenía derecho a poseerla”]. Thus, men had to find ways to stand out from the rest, and the tango dance provided them with a useful “seduction tool.” Besides personal attitude and skill in knife duels, excellence at tango dancing not only made men stand out, but also highly desirable to women. Based on this, it can be said that dancing and knife skills empowered certain men, those who were able to excel at these, by exalting their maleness and reputation. Enrique de María’s “*revista callejera de un acto*” [one act street revue], “*Ensalada criolla*” --Creole Salad-- (1898), portrays the importance of being an accomplished tango dancer and a courageous knife fighter as determinant factors of masculine superiority. In one scene:
Three low-class men of different colors (the blond pichinango, the dark Zipitría, and the black Pantalón) present themselves as famous knife-fighters who in addition have three impressive criollas [creole women] (not immigrants) as sweethearts. They compete with each other in cortes and quebradas, making fun of each other’s skills, and in the end recognize the dancing skills of the black. Their sweethearts arrive [...] The men invite anyone to compete, blacks and whites, in dancing and fighting, and the women fight among themselves over the exclusive possession of the men and end up shedding their tears in the arms of their appropriate partners. [At the end] all couples perform a tango with plenty of quebradas.9

Perhaps the first thing that attracts our attention from this extract is the fact that the three men had “impressive criollas as sweethearts.” Since, as mentioned before, women were a scarce “commodity,” this detail cannot be ignored. From here, we could ask next how is it that these men managed to have such women. Indeed, as mentioned in the beginning of the passage, they were not only “famous knife-fighters,” but also accomplished tango dancers. Their skills in both activities, considered defining traits of masculinity, made them attractive and even “irresistible” to the women, who competed over the men. Evidently not only the men competed to attract women.

Numerous revues and sainetes of the time presented similar plots. It is interesting how the man’s honor, courage, and maleness was evaluated and judged according to his dueling and dancing performance, and not his race. Savigliano points out that “[these matches] provid[ed] a fair opportunity for showing ‘real’ values [...] –courage and seduction as opposed to race/class discrimination,”10 as shown in the previous passage, where the best man is determined based on his tango performance.

By becoming a master of the tango dance and the use of the knife, the compadrito became the prototype of masculinity. Newly arrived immigrants tried to imitate his ways by dressing like him and learning his tango steps. The compadrito’s reputation granted him the favors, admiration, and love of women. Indeed, the compadrito was an expert at seducing
women and he had three main reasons to do so. Of course, the first reason was to satisfy his affective and physiological sexual needs. The second was to reaffirm his masculinity. Finally, he wanted to use them as a source of income. On this, Mascia comments:

In that environment [brothels and similar establishments] the man with the higher status was the one that had the higher number of women working for him. Because the women that worked in those places gained money in different ways: as prostitute, dancer, swindler, or thief [...] and, in over time as street prostitute. That gives origin to one of the meanings of the word “mina” [mine] with which these women were called for the amount of money they generated.

[En ese ambiente [prostíbulos y demás establecimientos similares] el estatus más elevado lo tenía el que poseía mayor número de mujeres que trabajaran para él. Porque las mujeres que se desempeñaban en esos lugares lograban dinero por diferentes razones: como pupila, como bailarina, como cachadora o lancera [...] y, en horarios extras, como trota calles. De ahí una de las acepciones de la palabra “mina” con la que se les calificaba por la cantidad de ingresos que generaban].

Certainly, the compadrito danced the tango to get as many women as possible but he also did so as a mere act of vanity and arrogance, “just for personal satisfaction and to channel his exhibitionist vanity, boasting a kind of power” [por mera satisfacción personal y para canalizar su vanidad exhibicionista, ostentando una forma de poder]. The compadrito was very aware of this power over women and men. His reputation made him feel a sense of territoriality, pride, self-identification and belonging in the arrabal and the city as a whole, over which he felt had control.

Soy hijo de Buenos Aires,  
Por apodo “El porteñito”,  
El criollo más compadrito 
que en esta tierra nació.  
Cuando un tango en la 
vigüela  
Rasguea algún compañero  
No hay nadie en el mundo entero  
Que baile mejor que yo.  
No hay ninguno que me iguale  
Para enamorar mujeres,  
I am the son of Buenos Aires,  
I am nicknamed “the porteñito”  
The most compadrito criollo  
That was born in this land.  
When a friend plays  
A tango in his guitar  
There is no one in the whole world  
That can dance better than me.
There is no one who can match me
When it comes to seducing women
Pure hot air,
Just flirtation and nothing more.
And when I face her
I look and evaluate her body
Securing the stew
With the money she will produce.
I am the terror of the ruffians
When I arrive in a dance,
because I respect no one
Who is present at the dance hall
And if anyone protests
And wants to look brave
With a punch I will send him back
To who encouraged him!

“El porteñito” [The little porteño] (1903)
Ángel Villoldo

This tango synthetizes the essence and the core values of the compadrito. It portrays his sense of belonging and confidence as a self-proclaimed “son of Buenos Aires.” Unlike other men, mostly immigrants, who were still struggling to fit in a new country and define their identity, the compadrito knew the arrabal was his home, that he was the “product of the suburb.” As such, he acted with freedom, familiarity, and even a sense of authority and pride. In the tango, the compadrito boasts about his tango skills (“no one in the world can dance better than me”) and his ability to seduce women. He describes his “tactic” to make them fall in love by dancing and talking with them. Interestingly, the compadrito does not hide his purpose for seducing women; in fact he seems to be proud of his ability to use women as a source of income. Finally, he reaffirms his “power” (and pride) not only over women but on other men as well by saying that he does not have to respect anyone and boasting about his ability to appropriate their women.
The *compadrito*’s behavior and personality might have been seen as negative and even shocking; it was condemned by the middle and upper classes. Yet with his traits and “values” — a sense of belonging, pride, courage and physical force — the paradigm of masculinity of his time, and a prototypic figure of the tango.

While it is true that the tango allowed men to show off and exert their agency in terms of personality, skill, and masculinity over men and women as well, this was not limited to the masculine sex. Just as male tango dancers were admired, so were women. These women, known as *milonguitas* or *milongueras*, were basically the *compadrito*’s female counterpart and were recognized as well for their tango and seduction skills. As did the *compadrito*, the *milonguita* used her abilities to get through life. Most milonguitas worked as prostitutes — “prostitutes were the first women to dance the tango.” And just like the *compadrito*, she was proud and enjoyed boasting about her dance skills, as shown in Vicente Greco’s tango “*La milonguera*” (1915):

*Soy milonguera, me gusta el tango,*
*y en los bailongos me sé lucir.*
*¡Hago cortes... y unas quebradas...*
*y unas sentadas que son así!*
*Por eso en baile que yo aparezco*
*me abren cancha las milongueras,*
*porque ya saben que, con mis cortes,*
*no hay minga caso de competencia.*

I am the milonguera, I love the tango,
And I know how to show off in a dance.
I make cortes and quebradas...
And some sentadas that go like this!
That’s why in every dance I go to
The milongueras open a space for me to dance
Because they know that with my cortes,
No one can compete.16

However, men considered a woman’s ability to dance the tango more an additional asset than an act of empowerment, since she was already a “valuable, scarce commodity.” As Gayol explains, “the woman [was] part of the masculine capital. She was part of his property, transforming her possession or her loss in a factor that augmented or diminished the man’s personal capital” [*La mujer integra el capital masculino. Formaba parte de su patrimonio transformándose su tenencia o su pérdida en un factor que aumentaba o disminuía el capital personal del hombre*]. In other words, the woman was a sort of “accessory.” This is clear in
Villoldo’s early tango “Cuerpo de alambre” [Body of wire] (1910) in which the narrator, probably a *compadrito*, expresses his pride and contentment for ‘having’ an accomplished tango dancer as his woman:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Yo tengo una percantina} \\
&\text{Que se llama Nicanora} \\
&\text{Y da las doce antes de hora} \\
&\text{Cuando se pone a bailar,} \\
&\text{Y si le tocan un tango,} \\
&\text{De aquellos con florituras,} \\
&\text{A más corte y quebraduras} \\
&\text{Nadie la puede igualar.}
\end{align*}
\]

I have a woman
Named Nicanora
And she is an expert
When it comes to dance,
And if someone plays a tango,
One of those with adornments,
With her cortes and quebradas,
No one can match her.\(^17\)

Thus, as Savigliano points out, “the *milonguera’s* eroticism [seduction skills] circulated in a strictly limited way, confined to illegitimate encounters marked by heterosexism and class.”\(^18\)

One should not think, however, that the tango was an exclusive tool of masculine empowerment.

The position of women as a simple object of dispute in the tango Discourse changed with the advent of the “*tango canción*” [tango with lyrics], a new stage, in which the tango took a verbal form through the incorporation of lyrics and poetry applied to the music. This period was also characterized for the rise of the cabaret as the maximum nightlife entertainment for men.

Most tango historians and experts delimit the *tango canción* between 1917, with Pascual Contursi’s “Mi noche triste” [My saddest night], considered to be the first *tango canción*, and 1935, the year of the death of the famous tango singer Carlos Gardel.\(^19\) Even though the existence of tangos with lyrics previous to “*Mi noche triste*” is well known, their lyrics were mostly choruses consisting of a few short and impertinent phrases that could not be considered songs and therefore had little resonance. There were other earlier tangos that had more substantial lyrics, like “*El porteñito*” (1903) or “*La morocha*” [The Brunette One] (1905); however, as Néstor Pinsón explains, “their structure was very simple and different [inconsistent], and they only narrated the profile of a certain character, in a festive tone most of the time.”
“Existieron tangos con letra, pero de estructura muy simple y diferente, donde se relataba el perfil de algún personaje, en tono festivo la mayoría de las veces.” Unlike these tangos, “Mi noche triste” not only narrated a complete story, but also presented a theme that would be present at least until the late 1930’s. This theme was the discontent of men because of women’s abandonment, disdain, or betrayal. Carlos Mina describes this period as a time in which

The most distinguished authors take female abandonment as the central theme of their tangos. In the tangos of this period, a woman always leaves. She either abandons the man or goes away from him, his apartment or the barrio. Sometimes the abandonment does not take place in the context of a relationship, but narrates an event that leaves virtue or honor on the sideline...

As Simon Collier, Hen Hass, et al., explain, “most tango lyrics were written by men, and the ‘ego’---the implicit singer---is almost always a man,” and their lyrics tended to construct women according to their own experiences of resentment and spite. However, although it could have appeared that tango lyrics continued to function as a tool of masculine empowerment, it was not precisely the case. Paradoxically, by portraying women as “evil,” “ungrateful,” selfish, licentious and basically as able to inflict pain and suffering on men by leaving them, tango lyrics granted women with a sort of agency and power by presenting them as strong, able, and willing to exert their will even if the consequences are not favorable. Thus, as Archetti points out, “the tango narrative can be seen as a male discourse on gender, and not as a solipsist tale.”

Therefore, while it is true that the tango canción gave voice to men, it was not precisely or only to exalt their “superiority,” but as a sort of escape, a way to express their worries and impressions about the changes they were experiencing, especially those regarding gender relations.
On this aspect, Marta Savigliano notes that “tangos are male confessions of weakness in terms of sex and class.” In other words, through the tango lyrics, the porteño man, not the one from the upper class, but the one of the suburbs, usually an immigrant or descendant of immigrants, confessed the “pains” of the transition between the 19th and the 20th centuries. On one side, he suffered his condition as a “new Argentine” [nuevo argentino] trying to adapt to and participate in a foreign land, while competing against other immigrants to “hacer la América.” On the other side, the man found himself with a woman who was an active agent, who exerted her freedom (albeit limited) by working outside the home in industry, in the cabarets, or even prostitution. According to Carlos Mina:

We can assume that the terrible geographic and historic fracture to which they were subjected by the immigration process allowed the readjustment of roles and values. Probably this fracture facilitated for the weakest beings, women, the possibility to slip into that crack in order to try to occupy a new place in the world, a freer place. The movement perceived by the poets [tango lyricists] is the one that women took into effect to get rid of the absolute masculine guardianship they were under.

Nonetheless, immigration, industrialization, and the increasing male population were not the only social changes women faced at the turn of the century. As Mina correctly asserts, during those years women passed through a process that changed their traditional role in society. It was not, however, a change limited to women in Argentina, but a part of the rise and spread of the feminist movement in the world. This movement did not pass unawares to the representatives of different social sectors of the time in Argentina. In an attempt to learn more about the social perception of the rise of the feminist movement, Miguel Font organized and promoted the
Encuesta Feminista [Feminist Survey] (1919). In general terms, this document tried to define what “feminism ought to be in Argentina,”26 in the midst of the debate about “la cuestión de la mujer”[the question of women].27

One of the clearest signs of the change in women’s traditional gender role, which limited them to the domestic sphere, was their incursion in the labor force. Certainly women had long been working in different trades, which they usually performed in their homes as seamstresses or laundresses, for example.28 In contrast, during this time of change, women began to work outside the home in factories, meat packing plants, and offices.29 Since prostitution, continued to constitute a legal labor option, many women practiced it, but instead of in the brothel or on the streets, many opted to exercise this “profession” in the glamorous cabaret. As Archetti explains:

[This] is a time, and not only in Buenos Aires, when women were “stepping out,” going to cabarets and in the process creating a new night-life, a public social life outside the walls of the home and work. Women were making choices and challenging conventional mores and moral standards. The tango [lyrics] reflect a male reaction to changes and permits us to analyze the transformation of the imagery of heterosexual relations.”30

In sum, the tango was not the only source of empowerment of women during this time, although it greatly contributed to them as such. As mentioned before, the tango Discourse consisted of and projected everything its social actors “fed” into it. In other words, the tango Discourse functioned as a sort of “cultural identity bank” in which people “deposited” their experiences, thoughts, and ideas, while at the same time they “withdrew” a set of values, a culture, and an identity. The massive immigration and its resulting sex ratio asymmetry, as well as the spread of the feminist ideology and its consequences such as women’s “stepping out”31 into the work place, were just some of the main conceptual “deposits” and sources of women’s agency. As part of the tango Discourse, these sources of empowerment were portrayed,
evaluated, and, most of the time, condemned by the men in their popular culture verbal outlet: tango lyrics.

We already saw that the central topic and theme of the majority of tangos of this period was abandonment. Nonetheless, besides emitting descriptive judgments about the evident changing interactions between men and women, tango lyrics raised a series of implied questions that contested existing views regarding traditional gender roles ascribed to men and women by society. Lyrics particularly questioned the hierarchical position of men over women. They also questioned the men’s masculinity and their portrayal as strong, unbreakable and unable to express any feelings beyond pride. In a similar fashion, tango lyrics contested the view of women as helplessly emotional and fragile. All these questions, however, reflect a common concern: the men’s loss of control over “their” women. Mina addresses this concern with two questions: “1) Why is masculine will power no longer absolute? 2) What does a woman want?”

Before answering these questions, it is necessary to understand that the men’s loss of control or power over women had a impact not only on the relationship between the sexes, but directly affected the core of the men’s masculine identity as a whole. As Gayol explains, since women were considered a man’s property, “any reference to women, and essentially to their sexual conduct affected the men’s honor.” [Las menciones de las mujeres y esencialmente de sus conductas sexuales remitían al honor de los hombres]. Back to the questions, Mina argues that, unable to answer them, the poets, and men in general, blamed the women’s behavior on their ambition, selfishness, and licentiousness. “The majority [of men] affirms to know what women want: luxury, a comfortable life, fun, to get out of poverty, or find a man that can help them get all that” [La mayoría afirma saber lo que quieren las mujeres: lujos, buena vida, diversiones,
Thus, seemingly, it was easier for men to justify women’s “irregular” behavior by attributing it to her desire to have a pleasurable and glamorous life, rather than accepting women’s desire to be independent. As Mina points out, “men do not recognize the women’s right to have their own life, or simply, make decisions independently” [los hombres no reconocen el derecho de las mujeres a hacer su vida o, simplemente, a tomar decisiones de manera independiente]. Unable to conceive the idea of women wanting to be autonomous, men could only think of prostitution or frivolity as the cause.

In tango lyrics, this licentious woman was the milonguita. As explained above, she was the compadrito’s feminine counterpart. According to Archetti:

The milonguita is young, unmarried, from a middle-lower class family and born in a barrio. She is sensual, very sensual, egoistic and self-assured with a self-confidence that emanates from her beauty and elegance. The milonguita escapes from the barrio, from poverty perhaps, and from a future as a housewife, to the center of Buenos Aires, to the life of excitement, luxury, and pleasure that the best cabarets offer to young, ambitious and beautiful women.”

However, despite having very similar traits, the milonguita was described and referred to less favorably than the compadrito, since she left the domestic sphere and was autonomous, and because she might have been a prostitute in a cabaret. Instead of being considered brave or honorable, the milonguita was considered nothing more than a “scarlet woman,” or as Anne Perontin-Dumon says, “a sensual woman who is only interested in material things. Therefore, she is not able to profess positive feelings, but a strange mixture of ambition and power: “that ermine coat...at the end turned out to be more durable than your love; I am still paying for the coat but your love is over” [Aquel tapado de armiño...me resultó al fin y al cabo más durable que tu amor; el tapado lo estoy pagando y tu amor ya se acabó].
Naturally, many tangos show the male’s condemnation of the lifestyle of his woman or a woman he knows. The lyrics usually consist of three parts. First, the narrator or masculine ego talks about how innocent and happy this woman was in the humble but “decent” barrio. Second, he describes how the woman passes through a moral transformation toward ambition and selfishness. Finally, the man describes the decadent end of her licentious life. In some tangos the poet [lyricist] gives the woman in question complete responsibility for her incursion in “la mala vida” [the bad life]:

Son macanas, no fue un guapo haragán ni prepotente,  
Ni un cafíshio de averías el que al vicio te largó...  
Vos rodaste por tu culpa y no fue inocentemente...  
¡Berretines de bacán que tenías en la mente  
desde el día que un magnate cajetilla te afiló!

It’s rubbish, it was not an arrogant layabout  
Nor a ruffian scrounger the one that introduced you to vice...  
You rolled into vice for your own fault and it was not innocently...  
They were caprices of money that you had in mind  
Since the day that rich man seduced you.

“Margot” (1921)  
Lyrics: Celedonio Flores

This tango shows that the woman exerted her agency by taking control of her life (for good or for bad) and by deciding to “go” with certain rich men instead of the humble man of the arrabal. Even though the act of prostitution or the submission to a rich man might have been seen as a purchase, which, technically it was, and a definite act of power over her, in fact, the prostitute, in many cases, had the chance to choose her “luck”. As Donna Guy explains, “prostitution was more typically a self-conscious response to poverty than the result of trickery by an evil procurer.” In other words, many women entered sex work because they wanted to, and not precisely because they were forced to do so. Contrary to the popular belief that most prostitutes were innocent victims of white slavery, who had been fooled and constrained into the sex trade through false promises of marriage or a job, in fact, as Sandra McGee Deutsch asserts, many prostitutes were not novices. At least, when it comes to foreign prostitutes, many had
already worked in the sex industry in Europe or had the intention of doing so after their arrival in Argentina. While most women engaged in prostitution mainly for economic reasons, Deutsch does not discard the possibility that some women did so as a means of sexual experimentation.

Besides exerting agency by deciding to work in the sex trade, women also exerted a sort of empowerment by choosing what they would consider the best men, according to their interests; after all they had a wide variety of men from which to choose. As Archetti points out, tango lyrics thus show how “women can decide for themselves whom to love, and, in such cases, the chosen man is only responsible for himself and not for her decisions and feelings. Thus, this represents a break with traditional perceptions of women.”

Savigliano explains that “women’s identities were born out of the competition among men: Macho men of different colors and classes pulling at women from different directions shaped women’s nameless identities.” In fact, the tango Discourse generated or propitiated countless female identities of which the milonguita, as we mentioned before, was the female prototype. Another important female identity present in the tango lyrics of this time was the good woman corrupted by a bacán [rich man] who eventually ends up in the cabaret. Poets were less strict with this kind of women since they considered them not responsible for the course of their lives. They were described as weak, unable to resist temptation. “The other man is guilty because he takes advantage of her moral fragility, and, consequently, he is punished.” Poets and men were more condescending with this female identity since her apparent lack of will power and dependence on another man, the bacán, went along the line of the acceptable traditional roles. Another reason why men saw this woman less judgmentally is because by transferring the responsibility of her mistakes to an “evil man,” she continues to be “innocent” and her sexual behavior does not signify a direct affront to their masculinity.
This female identity is thus presented as that of a “social marginal person. A woman beyond a person, in the tango she is always a confused object of masculine appetites.” [ser socialmente marginal. Mujer más allá o más acá que persona, en el tango ella es siempre confuso objeto de apetencias masculinas.]

In this topic, Pérontin-Dumon and Savigliano coincide in that the social panorama of the women of the tango was extremely pessimistic. While Pérontin-Dumon asserts that in the tango “any woman that is conscious of her body, sooner or later will become a prostitute even if she does not practice the profession, [in such a way that] the pretty girl of the barrio, in love with another man, will be just like the woman of the cabaret” [toda mujer que tenga conciencia de su cuerpo, tarde o temprano se convertirá en prostituta aunque no practique la profesión, (de forma tal que) la linda moza del barrio, enamorada de otro, será de la misma estirpe que la mujer del cabaret].

Savigliano arrives at a similar conclusion when she says that “tango lyrics most frequently suggest that, once they have left their original maternal household, women could only go from one man to another in an ambitious, endless, and damaging search.”

Just like the previous analysis about the “types of women” in the tango, Archetti presents an alternative male identity to that of the compadrito. Even though this type of man lacks a particular name, here we will call him the “betrayed man.” Archetti describes him as “a middle-aged, single, lower-middle-class or, perhaps, just middle class; that he has grown up in a barrio, and is now living in the centre of Buenos Aires, enjoying leisure time with his friends.” Such a man tries to find the love of his life not to establish a family, but for the “illusion” of company, publicity and even protection. This character is precisely the one who the “bad woman” or the milonguita abandons for the bacán, or with no specific reason. Archetti calls this act of leaving the woman’s “stepping out.”

The “betrayed man,” thus appears almost invariably as a weak
man, a woman’s victim, in most tango lyrics of the time. In many lyrics, he openly expresses his anguish and vulnerability, caused by the woman’s abandonment:

Percanta que me amuraste en lo mejor de mi vida, dejándome el alma herida y espina en el corazón, sabiendo que te quería, que vos eras mi alegría y mi sueño abrasador, para mí ya no hay consuelo y por eso me encurdeño pa’ olvidarme de tu amor.

Woman who abandoned me in the best part of my life, leaving a wound in my soul and a thorn in my heart, knowing that I loved you, that you were my happiness and my scorching dreams, there is no consolation for me and that is why I get drunk to forget your love.51

In other cases, the man in question could only express his bewilderment and disbelief for not being able to understand the woman’s departure:

¡Qué te ha de dar ese otro que tu viejo no te ha dado! ¿No te acordás que he robado pa’ que no falte el bullón? ¿No te acordás cuando en cana te mandaba en cuadernitos aquellos lindos versitos nacidos del corazón?

What will that other man give you that I have not given you?! Don’t you remember that I have stolen so that you did not lack food? Don’t you remember that when I was in jail I used to send you little notebooks with sweet little verses born in the heart?

“Ivette” (1920)
Lyrics: Pascual Contursi

Similarly, Archetti explains that the compadrito, when he falls in love, undergoes a transformation that makes him more sensitive, leaving him in a state of vulnerability equal to that of the betrayed men previously described.52 At any rate, as a consequence of the woman’s disdain, betrayal or abandonment, the man is left in ruins, uncertain and defenseless since he has lost control over the woman, his emotions, and his present life. About this, Donald S. Castro points out that “in the tango lyric love is passive, and the man seems to be the victim of love. This is in marked contrast to the tango as a dance in which the man is aggressive and dominant.”53

In the same train of thought, Castro asserts that “the porteño covers his vulnerability by
adopting an air of petulant, aggressive masculinity…the porteño is most vulnerable in his dealings with women.”

Thus, contrary to the traditional female prototype promoted by or at least expected by society, the woman of the tango presents a “new kind of femininity,” by which she has and exerts agency, consisting mainly of a capacity to inflict suffering on or to victimize the man. Therefore, “while this topic [the abandonment of the man in the tango] does not fit in the classic definition of machismo, it seems to oppositely fit in the castration. For this reason, the tango has been described as the song of masculine defeat.”

Despite the constant vilification of women in tango lyrics, in them appeared a type of woman revered and exalted by the masculine gender: the figure of the mother, an “asexual” being that met the traditional female role as a “sacrificed and hard working woman, whose only purpose in life was to raise her son.” Regarding this, Castro explains that “the image of the sacrificed mother was very dear to porteño men, who mostly came from single mother families.

In many tango lyrics, “women are drawn as a ‘mal necesario’ [a necessary evil]...It is almost as if the male needed protection from the cruel world and this could only come through a painful search for the right woman who would be like the ever sacrificing and protecting mother.” In a similar train of thought, Simon Collier explains that in many tangos, “the protagonist is often a loser, tormented by failure. He never grows up. As an unsuccessful lover---he is constantly being abandoned---he returns to the Mother, often a saintly figure in tango songs. All other women are deceivers: Only the Mother can be relied on.” This view of mothers as the only reliable women is present in several tangos of the time such as “Tres esperanzas” [Three hopes] (1933), “Madre” [Mother] (1922), and “La casita de mis viejos” [My parents’ little house] (1932). Thus, despite the representation of women in the tango as evil, the male still appears to depend on her, making evident his vulnerability and the emergent
In terms of dance, students of the tango have often defined it as an act of sexual domination by the man over the woman. Julie Taylor describes such relationship as “an encounter between the active, powerful, and completely dominant male and the passive, docile, and completely submissive female.”

Undeniably, the man’s leading and directing of the woman’s steps is one of the main characteristics of the tango dance. However, was this dance a hegemonic act as these scholars suggest? The physical communion of the bodies in the tango dance made evident the establishment of an equitable dialogue in which both men and women had a say. In order to understand this assertion it is necessary to take into consideration the fact that 1) the tango did not have an specific choreography, consisting thus of a series of improvisations; 2) the man and the woman performed different steps; and 3) it was danced between strangers most of the time. Parting from these facts, one might ask how was it then possible to dance a tango under such circumstances?

In answer to this question, Lidia Ferrari suggests that in order to do so, men and women had to have established a tacit agreement:

In the first place, there [must have been] a basic agreement, something that [made] them coincide in the dance, when everything leads us to think that the most difficult would be to accomplish that, the coincidence. One of the formulas [was] that someone [had] to lead, someone [had] to direct the dance while the other [had] to follow, adapt and consent to be guided.

“La casita de mis viejos” (1932)  
Lyrics: Enrique Cadicamo

Pobre viejita la encontré  
Enfermita; yo le hablé  
y me miró con unos ojos…  
Con esos ojos  
nublados por el llanto  
como diciéndome porqué tardaste tanto…  
Ya nunca más he de partir  
y a tu lado he de sentir  
el calor de un gran cariño…  
Sólo una madre nos perdona en esta vida,  
es la única verdad,  
es mentira lo demás.

Poor mum,  
I found her ill, I talked to her  
and she looked at me with those eyes…  
Those eyes clouded with tears  
as if saying why did you take so long…  
I will never leave again  
and by your side I will feel  
the warmth of a deep affection…  
Only a mother forgives us in this life,  
that is the only truth,  
the rest is falsehood.
According to Ferrari, the woman’s consent to be guided must not be considered an act of submission, but rather the execution of a specific role in function of a determined goal in common with her partner: the successful performance of the tango. Certainly, in order to dance the tango both man and woman had to be faithful to their roles and although the man led the course of the dance he had to be attentive to the woman’s moves as well:

In order to dance well [the man] [can not] have an attitude of carelessness or lack of awareness of the woman’s place. When dancing, he [is] interested in enjoying with her, and his force and confidence [is] employed to dance well, not to feel superior or to dominate her.

[Para bailar bien no puede tener una actitud de descuido o de desconocimiento del lugar de la mujer. Al bailar está preocupado por disfrutar con ella y su fuerza y su seguridad es para bailar bien, no para sentirse superior o dominarla].

In sum, the tango Discourse fomented the creation and empowerment of certain identities in terms of gender. Tango lyrics portrayed social dislocation and friction between men and women. While in some cases the man appeared in a hegemonic position over women by creating and recreating her in unfavorably terms in the tango lyrics, on the other side, women exerted a sort of agency over men through their capacity to make them suffer by leaving them. This behavior was the main theme of many tangos of the time. These positions certainly did not invite a dialogue between the sexes; however, the dance represented the opposite. The tango, in its danceable modality, required the will and the establishment of a mutual agreement between man and woman, a sort of kinetic dialogue in order to carry forward the fortuitous project that was the tango. In that sense, despite its changes and development in terms of rhythm, or the application of a narrative and lyrics, the tango did not lose its essence, which was to bring men and women
together.
Chapter 3

Social Class Interactions in the Tango Discourse

Defining “the other” entails an act of power and domination, since it imposes an identity upon the subject that is being defined, which may be or may not be accepted by the subject, but remains to be used and adopted by third parties. The construction of “the other” results from the differences instead of the similarities between parties, causing a series of dichotomies in which the “the other” is “everything the one defining is not,” thus transferring to “the other” the negative traits the one defining supposedly does not have. Such was the case of the mutual perception between the upper and lower classes in Buenos Aires at the turn of the century. The resulting dichotomy not only reflected the population’s station in life, but also a geographic reality. While the aristocracy clustered in the city’s northern Recoleta and Palermo neighborhoods, the lower classes remained in the center of the city and the arrabal, overcrowded in conventillos along the shores of the Riachuelo [stream]. This situation emphasized the ideological, economic, and spatial polarization between the lower and the upper classes.

Influenced by the positivist and determinist ideas of the time, the Buenos Aires elite saw such division more as an inherent condition than a difference in terms of capital. Thus, while the north of the city complied with the oligarchy’s ideal of wealth, culture, and morality: “civilization,” the arrabal was considered its natural opposite, the place of poverty, crime, and barbarism. Nonetheless, what seemed as an irreconcilable contraposition eventually found a convergence point in the tango, which fostered the encounter of the lower and the upper classes and facilitated their access into reciprocal spaces of the social spectrum. In addition, the tango Discourse contested existing class paradigms, ultimately contributing to the creation of a national identity.
Even though the *arrabal* might not have been precisely the barbarian place the aristocrats claimed, it certainly was the locus of criminal activity and places of ill repute. Gambling, trafficking, theft, and violent confrontations constituted common practices there. While not everyone engaged in criminal acts, it was difficult to stay at the edge of such environment without getting involved since, in many cases, these places were the main source of entertainment for a predominantly male population. The ambience of clandestinity and lawlessness of these activities and places was reflected and expressed particularly in *lunfardo*.

*Lunfardo* was a peculiar argot that resulted from the linguistic syncretism of the languages spoken by the immigrants and language codes used by the criminal classes to communicate secretly. The spread of *lunfardo* in the *arrabal* contributed to the aristocracy’s association of the lower classes with the criminal world. In the early 1900’s, the term “*lunfardo*” was interchangeably used as a synonym of “thief” or criminal: “Inspector D. Antonio B. Rodríguez, from the Sa. Section captured the *lunfardo* who, in the past days, committed various robberies in this and, mainly, in the Central and Cransac hotels” [*El comisario D. Antonio B. Rodríguez, de la sección Sa., realizó la captura del lunfardo que días pasados cometió varios robos en ésta y principalmente en el hotel Central y el hotel Cransa*].

Occasionally, the term was also used to refer to the criminal activity or environment as a whole: “The police has declared that Luis Pacheco, killed last night in Corrientes Street, had arrived yesterday from Buenos Aires accompanied by other individuals from the *lunfardo* world” [*La policía ha declarado que Luis Pacheco, muerto anoche en la calle Corrientes, había llegado ayer mismo de Buenos Aires en compañía de otros sujetos del mundo lunfardo*]. Eventually, *lunfardo* would become a cultural hallmark of the *arrabal*, present not only in everyday language, but also in popular expressions such as tango lyrics.
Intrinsically related to the *mundo lunfardo* was the brothel, which besides being an entertainment venue, often functioned as a plotting and meeting point for criminals. Although bordellos operated legally, the activities and business that took place among their clients were not always necessarily legal. Brothels constituted the main draw of the *arrabal*. They were highly frequented primarily by low-class men who, given the shortage of women, recurred to prostitutes more out of “necessity” than as a quest for simple pleasure. In addition to the customary sexual services, bordellos attracted clients with the peculiarity and novelty of the tango dance.

The tango was a source of amusement; a distraction from the worries and concerns these men found as newly arrived migrants in unknown geographic, cultural and linguistic circumstances. It provided an occasion, an opportunity to exhibit and reaffirm their masculinity, perhaps the most elemental trait remaining of an identity altered by a cultural shock, struggling to assimilate. Finally, the tango dance constituted a preamble for the sexual act. It established a deeper sense of intimacy between man and woman, turning the exchange into something more than a mere formality, at least for the duration of the dance.

As we saw in the previous chapter, women were scarce at the turn of the century, and therefore considered extremely valuable. They were “a motive of personal satisfaction and prestige.” This situation raised the question of “who had the right to possess them,” unleashing a strong rivalry among men. Certainly, the successful attainment of feminine company and sexual favors constituted an indicator of superiority over other men. During the tango’s early years the struggle over women took place among the marginal men of the *arrabal*, that is, between “equals,” to a certain extent, since they shared a circumstance. The right over women was disputed according to the man’s performance in the tango and the knife duel. These two
elements functioned as a sort of instruments and agents of social empowerment, since those men who managed to excel at them, usually compadritos, gained popularity, admiration, women, and eventually a living.

Nonetheless, by the early 1900’s, things began to change. Despite the bad reputation of the arrabal, many young upper-class men, also known as bacanes (singular: bacán) or cajetillas, most probably enticed by the excitement of transgressing the social class frontier and seeing beyond the moral and spatial limits set by the elite, ventured to visit the city outskirts. It was there where they first entered in contact with the tango and the people this form of popular culture represented. The cajetillas thus became habitués at the suburban brothels and places of ill repute where the tango was played and danced. Soon, the arrabal became their playground, and the tango a favorite diversion. For them, the tango embrace not only provided a mischievous source of fun, but also a series of liberties unavailable in “good society.” In other words, “these wealthy men paid to embrace poor women, being unable to touch the women of their own class without commitment.”

As a place of social confluence, the brothel—the tango stage— was not simply a place for recreation and fun, but a venue where the contrasts and frictions between social classes were most evident. The cajetillas’ transgression into the underclass realm altered the existing power structures, producing an asymmetric hegemonic relation between the men of the arrabal and their opulent visitors. Consequently, the right over women was no longer disputed only among the men of the arrabal, but also between them, as a marginal collective other, and the cajetillas. Hegemony was thus not only contested in terms of courage and skill, but also in terms of economic solvency.

Even though positivist perceptions regarding the concepts of civilization and barbarism
were still present in the clandestinity of the bordello, they remained at the background. Given that “the brothel is sex to a state of (sinister) purity” [El prostíbulo es el sexo al estado de (siniestra) pureza], ℗ hegemonic differences in that establishment were expressed in the more elemental grounds of sex and capital or, in other words, in the man’s capacity to possess a woman.

Although the compadrito continued to have a certain amount of control over his sphere of influence in the arrabal, and especially over his women, it was lessened by the cajetilla’s capacity to offer more, in material terms, to “his” women. To the milonguitas, a commercial or sentimental relationship with these wealthy youngsters meant a viable opportunity of upward mobility, one of the main reasons why they resorted to that profession in the first place. However, upward mobility for these women did not necessarily mean a stable life as housewives with a family and a home of their own. In most cases it meant being taken as a mistress or mantenida. ℘Therefore, in general terms, the bacán was a more desirable partner than the compadrito or a man of the arrabal.

Yet, power approaches to the possession of women between men, rich and poor, varied in motive. While the man of the arrabal attempted to “possess” the woman as a sort of “trophy,” accessory, and even as a means for a living, his motivation to possess her responded also to more sentimental and even metaphysical reasons. According to Ernesto Sábato, the motivation behind the suburban man’s desire to have a woman, even if it was only for the duration of a tango dance, derived from a feeling of “nostalgia for communion and love, the longing for a woman, not just the presence [and use] of an instrument of his lust” [La nostalgia de la comunión y del amor, la añoranza de la mujer, no la presencia de un instrumento de su lujuria]. ℘On the contrary, for the bacán, the possession of a woman constituted just a transaction, the acquisition of an object of
pleasure unavailable in his social class. Similarly, the tango seemed to have become a “product,” a diversion for rich youngsters. Their crude irreverence for the suburban man’s most valuable “possessions,” his women and the tango, the synthetic expression of his identity, constituted an affront. As Donald S. Castro explains, “for the lower classes, the tango expressed the frustration and alienation of urban life, while for the upper classes, it provided a means of escape from moral and social restrictions.”

The cajetillas’ insertion in the tango Discourse constituted a form of new displacement for the men of the arrabal. As a collective other, these men—and their women—were first socially and geographically displaced to the city’s periphery as a poor and undesirable uncivilized other. With the incursion of the young aristocrats in the arrabal and the brothel environment, the suburban population was once again relegated, this time within its own sphere of influence. This situation generated a deep sense of frustration and resentment in the men of the arrabal against the young aristocrats, as reflected in many tango lyrics:

Mientras tanto, que tus triunfos, pobres triunfos pasajeros, sean una larga fila de riquezas y placer; que el bacán que te acamala tenga pesos duraderos, que te abras de las paradas con cafisios milongueros y que digan los muchachos: Es una buena mujer. Y mañana, cuando seas descolado mueble viejo y no tengas esperanzas en tu pobre corazón, si precias una ayuda, si te hace falta un consejo, acordate de este amigo que ha de jugarse el pellejo pa’ ayudarte en lo que pueda cuando llegue la ocasión.

Meanwhile, let your triumphs, worthless and fleeting triumphs, be a long row of riches and pleasure; May the bacán that protects you have a lasting wealth, May you continue to get along with pleasure seeking ruffians, And that the clique says: She is a good woman, And tomorrow, when you are a deteriorated and old piece of furniture Without hope in your poor heart, If you need help, if you need some advise, Remember this old friend that will risk himself To help you in whatever you might need when the time comes.

“Mano a mano” (1923) Lyrics: Celedonio Flores

In these lyrics by poet Celedonio Flores, the narrator, a man of the arrabal, expresses himself with a tone of defeat but also a sense of dignity. He recognizes the financial superiority of his rival, the bacán, and excuses the woman’s decision to follow a life of vice, pleasure and luxuries, things he could not offer her. Yet, he expresses his availability and willingness to help
her whenever she might need it. In the lyrics one can perceive the narrator’s assimilated feeling of relegation.

In other cases, the narrator would take a reproachful approach towards the bacán, seeing his acquisitive power more as a lessening of his masculinity than a source of empowerment:

**Muchacho que porque la suerte quiso vivis en un primer piso de un palaceté central, que pa’ vicios y placeres, para farras y mujeres disponés de un capital. Muchacho que no sabés el encanto de haber derramado llanto sobre un pecho de mujer; y no sabés qué es secarse en una timba y armarse para volverse a meter.**

Young man, that because fortune wanted it that way, you live in the first floor of a central mansion, that for vice and pleasures, for parties and women, you have a capital. Young man, that does not know the charm of having shed tears on a woman’s bosom; and that does not know what it is like to lose everything in a game and having to find more money to play again.

“Muchacho” (1926)
Lyrics: Celedonio Flores

However, while most young aristocrats considered milonguitas acquirable “products” of pleasure and fun, there were exceptions. Occasionally, a bacán would get emotionally and romantically involved with a milonguita. Given the social class difference, such unconventional relationships could only be kept in the clandestinity of the bordello, the bulín (bachelor apartment), and, later on, the cabaret. Unable to sustain this kind of relationship for a long time, due to social prejudice and condemnation, the bacán often ended up leaving his lover, sometimes regretting his decision:

**Cuando tomo dos copas de más, en mi pecho comienza a surgir el recuerdo de aquella fiel mujer que me quiso de verdad, y yo, ingrato, abandoné. De su amor me burlé sin mirar que pudiera sentirlo después, sin saber que los años al correr iban, crueles, a amargar a este rey del cabaret.**

Whenever I get drunk, from my chest emerges the memory of that faithful woman that really loved me, and whom I, ungratefully, abandoned. I disregarded her love, not considering that I could regret it later, without knowing that the passing of time would cruelly embitter this king of the cabaret.

“Patotero sentimental” (1922)
Lyrics: Manuel Romero

Although less common, there were also cases in which the percanta (woman or lover)
abandoned the *bacán*, leaving him heartbroken and disconcerted:

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En la puerta de un boliche
un bacán encurdelado
recordando su pasado
que la china lo dejó,
entre los humos de caña
retornan a su memoria
esas páginas de historia
que su corazón grabó.

…..
Recordando sus amores
el pobre bacán lloró.
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At the door of a night club
A drunk *bacán*,
Remembers that in his past
A woman left him;
In the cigar smoke
Return to his memory.
Those pages of history
That his heart recorded

…..
Remembering his love
the poor *bacán* wept.

“Ivette” (1914)
Lyrics: Pascual Contursi

Contrary to the passion and fondness the young aristocrats felt for the brothel dance [*baile prostibulario*], most middle and upper-class porteños rejected and condemned it. For them, the tango’s marginal origins and licentiousness constituted a pervasive moral threat and a constant reminder of the barbarism they had tried so hard to leave behind. Some also saw the tango’s increasingly democratic atmosphere among its diverse social actors as a latent menace to their status quo. Unlike the growing rigorous nationalism of the upper class, the tango Discourse promoted “cultural values...with more bohemia than ambition, more liberty than rigor, more romanticism and generosity than rivalry and spite.” [*Valores culturales...con más bohemia que ambición, más libertad que rigor, más romanticismo y desprendimiento que competencia y encono.*] In sum, the tango Discourse promoted and facilitated a society where power resided in people’s solidarity to each other, not on financial capital or social position, an ideal quite similar to the one proposed by a rising communist movement.

The elite’s condemnation of the lower classes and the tango was reflected in numerous literary, journalistic, and scientific texts and articles of the time, from which stands out José Ramos Mejía’s *Las multitudes argentinas* (1912), a sort of scientific typology of Argentina’s population. In *Las multitudes*, Ramos Mejía describes the “imperfectly modified immigrant
or *guarango* (savage; uncivilized),” referring to the unassimilated immigrant, the primary inhabitant of the *arrabal*, as an “invertebrate of art, similar to the sexual inverters who reveal their dubious potency for an irascible manifestation of their appetites...One who needs garish colors and shrill music...bizarre combinations...to satisfy the especial idiosyncrasies of his sensibility. That in music has the atavisms of the barrel organ his parents played in misery.” [Un invertebrado del arte [que] se parece a los invertidos del instinto sexual que revelan su potencia dudosa por una manifestación atrabiliaria de los apetitos...[Que] necesita de ese color vivísimo, de esa música chillona...combinaciones bizarras...para satisfacer especiales idiosincrasias de su sensibilidad. [Que] en la música tiene los atavismos del organillo que manejaron sus padres en la miseria].

Ramos Mejía, portrays, with annoyance and dismay, the upper-and middle-class perception about the inhabitants of the port area, evidently referring to the hectic scenes of La Boca neighborhood, characteristic for its large and diverse foreign population, its colorful façades, and the ever-present tango. Ramos Mejía compares the suburban man’s taste to that of a homosexual, directly attacking his masculinity, an essential element of his identity. Ramos Mejía also criticizes the suburbanite’s liking for certain colors and music, describing it as a liking for “bizarre combinations,” as if it constituted an elemental fondness for things of mediocre taste. Interestingly though, following a positivist train of thought, Ramos Mejía points out that these “bizarre tastes” are necessary to satisfy the suburban man’s “special idiosyncrasies of his sensibility.” This implies that the liking for these things was intrinsically related to the suburban man’s identity. Albeit not biologically inherent, as Ramos Mejía and his positivist colleagues might have argued, the man of the *arrabal’s* fondness for these “garish colors and shrill music,” certainly constituted an essential part of his sociocultural context and developmental identity.
within the tango Discourse and at a general social level.

Despite the elite’s scorn for the tango and everything related to it, the cajetillas, young members of their own class, had already become an important element of this popular expression. Just like different musical instruments joined the tango ensemble, ultimately forming the typical tango orchestra [orquesta típica de tango], the cajetillas joined the tango Discourse providing it with a sort of social “completeness,” as they represented the “hegemonic other.” Recognized and popular young socialites like engineer, sportsman, and aviator Jorge Newberry were regular tango enthusiasts. While their association with the tango ascribed a certain degree of fame or publicity to the dance at a local level, other young aristocrats promoted the tango internationally, whether deliberately or not.

As privileged members of their class, young aristocrats had the possibility of traveling, thus taking the tango wherever they went.\(^{17}\) Along with “Argentine beef-barons and some adventurous tango musicians and dancers,”\(^{18}\) traveling young aristocrats introduced the tango to the Parisian upper-class circles.\(^{19}\) Even though the tango had been present in Europe approximately since 1907, it was first performed in Paris in 1910, ultimately reaching its peak in 1912. The novelty and audacity of the tango dance caused furor and almost immediate general acceptance in the French capital. In Jorge Sareli’s words, “the reception was great and the conquest in Paris was absolute, becoming more than a fashion a style that totally transformed the everyday customs of Parisian high society.” \([La recepción fue creciente y la conquista en París fue absoluta, llegando a ser más que una moda un estilo que transformó, totalmente, las costumbres y la vida cotidiana de la alta sociedad parisina.]\(^{20}\) Certainly, the tango reached unprecedented levels of popularity, giving origin to events like the champagne tango, where Parisian aristocrats gathered to drink champagne while watching tango dancers perform; some
aristocrats even ventured to dance the tango themselves.

The Parisian “tango-mania” rapidly extended to other European capitals, where attracted devotees. In London, aristocrats attended the “tea tango,” an event similar to the champagne tango, usually held in theatres. Some also hosted parties with tango performances. The tango craze impacted fashion as well. A line of products with the tango as its central theme hit the European market, originating a special series of garments “necessary” to execute the adventurous dance. Thus, the upper class woman could choose from an array of flexible “tango corsets,” “tango slippers,” and tango cocktail dresses, most of them available in the expected tango color, “in the red-orange spectrum, a color akin to sensual ignition.”

Meanwhile, at the other side of the ocean, the porteño aristocracy received the news about the tango craze in Paris with a mixture of surprise and shock. For them, the French capital represented the paradigm of elegance and good taste, and the mere idea of respectable people dancing tango in the luxurious dance halls of Parisian high society was inconceivable. Since the second part of the 19th century, the Buenos Aires elite had looked up to Paris as a model of refinement and modernity. Their admiration for the French capital was reflected in their adoption of French fashion and customs; however, it was particularly evident, in the first decade of the 20th century, in the many French architectural style buildings and mansions built throughout Buenos Aires, especially in the aristocratic neighborhoods of Palermo and Recoleta, and in public open spaces like Palermo Park or Avenida de Mayo, the porteño version of the “Champs d’Elysées” in Paris. Hence, the embracing of what they considered a vulgar, licentious, and barbarian dance like the tango, by a distinguished society like the French, could not but cause perplexity in the porteño upper class, as shown in a 1911 article published in La Razón:

“An unexpected propaganda has appeared parallel to our official action. Who would have thought that our creole airs were going to contribute spontaneously to the popularization of the Argentine name in Paris? We knew, in fact, that the tango prevailed with furor in the aristocratic halls of the world
capital, but we would have never predicted that, some day, the exile of our dances would be such that an entrepreneur from the great boulevards would think about disseminating them among the paying public.”

[Una propaganda imprevista ha surgido, paralela a nuestra acción oficial. ¿Quién hubiera imaginado que nuestros aires criollos iban a contribuir espontáneamente a la popularización del nombre argentino en París? Sabíamos, en efecto, que el tango imperaba con furor en aristocráticos salones de la capital mundial, pero nunca hubiéramos pronosticado que, algún día, el exilio de nuestras danzas fuera tal que un empresario de los grandes bulevares pensara en difundirlas entre el público pagante ---y pagano.]

The absolute acceptance of the tango in Paris led the Buenos Aires aristocracy to reconsider it since, if Paris embraced it, it must be good after all. As Mónica Ogando explains, “the triumph of the tango in Paris signified its progressive social acceptance in the upper class.”

[El triunfo del tango en París significó la progresiva aceptación social de la clase alta.] However, the tango’s passage through the Parisian halls altered it, becoming less improvised and with simpler and less erotic figures, so that it could be learned and managed by the Parisian aristocrats. This was the tango that returned to Buenos Aires as a “purified dance.”

According to tango historian José Gobello, the Baron Antonio María de Marchi, son-in-law of general Julio Argentino Roca, officially introduced the tango to the aristocratic halls of Buenos Aires in 1912 in the Palais de Glace, then in the Palace Théâtre in 1913, where it was finally accepted. Nevertheless, other sources, like Hugo Lamas and Enrique Binda’s *El tango en la sociedad argentina 1880-1920*, argue that by that time, the tango was already a standard practice among young aristocrats. Although this might have been true for the youngest generations, it was not necessarily the case for the adult sector, which had yet to understand and come to terms with the long despised dance.

Even though all social classes in Buenos Aires eventually accepted the tango, it did not happen at once. The acceptance of the tango was, certainly, a gradual process that took close to a decade. As Donald S. Castro points out, “only after World War I did the middle classes begin to participate in, and therefore change the tango; not until the late 1920’s did all Argentine social
classes accept the tango.” Besides the changes made to the “imported” tango in Paris, the dance was also changed in the porteño capital. Before reaching the aristocratic dance halls, the tango underwent a choreographic change often referred to as “alisamiento,” or smoothing, which consisted of an omission of the erotic elements and figures in order to make it socially acceptable beyond the arrabal. This change began to take place during the tango’s earlier socio-geographic transition from the arrabal to the conventillos at the turn of the century. The family-oriented environment of the conventillo required a less explicit dance, thus producing a simpler tango choreography without “cortes and quebradas.” Therefore, during some time two types or modalities of tango were danced simultaneously: the tango arrabalero and the tango liso, which would eventually evolve and be known as tango salón, that is, dance hall tango, a social and generally accepted form of tango.

The assimilation of the tango salón by middle and upper classes in Buenos Aires was facilitated by the proliferation of the cabaret, another French import from the early 1900’s that would prevail until the mid 1950’s. During this period, as Archetti points out, “the tango became the music of the cabaret.” Buenos Aires society considered the cabaret a sign of refinement, an emulation of Parisian lifestyle. Unlike the European cabarets, those in Buenos Aires were limited to tango and jazz performances and an occasional musical show. They “lacked the experimental, revolutionary, and artistic forms of the theatre, the arts, and the protest song that characterized the famous European cabarets.” Yet, as a place of entertainment open to both men and women, the cabaret constituted a sort of transitional venue for the assimilation of the tango. It was a precursor to the elegant aristocratic dance halls [salones] of Buenos Aires, a social middle ground that constituted a point of convergence in terms of social class.

Just like in its time the suburban brothel brought together individuals from the lower and
upper classes, so did the cabaret. However, this new encounter differed in two main aspects: first, in that instead of taking place in the clandestinity of the arrabal, it took place in the openness of the city center, in the cabaret, a traditionally middle-and upper-class venue of entertainment. Second was the fact that, since the cabaret welcomed men and women, the tango was no longer an exclusive “knowledge” or entertainment for middle-and upper-class men, but also for women. On this, Archetti explains: “the cabaret became both a real and imagined arena for ‘time out,’ and for many women, for ‘stepping out.’ Women could escape from the order of home, from the routine and drudgery of family duties, and thereby be tempted by the excitements of the cabaret and nightlife in the center of Buenos Aires. [However], although the cabaret represented the possibility of ‘stepping out,’ only a minority of women moved into this space.”

Thus, the cabaret first exposed these women to the tango.

The tango’s triumphal entry into the aristocratic dance halls of Buenos Aires meant the unprecedented eventual access of lower-class individuals, initially as performers, into this exclusive venue. The entrance of the suburbanite, and specifically the compadrito, in the cabaret, and later the salón, was possible due to his exceptional dance abilities. The compadrito mastered both the tango arrabalero and tango salón, inspiring admiration in anyone who watched him dance. However, in order to access the aristocratic sphere the compadrito had to comply with the demands of the new tango salón since, as Ogando points out, “the adoption of the tango salón style...represents in a way a form of social upward mobility; and actually that is what the compadrito has always wanted.” [“La adopción del estilo salón...representa de alguna manera una forma de ascenso social; y de hecho es lo que el compadrito siempre ha querido.”]

Nonetheless, just like the tango underwent a “refinement” process in order to be accepted by the upper class, so did the compadrito. For him, such process required a change of
appearance, dance style, and behavior. Soon, the elegant smoking substituted for the compadrito’s French style trousers, the crossed jacket, and his characteristic kerchief, hat, and knife, which denoted his suburban origin. In a similar way he altered his impudent and audacious way of dancing the tango, a style that had granted him admiration and fame in the arrabal, for a milder dance style more suitable to the aristocratic dance halls. Even though the renunciation of some of his signature dance steps might have really constituted a loss in terms of style and identity since those dance steps had helped him gain recognition and respect in the arrabal, Ogando explains that the compadrito was “willing to sacrifice his choreographic style in order to achieve a higher social status.” [“Estaba dispuesto a sacrificar su estilo coreográfico en vistas de un estatus social más elevado.”]35 Naturally, these changes in the compadrito’s identity were accompanied by a change of attitude or behavior. Eager to fit in the refined environment of the cabaret and the salón, the compadrito adopted an arrogant attitude. He also denied his humble background.

Similarly, the compadrito’s female counterpart, the milonguera, underwent a series of changes as she entered the cabaret. Naturally, the milonguera experienced a change of apparel and attitude as required by the elegance of the circumstances. Also, just as the compadrito, the milonguera changed her dance style, making it less explicit. Nonetheless, the most significant alteration in the milonguera was the fact that, given the popularity of French prostitutes among porteño men, many milongueras pretended to be French or, at least procured to speak French in order to attract wealthy clients who offered the possibility of a better life, at least economically speaking. Although the milonguera entered these venues as a tango performer, like the compadrito, she would sometimes sit in the audience accompanying a wealthy man or bacán. This was more common in the cabaret. Thus, for both the compadrito and the milonguera the
cabaret constituted an opportunity of upward mobility.

Even though the suburbanites’ apparent renunciation of important elements of the tango Discourse such as location, dance style, apparel, and attitude might seem as a sort of dissolution or “colonization” of the Discourse by the upper classes, that was not the case. The tango did not lose its essence as it entered the cabaret or the aristocratic dance halls of Buenos Aires, nor was a French tango the one that entered these exclusive places. The acceptance of the tango by the porteño aristocracy was due in great part to its previous acceptance in Paris. However, the tango performed in Paris was not precisely the tango that entered the aristocratic dance halls of the porteño capital. In other words, what entered the cabarets and aristocratic dance halls of Buenos Aires was the idealized concept of a tango refined in Paris; however, what was actually danced was the tango liso, the one that emerged from the tango’s transition from the arrabal to the conventillo.

As mentioned above, both the tango performed in Paris (and Europe) and the tango liso complied with certain moral demands that required the omission of erotic and explicit elements, the first in order to place it at the height of a distinguished society, the latter in order to make it suitable for a family environment. The idea of a tango refined in Paris contributed to the dissipation of long-held prejudices against the tango in the porteño upper classes, facilitating the entry of the tango liso into aristocratic entertainment venues. The fusion of the idea of a tango improved or “purified” in Paris with the smooth choreography of the tango danced in the conventillos eventually evolved into the tango salón.

In a way the tango salón satisfied the upper and lower classes, since both identified with it in different ways. For members of the upper class, the tango salón allowed them to be up-to-date with Parisian vogue, now also in terms of entertainment, without compromising their
reputation. For the lower class, it constituted a possibility of access to the aristocratic sphere, something until then unimaginable. Thus, the expansion of the tango beyond the frontier of the arrabal and its eventual acceptance in the aristocratic sphere enriched the tango Discourse. The entry of the tango salón in the cabaret and the dance hall functioned as a communicational vehicle that facilitated an unprecedented mutual access of both the lower and upper classes into reciprocal spaces of the social spectrum.

Despite the fact that a large sector of the porteño aristocracy fully embraced the tango, some members of this class remained reluctant and even opposed to accept it. While they recognized the undeniable fondness of the French (their role model) for the tango, ascribing it a more innocent connotation when performed in the Parisian capital, they refused to forget the obscure origins of the dance.

Opponents of the tango also continued to consider the tango a sign of moral decay, an activity intrinsically associated with crime and disordered behavior. And they even called for the regulation of such “pervasive” activity:

In the correspondent section appears the article with all its details. A certain audience of a certain cinema furiously insisted that the pianist play a specific tango. Since he did not do it, he
was stabbed after the performance. Between the tango and crime begins to exist a cause and effect relationship, that every time becomes more visible. Neither the cabaret lives without tango, nor the tango without causing reiterated acts of bloodshed...

Last night’s incident, has the meaning of a morbid situation of collective spirit, and makes us think that the popular saying according to which music domesticates the beasts is not completely exact. The tango, on the contrary, seems to excite them. It would thus produce the effects of those wild dances of our Tobas and Matacos performed before joining a surprise attack or a fight.

For similar reasons the candombe was prohibited. Maybe the moment has come to think about regulating the tango. It will be a pity, but perhaps it is a necessity.

This article also reflects the prevailing positivist perception of the tango as an uncivilized and even wild dance, like the kind of dances performed by “Tobas and Matacos,” native tribes from the north of the country.

However, despite the disapproval of certain members of Buenos Aires society, the tango continued advancing and winning the eventual acceptance of all the social sectors. Besides the cabaret, theatres greatly helped to the popularization of the tango. Plays and shows began to include tango performances in their presentations, some of which directly targeted a family audience (Figure 1.) The spread of radio in Argentina in the 1920’s would also contribute to the diffusion of the tango, bringing it to the private sphere of the home. Also, as Mónica Ogando explains, “the progressive disappearance of the compadrito and the brothels eliminated the social prejudice and stimulated the interest in the tango to a new social sector.” [“La desaparición progresiva del compadrito y de los prostíbulos fue eliminando el prejuicio social y estimuló el
The acceptance of the tango in all levels of the Buenos Aires social spectrum also obeyed the fact that the tango, as a form of popular culture and social Discourse, provided elements that contributed to the creation of a national identity. The development of such identity constituted an issue of interest for all classes since it not only sought to respond to an intrinsic need and desire for self-definition and belonging, but also because it served more practical purposes. On the one side, the adoption of a national identity, especially in the case of the lower classes, would provide them with a social platform from which to adapt and develop in the new geographic and social context of a growing industrial Buenos Aires. It would also integrate the immigrants into a concrete cultural identity. On the other side, having a national identity would make the country identifiable and distinctive in the international arena, complying with the ruling elite’s purpose of playing a role in the world scene.

Certainly Argentina was already well known internationally as a prosperous agro-exporter country, which gave it the name of the “granary of the world.” However, it lacked a specific trait that would make it recognizable to the world. The tango covered this necessity. As Carlos Mina points out, the tango functioned (and continues to function) as a representative of the Argentine nation since “it has been in charge of taking the Argentine image around the world.” [“Ha sido la encargada de llevar nuestra imagen por el mundo.”] Even if the tango represented mostly the national capital’s population, not so much the rest of the country, internationally, the tango was perceived as a cultural expression and trait.
Para que las familias puedan ver el tan popularizado Tango

“LA COPA del OLVIDO”

La empresa del EMPIRE THEATRE avisa de que Mañana Jueves estrenará a las 18.30 y 21.30 La pieza teatral en un acto y dos cuadros breves

“LA COPA del OLVIDO”

Original de ENRIQUE DELFINO, tomando parte en su selecto elenco de artistas nacionales. En esta obra servirá expresamente para la Empresa de este teatro, el autor del aplaudido y popular tango Sr. DELFINO. Dirigirá la ejecución de esta pieza musical que será cantada por su creador musical Sr. JOSE CICARELLI. La mise en scène a cargo de Don CARLOS M. PACHECO.

Estrenos notables de esta semana:

“So that families can see the popularized tango.”

“The Glass of Oblivion”

La Razón, 1922
The tango was consolidated as a generally accepted dance in the 1930’s, reaching its highest point of popularity in the 1940’s, a period known as the “Golden Age of Tango.” By this time the tango was performed and danced in the public and private sphere. It was danced in aristocratic and popular clubs and events, as well as in the privacy of the home. Numerous tango orchestras were created and people would go out to listen and dance to their music. Nonetheless, despite the success reached during the 1940’s, by the mid 1950’s the popularity of the tango began to decline. Between the 1930’s and the 1940’s Buenos Aires demography was transformed once again by a mass migration from the interior that soon conformed the new working class. Since the tango had already been assimilated into Argentine mainstream culture, and those who had supported it for all these years where now part of the middle and upper classes, the tango was no longer seen as a cultural expression for the working classes. Instead, the lower class began to identify with folk music, which eventually displaced the tango, becoming the new “voice of the people.”
Conclusion

Throughout this research I have analyzed how a subjective expression like music can impact in such a way that it ends up producing a concrete reality for an individual, a community and even a nation, as was the case of the tango in Argentina. The sudden convergence of marginal social actors from diverse cultural backgrounds in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, at the end of the 19th century, resulted in the creation of an unprecedented popular culture expression: the tango. From being a simple form of entertainment, the tango evolved to become a manifestation of the collective ideology and idiosyncrasy of the people of the arrabal and, later, the people of the porteño capital as well. As a triad conformed of music, lyrics, and dance, the tango constituted a Discourse, a way of being that entailed an environment, a milieu that propitiated the existence of the people that identified with it. Simultaneously, these social actors generated the Discourse by nourishing it with their everyday experiences, ideas, and newly acquired knowledge. For this reason, the tango functioned as platform for identity development that allowed individuals to construct an identity of their own as a collectivity, while also empowering specific individuals responding to the categories of race, gender, and class.

The suburban brothel was the unconventional and initial point of encounter of the tango Discourse. Nationals and foreigners, men and women, poor and rich, converged there, establishing a series of dialogues and negotiations regarding agency and identity. With so little in common, the tango became the ideal and most effective communicational instrument and vehicle of these social actors that allowed them to move within the social spectrum.

In terms of the interaction of suburban individuals, such “dialogues” primarily pertained the issues of race and ethnicity in a predominantly male population. In the midst of an unknown territory, where some individuals even faced an unknown language, the Afro-Argentine, the
compadrito, and the immigrant, the three main and prototypic social actors of the arrabal, found in the tango dance the best way to develop and maintain an identity of their own. This took place in an environment where the construction of identity entailed the defense and consolidation of their masculinity and a reputation, the most basic form of identity. Through the dance these individuals had the opportunity to excel at something valued by their social surroundings that would eventually grant them recognition and even admiration. For them, this reputation, a constructed identity based on masculinity, signified possibility and the means to have a woman and gain the respect of the other men of the arrabal. Eventually, these individuals found in the tango Discourse a sense of belonging and rootedness.

In terms of gender, the tango Discourse acted as a catalytic element of agency and contestation that propitiated the establishment of a dialogue between the sexes in terms of equity. Just as the tango allowed men to exert their agency in terms of personality, skill, and masculinity, it also empowered women. Even though a suburban woman’s ability to dance the tango empowered her over other women who did not dance it, her dance skills were considered mostly an additional asset since, due to the limited number of women, they were already considered valuable, scarce commodities by men. However, what actually gave a certain amount of agency to the women of the arrabal, within the tango Discourse context, in relation to their male counterparts, was the emergence and popularization of the tango canción. Since tango lyrics evidently portrayed women as selfish, ungrateful and materialistic individuals, the tango canción could have been seen as an instrument of masculine empowerment used to submit women; however, that was not the case. In fact, tango lyrics granted women a sort of power and agency by portraying them as strong, able and willing to exert their will by deciding to be with a man or, on the contrary, leave him. The image of women presented in tango lyrics reflected the
increasing change in traditional gender roles as a consequence of the influence of feminist ideas as well as women’s gradual incursion in the labor force. In its dance form, however, the tango propitiated the establishment of a dialogue between men and women in terms of equality. Contrary to the conception of the tango choreography as an enacting of sexual domination by the man over the woman, the tango dance demanded the equal participation of man and woman. Even if the man directed or guided the woman’s movements, the dance could not take place without the woman’s willing participation. Thus, in order to happen, man and woman had to follow their roles and commit to “work” together, which constituted a proportional kinetic dialogue where both had an equally important “say” or role.

Finally, in terms of class, the tango, as a Discursive instrument, functioned as a communicational vehicle that facilitated the transmission of ideas beyond social class boundaries. It also propitiated the mutual access of certain individuals into proportional spaces of the social spectrum while contesting class paradigms. The incursion of the cajetillas, young aristocrats, into the suburban brothels of the arrabal constituted a transgression into the suburbanite’s sphere of influence. In the arrabal, power was defined in part as a man’s capacity to possess a woman. The cajetillas’ insertion in the tango Discourse altered the suburban power structures producing a hegemonic asymmetry. While before their arrival the right over women was disputed among “equals,” that is, suburban men, members of a same collectivity, now these men had to compete for the scarcely available women with the young aristocrats as well. Thus power was no longer disputed only in terms of skill and courage, but also in terms of money. This situation produced a sense of double displacement in the men of the arrabal. Despite the suburban man’s resentment and upper class scorn for the tango, the cajetillas had already inserted themselves in the tango Discourse. It was precisely them who, along some tango
musicians and dancers, took the tango to Europe, and specifically Paris, where it became extremely popular. The acceptance of the tango in the French capital led the porteño aristocracy to reconsider the dance, which until then was considered a sign of moral decay, criminality, and even barbarism. Since the tango danced in Paris had undergone a series of alterations that omitted the dance’s original erotic elements, Buenos Aires aristocrats finally accepted it, allowing it to be danced in the cabarets and exclusive dance halls of the capital.

The entry of the tango into the aristocratic dance halls of Buenos Aires allowed the access of lower-class individuals into an upper-class space, signifying in a way, a possibility of upward mobility. Even though the incursion of the compadrito and the milonguita in the exclusive dance halls required them to change elements of their identity like their apparel and behavior, this was not entirely considered as a break with the tango Discourse. Since the tango of the arrabal had also experienced a series of changes that, like in the tango danced in Paris, required a less explicit choreography, this was the tango the suburbanites danced in the aristocratic dance halls, which eventually became known as tango salón. The progressive incorporation of tango performances in theatres, radio programs, and social gatherings greatly contributed to the eventual general diffusion and acceptance of the tango in Buenos Aires society.

The adoption of the tango in all levels of Buenos Aires society provided elements that contributed to the creation of a sense of national identity. Just like its musical antecedent the candombe, the tango inspired a sense of unity among those who danced it. The tango also became a cultural trait characteristic of Argentina recognizable in the international arena. The apogee of the tango lasted until the mid 1950’s. By then, many of the individuals that had been protagonists of the tango Discourse formed part of the middle class, and the tango was no longer
seen as a lower-class expression. For this reason the advent of the folk song in the late 1950’s became the new “voice of the people.”

Unlike similar studies on the topic of the tango and identity construction, which generally focus on the concept of identity as a whole or a metaphor of the country, this research offered a more comprehensive picture of the influence of the tango in the construction of identities within the social spectrum by focusing on different specific groups in terms of race, sex/gender and class.

Even though this thesis project explored in detail the ways in which the tango Discourse propitiated and facilitated the development of social identities in terms of race, gender, and class, further research is still needed. Additional work must be done regarding the individual’s personal perception of identity. Scholars must also investigate whether people from the country’s interior felt represented in any way by the tango Discourse during the time it prevailed in the capital prior to the advent of folk music.

The aim of this study was to provide a pluridimensional approach to the study of the tango as a form of popular culture and instrument of identity construction that may contribute to the understanding of the impact of similar cultural expressions in contemporary and future community and individual identity development, in order to promote not only the acceptance of social differences but also to the construction of such differences.
Notes

Introduction
2 The Obelisco or Obelisk is a national monument iconic of Buenos Aires, the capital city.
3 *Caminito* or literally “little pathway” in Spanish refers to a street located at La Boca neighborhood in Buenos Aires. *Caminito* is internationally known for its tango atmosphere and for giving its name to the famous tango “Caminito” (1926), with music by Juan de Dios Filiberto and lyrics by Gabino Coria Peñaloza.
5 Adjective used to indicate that something or someone is related to the port city of Buenos Aires.
9 City outskirts.
14 “Territorial expanse is the malady that affects the Argentine Republic: the desert surrounds it everywhere and manifests in its bowels; solitude and the lack of human presence are, generally, the unquestionable limits between provinces.” Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo o Civilización y Barbarie* (Santiago: 1845), accessed on May 13, 2012 <http://bibliotecadigital.educ.ar/articles/read/facundo>, 21.
15 Alberdi, XV.
17 Move upward economically.
18 Sarmiento, 24.
19 Censo de la Ciudad de Buenos Ayres.
22 Rock, 142.
24 Mina, 14.

1. A Song of Encounter: Race and Ethnicity in the Tango
3 Ibid., 30.
La Cuerda-Trío, “El candombe: Candombe, el abuelo del tango.”

6 Vicente Rossi, *Cosas de negros; los orígenes [sic] del tango y otros aportes al folklore rioplatense* (Córdoba: Imprenta Argentina, 1926), 52-55.

La Cuerda-Trío.

Vicente Rossi, *Cosas de negros; los orígenes [sic] del tango y otros aportes al folklore rioplatense* (Córdoba: Imprenta Argentina, 1926), 52-55.

La Cuerda-Trío.

Rossi, 55.

Ibid., 57.


Rossi, 56.

Candombe dance troupe.


Ibid., 220.

Andrews, 160.

“An earlier law decreed by the Provincias Unidas del Río de la Plata (The United Provinces of Río de la Plata) freed the children of women slaves born within the territory.


20 La Cuerda-Trío.

Ibid.

21 Gobello, 15.

Ibid., 14.


23 Gobello, 13.


28 Ibid., 264.


30 Mascia, 262.


32 Gobello, 13.

33 Mascia, 269.

34 Gobello, 15.

35 Mascia, 269.

36 Gobello, 16.

79
41 Ibid.
43 Rock, 142.
46 Rock, 141.
50 Mascia, 261.
51 Ibid., 269.
53 Bergero, 5.
54 Ibid., 90.
57 Sábato, 11.
58 Sábato, 5-6.

2. Tango: A Dance of Gender
4 Ibid., 47.
6 Archetti, 137.
7 Mascia, 262.
10 Ibid.
11 Mascia, 269.
Ángel Villoldo, “El porteñito,” 1903

14 The terms milonguera and milonguita will be used interchangeably.

15 Guy, 142.


17 Ángel Villoldo, “Cuerpo de alambre,” 1910. Todo Tango

18 Savigliano, 61.

19 Even though there were plenty of tangos with lyrics after Carlos Gardel’s death in 1935, many tango historians and experts point to this year as the end of the tango canción stage since a lethargic period in terms of tango production followed Gardel’s death. This state of stagnation or minimal tango production lasted until the 1940’s when the tango experienced a revival known as the Golden Age of Tango. For more information about tango production rates and the evolution of the tango see Jorge Adamoli, “Quiénes y cuándo le dieron vida al tango,” Doce ventanas al tango, ed. Jorge Adámoli (Buenos Aires: Fundación El Libro, 2001), 17-36.

20 Néstor Pinsón, “Mi noche triste,’ el tango canción.” Todo Tango


22 Simon Collier; Ken Hass; et al., ¡Tango! (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 140.

23 Archetti, 137.

24 Savigliano, 62.

25 Mina, 117.


27 Ibid.


30 Archetti, 133.

31 Ibid.

32 Mina, 120.

33 Gayol, 189.

34 Mina, 121.

35 Ibid.

36 Archetti, 147.


38 Lyrics by Celedonio Flores, music by José Ricardo and Carlos Gardel, “Margot,” 1921, Todo Tango

39 Guy, 7.
3. Social Class Interactions in the Tango Discourse

2 “La muerte de Pacheco,” La Nación, November 18, 1906, 7. NewsBank: World Newspaper Archive (SQN: 1275E0330F1A8F0D)
5 Ibid.
9 Sábato, 14.
18 Savigliano, 109.
19 Savigliano, ibid., points out that sailors and white-slave traffickers also contributed to the spread of tango in Marseilles, another “port of entry for the tango” in France besides Paris. Ibid.
20 Sareli, ibid.
21 Savigliano, 125.
25 Savigliano, 122.
28 Castro, 7.
29 Ogando, 184.
30 Archetti, 138.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 139.
34 Ogando, 190.
38 Ibid., 187.
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http://www.todotango.com/musica/tema/584/Cuerpo-de-alambre/

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Vita

Lorena Tabares was born in El Paso, Texas. After completing her work at Americas High School, El Paso, Texas, in 2005, she entered The University of Texas at El Paso. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Latin American and Border Studies (LABS) with a specialization in Political Science from the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso in 2009. In August 2010 she entered the Graduate School of the University of Texas at El Paso. Since then Ms. Tabares has conducted interdisciplinary research. Her areas of academic interest include social divisions and power relations, social and political geography, structural violence, linguistic anthropology, history, political philosophy, and theology. She has conducted research in Mexico and South America. Her research has been presented at the 32nd Annual Institute of Latin American Studies Student Association (ILASSA) Conference in Austin; the 53rd Western Social Science Association Annual Conference in Salt Lake City; The University of Texas at El Paso Women’s History Month Conference, and the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies Student Research Symposium.

Permanent address: 2305 Tierra Chica Way
El Paso, Texas, 79938

This thesis was typed by Lorena Elizabeth Tabares.