EL TANGO EXTRANJERO

THE INTERNATIONAL ROLE IN CREATING A NATIONAL SYMBOL

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\(^1\) *El Tango Extranjero* means “The Foreign Tango” in Spanish
For Zulita,

Who was tickled pink and laughed

When I played a tango-canción on the piano when I was seven;

And for the lady

Who can still play a mean tango herself.
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**Glossary of Terms**

*Author’s Note:* In order to remain true to the subject matter, I have chosen to use many of the following terms in my text, without using an English equivalent. This Glossary includes terms that I use frequently or that need contextual explanations. There may be other foreign terms used in this work, but their translation can be found in a footnote. Furthermore, when quoting a non-English source, I have chosen to leave it in its original language to maintain authenticity. A footnote with a translation will be provided in such instances. All translations are made by the author unless noted otherwise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>argentinidad</strong></td>
<td>“Argentine-ness”; this refers to the intangible idea of belonging to the Argentine culture</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>arrabal</strong></td>
<td>City quarter, usually a poor quarter (slum) on the outskirts of a city; this refers to the city districts of Buenos Aires, especially before the 1940’s, that were not located immediately in the posh, downtown areas of the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bandoneón</strong></td>
<td>The bandoneón is a German squeeze-box instrument, related to the accordion, which has become essential to the sound of tango music. It is often considered to be one of the hardest instruments to learn, and is primarily used today only in tango music</td>
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barrio Can refer to neighborhoods, city districts, suburbs, or shantytowns, depending on context

Casa Rosada “Pink House,” refers to the Presidential Palace in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It is Argentina’s equivalent of the American White House.

criollo “Creole,” refers to natives born people of the region. In Argentina, the criollos usually were of mixed descent, with blood from Spanish settlers, and native South American Indians

Época de oro “Golden Age,” refers to the era during which tango peaked in popularity and cultural importance in Buenos Aires, circa 1920 to 1950

gaucho A native cowboy or cattle-herder of the South American pampas, usually of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry; mostly found in Argentina, Uruguay, and Southern Brazil

La Guerra Sucia “The Dirty War,” refers to the era of state-sponsored military violence and torture toward left-wing individuals in Argentina, circa 1976 to 1983

lunfardo A slang native to Buenos Aires and Montevideo from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was spoken primarily among immigrants (especially dock workers). Lunfardo is a mixture of Spanish, Italian, and some French. It was used by the lowest class of immigrants, and included many vulgar terms. It, furthermore, was frequently used in tango lyrics, especially in early tango. It has also become incorporated into porteño speech.

milonga 1) Can refer to the gaucho influenced dance, and immediate parent of the tango; or 2) later, the venues in which tango was danced in the Golden Age in Buenos Aires (and even today)

Peronism / peronismo Peronism is an Argentine political movement that emerged in the 1930’s and is based on the politics associated with President Juan Domingo Perón and his second wife, Eva (Evita) Perón. Peronism is hard to define, but includes some of the following characteristics: Strong centralized government, with authoritarian tendencies; strong nationalistic tendencies, and freedom from foreign influences; an approach to economics which includes
socialist and capitalist ideas; and the combination of nationalism and social democracy. Peronism historically also emphasizes the working class and its contribution to Argentine society.

*porteño / porteña*  Adjective or noun, referring to an object or person from Buenos Aires, the port city

*radicalista*  Radical political activist, usually associated with extreme left-wing political movements, although the associations and connotations with the term have shifted throughout history. In Argentine history, the term *radicalista* usually refers to the center-left political party or political movement of the same name

*Río de la Plata*  The River Plate, the river that runs between Argentina and Uruguay. Both Buenos Aires and Montevideo (capitals of Argentina and Uruguay) are situated on the River Plate delta. The *Río de la Plata* region refers to the larger region in Argentina and Uruguay that surrounds the River Plate

*tango nuevo*  “New tango,” refers to the hybrid, jazz- and classical music-inspired tango that Astor Piazzolla introduced in the 1950s

*tango-canción*  “Tango song,” refers to shorter tango pieces, which include lyrics, and are meant to be sung by *tanguero* vocalists. Some of the most famous *tango-canciones* (plural of *tango-canción*) were popularized by Carlos Gardel.

*tango-mania*  Refers to the period of tango enthusiasm that took place in Paris and other European and American cities circa 1912 to 1930

*tanguero*  A *tanguero* is a person associated deeply with the tango. Historically it referred to tango performers, composers, arrangers, dancers, etc. Today, it is usually used to refer to tango historians or tango scholars.
Preface

I am a first generation Argentine American. I was born, raised, and have lived on the east coast of the United States all my life, and have only visited Argentina twice. And yet, the tango seems to have become part of me. The dance, the music, and the culture have been a part of my psyche ever since I can remember. This is perhaps strange, as I can claim no direct heritage of the tango; I have never lived in Argentina, and I did not grow up dancing it, and neither did my parents, for that matter. Why then, is the tango such a strong presence in my life and what does it matter?

I grew up feeling multinational, multilingual, and multicultural, (partially because I also went to a German immersion school until college). And yet, part of me never ceased to feel connected to the country I could never have called home: Argentina. Some undeniable parts of my upbringing undoubtedly conditioned me to feel so strongly about my connection to it. My parents, who both have strong roots in Argentina dating back to the early twentieth century, never showered me with rhetoric about la patria\(^3\) or placed Argentine goods and customs over others. Still, they told stories about their childhoods in Buenos Aires, we would occasionally eat traditional Argentine food, and then there were the countless CDs of tango music that we owned. Ah, the tango.

I started taking ballroom dancing lessons at the beginning of high school, as my sister and brother had done before me. I absorbed everything our teacher would share with us: from the cha-cha, to the waltz, and much more. It was wonderful experience. One day we were finally going to learn the tango, and I was very excited. Our teacher put on a generic ballroom tango song, and we began to parade around the room, our chests puffed out, our arms extended

\(^3\) Spanish and Latin for “the fatherland”
dramatically, and our bodies rigid and tense with “mournful passion.” I remember hearing my mother’s voice in my head: *This is not real tango… this is Hollywood tango!* And furthermore, I remember agreeing with her.

There was something about this ballroom version of tango that felt inauthentic to me. But why did I, an American, feel that way and did I have a right to say what was “authentic,” anyway? Why did it bother me? The music was some large orchestrated version of *La Cumparsita*, the epitome of “cheesy” tango music; the dance was overly dramatic; and it all felt

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4 Photo taken by my mother, Norma Garibaldi, Spring 2006
very superficial. I once asked my ballroom teacher if we might learn some more “authentic,” Argentine tango moves, to which she frowned and shook her head. She explained that it was too hard to teach, too hard to learn, and less of a crowd pleaser. This was a hardly satisfying answer, but I swallowed it well enough, and was left with a lingering longing to find out what “authentic” tango was and where I could learn it. Since my first exposure to ballroom dancing, I have sought on multiple occasions to satisfy my desire for authenticity. I have attended pickup classes of Argentine tango dancing on numerous occasions taught by various Argentine instructors. I found that the Argentine tango is indeed much harder to learn and dance than the ballroom tango. Still, with a good leader, I was able to follow the intricate movements.

3 Dancing the Argentine tango with my sister, Annie, at the Argentine embassy in Washington, DC, Summer 2005

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5 Photo taken by my mother, Norma Garibaldi, summer 2005. The event was a fundraiser for the Choral Arts Society of Washington, which was planning a tour of Argentina and Brazil. The fundraiser took place at the Argentine embassy in Washington, DC, and included free Argentine tango classes taught by an expatriate.
Over the years, I have become more interested in and aware of the history and the culture surrounding the allure of tango. My fascination with the tango has led me to write papers on lunfardo, the immigrant slang used in tango lyrics, and on the Argentine gaucho culture, whose image is often associated with the Argentine tango. And now it has led me to the question I would like to tackle here: Why is it that as an outsider I feel that I have a right to determine what is true tango? My researching and soul-searching have led me to my answer: the tango, while a national symbol for Argentina, has been an internationally commodified object, essentially since its beginnings. National actors have not been the only ones who have influenced the shape and evolution of the tango. On the contrary, it is the international influence on the tango that has helped it evolve into what it is today, and has allowed the tango to endure as a national symbol. In my transnational journey to understand the tango as a symbol of national identity, I found a better understanding of my own relationship with the tango. The tango can mean so much to me even though (and maybe even because) I am both an insider and an outsider. The transnational character of the tango mirrors my own—I am partially Argentine and also international. And as tango develops further, I only love and respect it more.
Introduction—Tango’s Beginnings

The tango received a high honor from UNESCO\(^6\) this year: on September 30, 2009, the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage approved the petition filed jointly by Argentina and Uruguay\(^7\) to protect the tango as Intangible Cultural Heritage. This approval is significant in many respects. First, on a symbolic level it recognizes the importance of the tango for the identity of the population that claims historical ownership of the tango. Second, it acknowledges the tango’s importance historically in both the Río de la Plata region and internationally. And lastly, in more practical terms, this approval provides funding for projects to preserve and protect this intangible cultural heritage. But what, according to UNESCO, is the tango, really, and what makes it a national treasure?

In its official description of the tango, UNESCO describes it as a cultural form familiar around the world.\(^8\) It further acknowledges the role that urban and lower class roots, European immigrants, African slaves, and criollos\(^9\) played in the early development of the dance. “A wide range of customs, beliefs and rituals were merged and transformed into a distinctive cultural identity. As one of the most recognizable embodiments of that identity, the music, dance and poetry of tango both embodies and encourages diversity and cultural dialogue.”\(^10\)

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\(^6\) UNESCO stands for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, one of the branches of the United Nations that deals with issues regarding education, science and cultural affairs.

\(^7\) Although both Argentina and Uruguay have made claims on the historical and cultural ownership of the tango, I will be only focusing on the Argentine side of the story.


\(^9\) Natives of the region, native born people of the region

UNESCO focuses on the inhabitants of Buenos Aires and Montevideo when discussing the importance of cultural identification associated with the tango. They define it as an urban, and a localized phenomenon:

The tango is a musical genre that includes dance, music, poetry and singing, and is considered one of the main manifestations of identity for the inhabitants of the Río de la Plata region. [...] Tango is also incorporated into celebrations of national heritage in Argentina and Uruguay, reflecting the widespread embrace of this popular urban music.\textsuperscript{11}

UNESCO focuses its definition of the cultural significance to the Río de la Plata region, while acknowledging its repercussions on Argentina and Uruguay as a whole. According to UNESCO, the tango encompasses a large group of communities in Buenos Aires and Montevideo, including: dancers, musicians, composers, poets, singers, tango experts, researchers, producers, milongas (dance halls), filmmakers, specialized journalists, students in diverse arts, trade and techniques.\textsuperscript{12} These are the individuals who will receive assistance from the UN organization to protect and preserve tango culture. These, according to UNESCO, are also the individuals who help to define tango.

There is a paradox in restricting the tango community to the inhabitants of Buenos Aires and Montevideo, however. They certainly claim ownership of the tango, and their historic role in its development is certain. UNESCO, however, neglects to mention the international communities that have also help create and shape the tango. While the tango is recognized as a localized symbol, its creation and endurance occur on an international level. Surely, it is difficult to define the tango and all that it encompasses, as it includes a wide range of individuals. It is therefore understandable that UNESCO would exclude the international communities that are

\textsuperscript{11} (UNESCO Culture Sector) "UNESCO.org." September 2009. The tango. 7 October 2009
\textsuperscript{12} (UNESCO - Intangible Cultural Heritage 1)
involved in the tango in their official documents. However, because of their continued influence in the tango’s development, these communities should not be ignored.

Thus, UNESCO has added fuel to a lasting tension in the development of the tango: a tension between being a localized symbol that has been developed internationally and transnationally. What was a popular symbol has now been ratified by an international organization as an official national symbol. In this work, I will be looking at tango as a cultural form, reflecting to some extent all its components, for example the dance, music and poetry, etc., as well as its effect on societies and identity. In particular, I will examine how its fragmented and dynamic international journey has led it to become the national symbol of Argentina. This tension between being an official versus a popular symbol has been present throughout tango’s history, as have the concepts of appropriation, hybridism, and transnational movement. I argue that the tango has become both an official and a popular symbol of Argentina today, largely due to its international historical journey.

From the beginning, the tango was never “pure.” It emerged from a mixture of cultures, by circumstance, and was further influenced by foreign and domestic players and powers alike. Argentines and foreigners have different ideas of what tango truly is, whether it be the dance, the music, the poetry, or the performance. ¹³ And yet, there also seems to be a notion that there is the Argentine tango that is the “correct” and “authentic” version in contrast to the more commercial versions found in other regions of the world, including North America, Europe, and East Asia. Furthermore, both Argentines and non-Argentines are prone to consider tango, whatever their understanding of it, to be a part of Argentina’s national identity.

¹³ As will be discussed throughout this work, there is disagreement both domestically and internationally as to what tango is. There is both disagreement among Argentines what is “real” tango (for example some people consider Gardel’s tango to be the only tango that exists, others consider Piazzolla’s tango to be the height of tango’s development); and there is also an international disagreement of what “real” tango is (for example, most Argentines do not consider American or European tango to be tango at all.)
How does the tango reflect this sense of national self? According to the BBC, “tango is about national identity and every note of its music, every gesture of the dance, contains within it [Argentina’s] history.” Indeed, many have argued that the tango has such strong emotional implications for Argentines, because it is so closely wound with the history of Argentina. Argentine philosopher and musician Gustavo Varela explains: “Since its origin in 1880, the history of the tango walks along the birth and evolution of the modern Argentine Nation. Its sounds and poetry have witnessed the several processes our country went through during the twentieth century; and the transformations that its lyrics have gone through are a way to tell how a national identity is created.”

Furthermore, domestically, the tango has followed and reflected the emotional, economic, social, and political hardships that the Argentine people have endured since the turn of the twentieth century. The history of Argentina began with economic disappointments endured by the lower immigrant class, which were replaced by new, political and social hardships with every successive generation. The lyrics and the evolution of the tango reflect this. “Punctuated by sadness and disappointment, tragedy and joy, the dance survives because of nostalgia for the past, disappointment in the present and hope for the future.” Even now, in a period of economic turmoil, the Argentine people can turn to the tango as a comforting symbol of their identity.

From the outside, the notion that tango is one of the defining elements of Argentine national identity has also been fostered through the fragmented history of tango itself. As Varela

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15 (Varela) Although Argentina gained independence in 1816, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the country began to see significant changes in its ethnic makeup, with a massive wave of immigration from Europe. This wave of immigration led to expansion and economic growth. Thus Varela’s timeline makes sense in that regard. The beginnings of tango coincided with the arrival of the sizable amount of the population that allowed for the nation to bloom and modernize.
16 These included World Wars, political authoritarianism and economic downturns.
explains, “tango travels to Europe almost from the beginnings of its origin… By 1913, tango is danced in the Parisian salons creating a true tango fever…. In the ‘20s and ‘30s, mainly through cinema, tango is established as a symbol for Argentine identity. A few years later Piazzolla\textsuperscript{18} will do the same thing, only this time through music.”\textsuperscript{19} Thus, the nature of tango’s history has been both domestically and internationally significant. Both domestic and international players have worked together to create and foster the tango as Argentina’s national symbol, and a fundamental element of its national identity.

In the following chapters, I will examine the evolution of the Argentine tango, demonstrating the importance of fragmentation\textsuperscript{20} and international influences on its creation and endurance as a national symbol for Argentine identity. I will look at the evolution of the tango chronologically, highlighting important moments in its development both domestically and abroad that have furthered its development and importance culturally and in regards to its relationship with national identity. Specifically, five major periods in tango will be explored: its beginnings; its early travels to Europe; its repatriation to Argentina and the subsequent Golden Years; then its renaissance and endurance abroad, which finally led it back to Argentina for a local renaissance. The current renaissance in Argentina demonstrates the lasting importance of the tango to national identity, as well as the durability of various hybrid forms of the tango. It also shows us that tango has particular transnational characteristics, which enables the tango to

\textsuperscript{18} Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) was one of tango’s most controversial composers and performers. He is most well-known for his nuevo tango, in which he mixed traditional tango sounds with classical music and jazz influences. He will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters two and three.

\textsuperscript{19} (Varela)

\textsuperscript{20} I will demonstrate that tango was never a unified concept to begin with. However, in its development, the concept of the tango becomes increasingly fragmented and diverse. At any given moment in tango’s history, there have been multiple versions of the tango.
leave its borders, only to come back with renewed vitality and popularity. The national symbol therefore, benefits from its international travels and exposure, as it furthers its development and helps the tango endure.

Following this introduction, I will provide a brief historical background of the beginnings of tango, before it embarked on the international journey that will prove crucial to its development and establishment as a national symbol. I will highlight the hybrid nature of the tango in its early stages, which featured a mixture of a wide variety of criollo, African and European music and dance styles. At this point, the tango, which was initially ignored by the elites, was a lower class, immigrant dance that was associated with pimps and brothels, and belonged only to a subculture of Buenos Aires.

In chapter one, I will examine the first wave of tango export to Europe that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century. The fascination for exotic and foreign cultural forms in Parisian salons and cabarets made the Argentine tango a sensational hit almost immediately, attracting more than just lower class patrons to these venues. Once the Parisian elite took notice of the dance and its music, it spread throughout Europe and even reached the United States, particularly Hollywood. I will also demonstrate how this period shaped the international image of tango and Argentina, creating links and stereotypes associated with the whole of Argentina, when the tango really only represented the metropolis of Buenos Aires. Thus, a national image was created that did not reflect the entire nation.

Chapter two will discuss the repatriation of the tango to Argentina. I will demonstrate how the Buenos Aires elites came to appreciate their native dance once the European elite accepted it. This led to the Golden Age of tango (roughly 1920 to 1950), which was the period in which tango was at the peak of its popularity and importance in Argentina. An attempt at
political appropriation of the tango followed under the populist ruler Juan Domingo Perón. Among other things, he sought to unify the nation with tango. The tango then experienced a lull in the 1970s, when the military junta that ousted Peron tried to rid the country of Peronist symbols, and tango was forced underground. Thus, during this chapter in tango’s history, international recognition of the tango led the Argentine people to claim it as their own. However, when the political situation in Argentina became hostile, tango had to find refuge on international soil.

Chapter three will examine the tango renaissance that took place internationally in the 1980s and has continued until today. Many Argentine expatriates, with the help of locals, found tango a new home abroad. Live shows, movies, and a renewed demand for dance lessons and music all over the world have sparked new life in the tango. The renaissance demonstrates tango’s international appeal as well as its dynamism, its ability to emerge in new hybrid versions and to adapt to individual markets and peoples. What we now experience is a continuation of that renaissance. Much like in the first era of *tango-mania*, tango found new life, exposure, and cultural importance outside of Argentina.

In the conclusion I will briefly look at the effects that the international tango renaissance has had on the tango audience in Argentina. For the second time, Argentina reclaimed the tango’s “authentic”\(^\text{21}\) version vis-à-vis the rest of the world, by readopting the tango as its national symbol and building on the hybridization process that foreigners and Argentine expatriates began. As tourists flocked to Argentina for tango, locals, especially in Buenos Aires, have re-embraced their national dance. So much so, that they petitioned UNESCO to give

\(^{21}\) According to many Argentines, only a tango produced by Argentines in Argentina can be authentic. Furthermore, many Argentines also consider the version of tango popularized during the Golden Age to be the only “authentic” version found in Argentina.
international recognition for its cultural heritage. Tango’s life and development abroad helped the national symbol flourish.

The immigrant’s dance—A brief history of tango’s beginnings


One can trace the roots of the Argentine tango back to circa 1880 in the Río de la Plata region in South America. There is evidence to suggest that the tango emerged from the remnants of the Afro-American slave community in the Río de la Plata area, between Argentina and Uruguay, in the late nineteenth century. There was a substantial black population in this area,

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23 The history of the tango is disputed and documentation is scarce and spotty and thus much of the early history is speculative, as little reliable documentation remains.
due to the slave trade. The slaves, and then later freed Afro-Americans, often congregated and danced in large groups. These dances were often referred to as tangos, or later tango criollos by Spanish speaking outsiders.

Thus, the word tango seems to have its roots in the African slave subculture in the Río de la Plata area. There are two theories as to its origins. One is that it was of African provenance; the other is that it was derived from Portuguese, due to the substantial influence of Portugal in slave trafficking to South America. The theory is that the term tango may come from the Portuguese verb tanger, which can refer to the sounding of a string or music. Further, this verb is derived from the Latin verb tangere, which means to touch. This seems both fitting for a term that would later refer to both a musical and a dance style. In South America, however, in the late nineteenth century, the term tango was used to refer to a meeting place and the dances that the slaves and freed black citizens in the Río de la Plata area shared.

The freed slaves were located throughout the Río de la Plata region, on both the Argentine and the Uruguayan side of the river. As cities and their ports began to offer more economic possibilities, Afro-Americans, as well as other rural inhabitants, began to move into the cities. Tango, as it is understood today, is an urban phenomenon that began to bloom in Buenos Aires and Montevideo in the late nineteenth-century, probably brought into the cities by migrating ex-slaves or their descendents.

After moving to the city, the tango developed as a fusion of dances found in Buenos Aires: European imported folk dances such as the habanera and mazurka, as well as the local

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24 (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 96)
25 Spanish for “Creole tangos”
26 (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 95-96)
27 (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 96)
28 Although the tango can be attributed to both cities, and by extension, both Argentina and Uruguay, I will only focus on Argentina and Buenos Aires, as the Argentines have systematically claimed the tango as a national symbol throughout the twentieth century, and the tango is largely recognized today as an Argentine phenomenon.
**milonga**, and Afro-American *tango criollo* and *candombe*. Although, the *tango criollo* contributed to the development of tango, especially by giving it a name, it is widely argued that the *milonga*, which was created by fusing remnants of gaucho traditions, was the “immediate parent of the tango” in terms of the dance itself. It is important to note that there is no evidence that the gauchos ever danced the *milonga* on the Pampa; rather, once they migrated into urban areas, aspects of the gaucho culture were taken and added to a new music and dance known as the *milonga*.

Thus, the tango emerged as an urban hybrid dance with various influences from Afro-American dances, native dances, and European imports:

The tango, even if it did not yet have the name, was just such a fusion of disparate and convergent elements: the jerky, semi-athletic contortions of the *candombe*, the steps of the *milonga* and mazurka, the adapted rhythm and melody of the *habanera*. Europe, America, and Africa all met in the *arrabales* of Buenos Aires, and thus the tango was born – by improvisation, by trial and error, and by spontaneous popular creativity.

Tango therefore, was an entirely popular dance created by meshing local and imported traditions, which the populace claimed it as its own. International influences were an important factor and contributor to its development from the beginning. Like the vast majority of the Argentine population, the tango’s roots were imported and then fused into something that would come to represent the entire nation. At this point, however, it was not yet seen as a symbol of national or cultural identity. It was merely a popular dance and social outlet primarily for the lower and immigrant working class of Buenos Aires.

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29 The *candombe* was a wildly rhythmic dance. Afro-American influences were possible in the urban center, because by the end of the nineteenth century, freed blacks comprised roughly one quarter of the population in Buenos Aires. They were primarily located in the city center, and thus were in the heart of early cultural developments. (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 96)  
30 (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 96)  
31 (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 97)
Over time, however, tango would become more and more Europeanized. At the turn of
the twentieth century, Argentina was an up-and-coming economic power. The country was rich
in agricultural and mineral resources, and the construction of railways in the mid nineteenth
century helped position Argentina for an economic boom. However, the country was severely
lacking in population. Therefore, the Argentine government systematically attempted to attract
Europeans to emigrate to Argentina. As inducements, these immigrants were offered subsidies,
accommodation, food, and the promise of land or work upon arrival.\footnote{32} By 1900, about seventy-
five percent of the population of Buenos Aires had been born in Europe.\footnote{33} The immigrants who
came to Argentina were predominantly Italians and Spaniards, who hoped to work for a short
time then and return home with a small fortune.

More often than not, however, the immigrants did not find the vast wealth they were
seeking, and they remained in Argentina, financially unable to return to their homeland. Specific
immigrant groups settled in particular sections of Buenos Aires, and those neighborhoods
became associated with these nationalities. Each immigrant group could in this way retain
certain aspects of their culture in this foreign country. However, the immigrants simultaneously
assimilated into the \textit{porteño} life and politics. Thus, there was a high degree of cultural
integration in Buenos Aires, and a distinct \textit{porteño} identity was constantly being shaped by the
diverse citizens of the city.

Up until 1900, the term \textit{tango} could refer to a number of styles of dances and music.
Typically, they were distinguished from each other by the addition of an adjective qualifier, such
as \textit{tangos criollos}, those with Afro-American influences, or \textit{tango andaluz}, those with Spanish
influences. After about 1900, however, the tango referred to a singular entity, and by 1910 it had

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item 32 (Denniston 12)
\item 33 (Baim 16)
\end{itemize}}
become the music and dance of choice of young *porteño* men who frequented nighttime establishments that showcased musicians and dancers versed in the tango.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, as the demographics of the metropolis were changing, so too were its trends and sounds.

At the time, the male-female ratio in Buenos Aires was very uneven, as the immigrants who came to the port city were primarily young men looking for work. Rarely did a whole family or wives, and children or spouses make the trip across the Atlantic. Thus, in 1914, men vastly outnumbered women in the metropolis, and the number was constantly rising.\textsuperscript{35} This led to higher demand for brothels, saloons, and other establishments that catered to the needs of the young immigrant male working class of Buenos Aires and offered employment to a sizable portion of working class women. It was in these establishments that tango developed and thrived. Often brothels would employ musicians to keep the clientele entertained while they waited to be attended to. But some scholars argue that it is unlikely that most men learned the tango solely from visiting brothels and claim that the “true home of the tango was the patio of a tenement block, where working-class Argentineans and recent immigrants from other countries met, mixed, played, and danced together.”\textsuperscript{36} Regardless of where it was danced, the tango spread among lower class circles.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century it was almost exclusively the working class that took part in the tango culture. The elite, who also had strong ties to Europe, tried to emulate the upper classes of Europe and North America, and largely ignored the cultural forms of the immigrant class in Buenos Aires. In general, this was a difficult time for lower class Argentines in search of a national identity. While the upper class remained firmly oriented towards European culture, the lower class had yet to solidify a national identity. While

\textsuperscript{34} (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 97-98)
\textsuperscript{35} (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 95)
\textsuperscript{36} (Denniston 59-60)
immigrants retained aspects of their home cultures and included them in new cultural forms within Argentina, the longer they remained outside their home countries the more likely it became that new generations would reject their native roots and yearn to create a new hybrid identity that defined their experience as *argentinos* and *porteños*. The tango was a major contributor in just that way. It would not be long until foreigners, too, would begin to associate tango with a sense of national identity. Shortly after its development in Buenos Aires, the tango would be exported to Europe, where tango would begin to be known as an Argentine symbol.
I. Tango for Export / Tango-Mania

Globalization and commodification sends tango to Europe and beyond

The first wave of tango export at the turn of the twentieth century established tango as a commodifiable object, thus allowing it to be marketed and sold. Further, the tango, which inside Argentina emerged as an urban phenomenon particular to Buenos Aires, became a symbol of the entire Argentine nation in the eyes of the European and North American communities. After leaving Argentina, tango went through three main stages that fundamentally shaped its future development: First, tango reached Paris, the cultural capital of Europe, where the elite class was fascinated by the dance. Here, tango as a national emblem of Argentina was established, even as it underwent stylistic changes. From there, it spread to the United Kingdom, where the British elite toned down the dance to be palatable to British dance circles. The resulting dance formed the beginnings of modern ballroom tango. Finally, tango found its way to Hollywood, where motion pictures featuring the tango created an image of the Argentine nation that was marketed to a wider audience, and further solidified the association between tango and Argentine identity.

Paris and a fascination with the exotic

It is unknown exactly who first introduced tango to Parisian society, but it is believed to have arrived between 1900 and 1910. Various explanations have been put forth: expatriate Argentine oligarchs,\(^{37}\) Argentine beef-barons, various tango musicians and dancers, as well as sailors and white-slave traffickers from Marseilles all may have helped to bring the tango to

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\(^{37}\) As well as the sons of upper class oligarchy, who had time and money to travel to Europe. (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 99)
Paris. The figures and numbers are unclear. What is known, however, is that its presence in Paris did not go unnoticed; in fact, a tango-mania erupted throughout Europe.

The tango became extremely popular in Paris around 1912, as it became part of the booming market for imported and exotic dances. Dances such as the Afro-American cake-walk, the Brazilian maxixe, and the French apache were highly popular. Nighttime establishments, including cafés and cabarets, were flooded with audiences from the Parisian upper and middle classes who wanted to watch and partake of the newest exotic trends. The tango was just one of the many dances that were introduced to European high society in Paris, but the tango had a greater effect on Parisian life and fashion than most other dances and became a great marketing tool.

The reception of the tango within France and around Europe was varied, but it still spread like wildfire within Paris, and later to other European cities. Its allure is explained by Marta Savigliano, an Argentine tango scholar:

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38 (Savigliano 109) It is peculiar that expatriate Argentine oligarchs and beef-barons are among the possible explanations as to who introduced the tango to Parisian society. While the tango was a dance of the lower class in Argentina and certainly not a popular dance among the upper class, it is not impossible that members of the upper class would have come in contact with the dance in Buenos Aires. It is probable that beef barons would have had contact with the dock workers who shipped their meat overseas; furthermore, it is not impossible to consider that upper class men sometimes found themselves in the brothels in Buenos Aires. These are my own speculations and interpretations, however are not unreasonable, at least for exposing a small portion of French or Parisian society to the tango.

39 (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 99) The use of the term “Afro-American” was taken from Marta E. Savigliano, describing African Americans. (Savigliano 111)

40 (Savigliano 111) While the apache was not a foreign dance, it was a dance found in prostitution circles of the Parisian underground, and was thus considered exotic enough to be fashionable. A wide variety of other exotic dances were also popular in Paris and Europe at the time. These dances include the hula, the Spanish flamenco, and Russian folk dances. (Savigliano 111)

41 (Savigliano 111) While Parisian high society seemed to embrace the exotic dance, other European high societies were more hesitant to allow tango to become a popular dance. For example, during the First World War, the German Kaiser decreed that any German officer caught dancing tango in uniform would be court-martialed. The Pope was even urged to ban the dance by many conservative Catholics (although he did not). On the other hand, the Russian Czar hired an Argentine couple to teach his family to dance it. The main opposition to the dance came from conservative individuals, who questioned the tango’s morality and social propriety. (Denniston 82)
Tango was scandalous and fascinating, but the differences in opinion did not strictly follow a class division. Tango was resisted by bourgeois moralists and by a sector of Parisians, who, far from being scandalized, were opposed to the distinguished, classy tinge of this sultry exotic dance. Perhaps the Parisian lower classes or those who identified with them ignored tango’s own lower-class origins, or perhaps they were aware of these origins but resented the tangueros playing up to the European aristocrats and bourgeoisies by practicing a pathetic autoexoticism for the benefit of the decadent market of pleasure.44

The tango was marketed by local Parisians as an exotic, scandalous dance from the distant South American country, Argentina. While the Parisians were enthusiastic about the exotic dances; the Argentines who were in Paris were not as enthused by the tango’s increasing popularity.45 “This was particularly true in the elite dominated diplomatic corps which was concerned that the Europeans were receiving the worst that Argentina could offer in the form of the lower class tango.”46 The Argentine elites wanted to portray their country as modern and Europeanized, and were unhappy to see Parisians focus on a product of the lower class. One anonymous Argentine observer in Paris at the time noted: “C’est une folie. Les jeunes femmes et les jeunes filles de toutes classes, aussi bien midinettes que bourgeoisies, ouvrières qu’aristocrates ne pensant plus qu’à le danser. De même pour les hommes.”47 Tango broke through class barriers and appealed to members of every social group in Paris, a feat that had yet to be accomplished in Argentina. Thus, from the point of view of the rich Argentines in Paris,

44 (Savigliano 109)
45 As Paris was the cultural and diplomatic capital of the world at the turn of the twentieth century, it was common for upper class Argentines to travel to Paris as often as time and finances would allow. To be stationed in Paris would have been considered a high honor; and for most young wealthy Argentines, a trip to Paris would be considered part of their education.
46 (Castro 93)
47 French quote, translated roughly as: “It’s crazy. The young women and ladies of all classes, even the bimbos and the bourgeoisies, the working women and the aristocrats, all think of nothing but dancing it (the tango). The same goes for the men.” This anonymous Argentine was quoted in Parisian publication La Vie Parisienne on March 15th, 1913. Quote found in (Humbert 105)
who did not see the appeal of the tango, the acceptance of their dance was at first shocking and scandalous.

However, the die had been cast: The explosive popularity of the tango had implications for its commodification and the association of tango with commerce. Tango became a large selling tool. “Anything could be sold by attaching the word Tango to it, and there are many advertisements from the period for Tango shoes, stockings, dresses, and hats. Indeed fashion was changed by the mania for Tango.” The name tango in itself was becoming a brand name. It was Argentine, it was foreign, it was exotic, and it sold. It went so far that a particular fabric shop keeper, who found himself with a large stock of satin of “such a garish orange-yellow that it proved unsellable,” capitalizing on the tango craze, decided to name the fabric “Satin-Tango.” Suddenly, the satin began to sell. In fact, he sold out of the fabric within a few days, and there was a large demand for more. A similar process occurred with many other products of the same era, so great was the tango’s influence on Parisian fashion. Various articles of clothing showed up in the satin-tango, including the fashionable “blouse-tango” for women, a light, full-sleeved blouse with black fur or feathers. Indeed, many of the fashion designers for both men and women of the period designed with tango dancing in mind, particularly “to allow even more freedom of movement.”

Typically, the tango in Paris was sold alongside the image of the compadrito, the hero and anti-hero of the tango, who undertook the task of “urbanizing the gaucho traditions which he

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48 (Denniston 82)  
49 (Collier, Cooper and Azzi 77)  
50 (Collier, Cooper and Azzi 78)  
51 (Collier, Cooper and Azzi 79)  
52 The compadre or compadrito refers to the pimps in Buenos Aires who worked in brothels where tango was danced. According to Julie Taylor, the compadrito is “essentially a man of the country, who brought with him myth and memory, song and poem in which gaucho figures as a great lover and fighter. […] Women were attracted to him as they had been to the romantic gaucho of the plains; but instead of becoming only an urban Don Juan, the compadrito became a pimp. As skillful and valiant a fighter as the compadre, he became, not a defender of rights,
had inherited.” For the most part, the image of the comadrito was outdated and stylized, but it proved an effective marketing tool outside Argentina due to the comadrito’s exotic dress, and mysterious and dangerous past. Many of the tango dancers in the cabarets and cafés dressed up like gauchos or compadritos when performing. This added to the image of exoticism and dangerous allure that enticed the Parisians. Parisian performers manipulated the image of the tango in such a way that it would sell even better. These images, however inauthentic, proved effective and lasting, as they accompanied the tango as it moved around the world.

5 Compadrito, Sketch of a typical comadrito

but a bully, a robber, and at times a killer. […] Losing all awkward traces of customs brought in from the plains or over from Europe, the comadrito assume a façade of stylized clothes and movements. […] The myth of the comadrito and the lore surrounding the tango are inseparable. The comadrito was the man of the tango, and the tango was his dance, its choreographic style based on his affectations, developed in the brothels he ran on the edges of Buenos Aires around 1880.” (J. M. Taylor 275-276)

51 (J. M. Taylor 275)
54 Image Source: http://www.tangowoche.ch/Elemente/Mingito/Compadrito_web.jpg
The tango that developed in Paris, although mostly imported directly from Argentine sources, had less and less to do with the dance in Argentina, technically and stylistically. It is therefore sometimes referred to as the “French tango.” The choreography of the dance had been drastically altered to appear more spectacular, extravagant, and exotic:

The original choreography had been stylized into glamorous, almost balletic postures (extended arms, stretched torsos and necks, light feet) and rough apache-like figures (deep dips, backward bends, dizzying sways), with marching walks in between. In general, to dance in a tango style meant to combine in a piece both airy elegance and tumultuous earthiness, the result being an effect of sensuality and passion.\(^55\)

This contrasted with the much less structured, improvised style of the tango found in Buenos Aires around the same period.

Therefore, the shift from Argentina to Europe had substantial consequences for tango’s music, dance, and perception. The tango developed in Paris was produced to fit the market that yearned for the sensual exotic found in foreign cultures, and exaggerated its exoticism in image and form to match the domestic demand. However, perhaps most importantly, for the first time internationally, Argentina was assigned a cultural symbol. Now, to the international world, tango, no matter what its form, was an Argentine export. This positive reception legitimized the tango in the eyes of the foreign elite and greatly affected its repatriation in the 1920s to Buenos Aires, to be discussed in the following chapter.

**Britain and the seeds of modern ballroom tango**

As the dance became popular on the stage, it was picked up by Parisian high society and transferred to salons and ballrooms.\(^56\) As people wanted to be able to dance the latest

\(^{55}\) (Savigliano 119)  
\(^{56}\) (Collier, Cooper and Azzi 76)
fashionable dances in ballrooms, the demand for dance classes and well-versed dance instructors rose. The 1920s and 1930s saw the creation of the beginnings of the modern ballroom in Britain, which included such dances as the foxtrot, the quickstep, the waltz, and the Ballroom tango. Upon hearing of its popularity in Paris, members of British high society organized teas where dance masters from Paris were brought in to teach the young ladies of high society to dance the tango “with decorum.”57 Dancing the tango with “decorum” led to the beginnings of ballroom tango.

A series of conferences among the British recreational dance schools in the 1920s defined syllabi for all dances, in order to create a unified set of steps, so that beginners58 would learn the same, codified steps. The syllabus that was established in Britain in 1920 for the tango essentially was taken from the pre-war French-tango that had emerged in dance halls and on stages in Paris.59 In 1933, German amateur ballroom dancer Freddie Camp moved to London, and experimented with the tango. Under his influence, the tango adopted some characteristics of modern ballroom tango. Camp was responsible for the invention of the sharp, staccato, exaggerated movements that are still found today in ballroom tango.60 These modifications were taken into account in the newer tango syllabi and became very popular. The consequence of these ongoing changes, however, was that the tango hardly resembled its Argentine predecessor anymore.

The creation of the tango syllabus went a long way toward cleaning up the image of tango for mass use in British ballrooms. It also made it more accessible and easier to learn for

57 (Lindholm 96)
58 These were primarily upper and middle class members of society who learned to dance to keep up with fashionable circles and high society.
59 (Denniston 87)
60 (Denniston 88) Some have argued that this version of the tango should be referred to as the German tango; although Camp himself denied that his version of the tango had any German characteristics per se. It was merely his own interpretation of the dance, and it began to catch on.
the average member of British society. The music became more rhythmically marked, in order to make it easier to lead and follow.\textsuperscript{61} The English dance schools, which today are known as the International Dance Sport Federation, were primarily interested in creating an “illusion of uniformity” in tango choreography. This broke from the tango created originally in Argentina, which was based on the premise of improvisation. The English schools created a rigid system of standardized steps, movements, rules of combination of steps and even costumes to be worn by performers. The European press, aware of the changes undertaken in British ballrooms, however, saw these actions as an improvement:\textsuperscript{62}

Perhaps it is not the original tango. What is danced in our country could be a version… how can I put it? … attenuated… restrained and corrected. There is too much appearance to be saved, too many susceptibilities to be avoided, to enable us to afford the luxury of an ‘authentic’ tango.\textsuperscript{63}

Unlike Parisian society, which fully embraced the sensual exoticism that the tango represented, British high society was more concerned with keeping up appearances and enforcing societal restraint. They walked a thin line between wanting to follow trends and fashions from Paris, and remaining proper. Changing the tango to suit British societal expectations was one way for the British upper class metaphorically to have their cake and eat it, too. They could engage in the latest fashions and trends, but also control their image, as to demonstrate how to behave “with decorum.” However, precisely due to this, the spontaneity and subtleties associated with the Argentine tango had been lost. This shows yet another way that the dance strayed from its roots, but became more popular abroad.

\textsuperscript{61} Leading and following are two concepts of vital importance in ballroom (and tango) dancing. The leader, usually the male, must be able to communicate non-verbally to his partner what the next step will be. Reciprocating the motion is the act of following. When the rhythm of a piece is marked, it is usually easier both to lead and to follow. Typically, the Argentine tango is rhythmically less marked, and it is generally accepted that good Argentine tango dancers learn to dance to the melody, rather than to the underlying rhythm of a piece.\textsuperscript{62} Information from the this paragraph taken from (Landa 88)\textsuperscript{63} As quoted in (Landa 88)
The British ballroom tango was further modified by North American dance circles, and created what is now known as the American tango. While this version of the tango is most closely related to the British, international ballroom tango, it was further refined and made more acceptable for the American home audience. In particular, the American version advocates an ever more open hold between the dancers, creating more distance between the dancers, and even less physical contact than in the British version. This also allows the dancers the room necessary to engage in more staccato movements, such as those popularized by Freddie Camp.

While ballroom and American tango have little to do (technically or musically) with the Argentine tango, this development is important to note for two main reasons. First, it demonstrates tango’s dynamic character; that is, the tango can be easily changed and modified to adapt to local styles and fashions and still be considered a tango. And second, the codified versions of the ballroom and American tangos provided a constant, subconscious reminder to the world that the tango existed and was an Argentine product, even in times when the Argentine tango experienced low points in its development.

**Hollywood gets an exotic taste of Argentina?**

Although the US reaction to the tango in the 1910s was mostly negative beyond cosmopolitan New York, the 1920s saw a new attitude emerge in some of the larger metropolitan areas. In particular, Hollywood began to take note of the tango. It was becoming increasingly popular in Paris and London, and could no longer be ignored. Tango’s experience

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64 (Denniston 91-92)
65 Some of these low points in the Argentine tango’s development will be discussed in chapters two and three. These include political and social turmoil.
66 The reaction to tango in New York was similar to that in Paris; other less cosmopolitan cities in the US, however, were less receptive of the tango. In Boston, for example, a bill was introduced to the state legislature in 1914, fining anyone caught dancing the tango $50, citing that “any dance participation in which is not conducive to propriety shall be prohibited.” There was also a fair amount of religious backlash against tango dancing. (Baim 57)
in Paris proved that the tango could sell, and Hollywood producers began to capitalize on the
tango sensation as a selling-point for their movies as well.

The first appearance of the tango in a motion picture was in June Mathis’ screen adaption
of Spanish novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez’s *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. The sixth
highest grossing silent film of all time, this 1921 film was a huge success. In arguably its most
famous scene, the film showcases a young unknown Italian actor, Rudolph Valentino, decked
out in a stereotypical gaucho costume, dancing an exaggerated tango in a seedy bar in Buenos
Aires, much in the style of the tango danced in Paris around 1912.

Featuring the tango in this widely distributed film, on the one hand, helped fuel the 1920s surge of the tango in the industrialized
nations of the north, and on the other, underlines the association of
the reimagined gaucho with the tango, a link that, while ever more
tenuous, was effective advertising among audiences with little
knowledge of the dance.

As discussed earlier, the tango had little to do with gauchos or gaucho culture, and
gauchos certainly did not dance the tango in the Pampa. The *milonga*, a parent dance of the
tango, was built from gaucho elements and traditions, but the tango was not a gaucho dance.
Furthermore, tango dancers in Buenos Aires were neither gaucho nor did they dress up in gaucho
garb. The traditional gaucho garb was not found within the *arrabales* of Buenos Aires, whose
residents, many of them immigrants, largely wore European fashions. The gauchos, as seen in

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67 Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928) was a Spanish novelist and politician, born in Valencia, Spain. He lived in
Argentina for a period in his life in political exile. He returned to Europe, where he wrote his novel *The Four
Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, which was a response to WWI. It features an Argentine cattle baron whose daughters
married a Frenchman and a German, respectively.

68 Valentino was an interesting choice for this role, in that he was an Italian, and a large percentage of Argentine
immigrants were Italian. However, the image of an Italian immigrant wearing gaucho garb is unrealistic and
confuses Argentine stereotypes. Following this role (his first in a motion picture), Valentino became a huge name in
Hollywood. Furthermore, a dance figure in the American tango was named after him, demonstrating his lasting
effect on the image and production of the tango.

69 In addition to showcasing little knowledge of the dance, this scene also demonstrates the fact that the producers
had little knowledge of Argentina, as well. The establishment in which they dance does not resemble an
establishment of the Boca District in Buenos Aires of the time. Furthermore, Buenos Aires had little to do with
gaucho culture at this point in history. (Goertzen and Azzi 69)
the photographs above and below, wore wide slacks, leather boots, and often wore ponchos or other woven knits to keep warm. This image contrasts greatly with the modernized European fashion that was found in Europe and the United States, and in a lot of Buenos Aires, too, for that matter.

6 Rudolph Valentino, in the 1921 silent film The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

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70 Photo Source: http://media.photobucket.com/image/rudolph%20valentino%20four%20horses/fairfax_verde/RudyFourHorsem en.jpg
This image undoubtedly was very foreign to the American audiences and therefore tied in with the exotic appeal of the tango. Although the tango and the gaucho had little in common historically and in common practice, they were branded together for marketing purposes by virtue of the fact that both came from the same foreign country and foreign culture. To outside eyes, the various subcultures that went into creating the tango were almost certainly unknown, but more importantly, seemingly irrelevant. Unintentionally, foreign audiences simplified and

combined (and confounded) two of Argentina’s established symbols, creating a new hybrid stereotype. The Hollywood producers knew that Argentina produced the tango, and presumably also knew that Argentina produced gauchos, therefore, it was easy to claim that one was connected to the other. The American (and European) audiences did not know any better, and the tango sold better that way.

The further tango moved away from Buenos Aires, the more exaggerated its images became, partially relying on artificial stereotypes as a brand symbol to make the advertisement to foreign cultures more effective. The scene in which Rudolph Valentino danced the tango in Buenos Aires was not in Ibáñez’s novel and was not necessary for the plot of the movie. It was solely added to the film to showcase Valentino’s tango abilities, and was the visual image of the Argentine tango produced for the silver screen. This movie had many implications for Valentino, as he became a “matinee idol.” But more importantly, it was a big step towards the further spread of the tango, and ironically, the first step towards the acceptance by the Argentine upper class of its own dance.

![Symbol]

The commodification of the tango in Europe and the United States had been a success. A European and American tango-mania had occurred, and put Argentina on the cultural map. This made the upper class back in Buenos Aires take notice. In particular, they noticed that European elites acknowledged and legitimized their cultural symbol. However, the tango that spread and was marketed abroad had little to do with the original Argentine version. And, in their different

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72 (Lindholm 96)
ways, both the lower and upper classes of Buenos Aires began to reclaim their dance in an attempt to show the world the true Argentine tango.
II. Repatriation of the Tango

Argentina: Cultural appropriation, the Golden Age, and politicized manipulations

After tango’s success abroad, it returned to Buenos Aires. It was repatriated twice in the following thirty years (roughly 1920 to 1950). First, it would be repatriated by the porteño elites, who redefined the tango as a local art form and wanted to use it to create a positive image vis-à-vis the rest of the world. This led to the Golden Age of the tango, its high point in popularity and significance within Buenos Aires and Argentina. Second, it was later appropriated by the Peronist government in the 1940s, to support their nationalistic and populist agenda that included unifying the nation and emphasizing Argentina’s working class roots.

The Tango returns “home”

Tango-mania abroad was a massive success—both Europeans and North Americans were intrigued and smitten by the tango. This success had repercussions on the acceptance, dissemination, and status of the tango back “home” in Buenos Aires. A cultural give and take occurred between the Argentines and Europeans that changed tango’s image at home.73 Once the European elite had given their stamp of approval to the Argentine working class dance, the elites of Buenos Aires began to take notice as well and reclaimed the birthright of the tango. Scholar Jo Baim argues,

It is not surprising that a high society made up of people whose ancestors were European immigrants, and who distinguished themselves from lower classes by trying to be as Europeanized as possible, would wait for foreign approval of the tango by persons

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73 Joseph Chan and Eric Ma argue that through globalization, encountering cultures inevitably experience hybridization, give-and-take between cultures. (Chan and Ma 4)
of their own social class before accepting its repatriation to Buenos Aires.\textsuperscript{74}

The fact that the tango had become a commodified good in the European market facilitated its importation back to Argentina’s capital by Argentine elites who had witnessed the \textit{tango-mania} first hand in Paris. Their re-importation of the tango helped broaden the market for the tango, and helped create a space both internationally and locally for the tango to grow, develop, and change, but this time on local terms.

As the \textit{porteños}, both upper and lower classes, learned of the changes and stereotyping that had been applied to their native dance during its sojourn abroad, a sense of ownership swept through Buenos Aires. Both upper and lower classes moved to repatriate the tango, and claim ownership over the “authentic” Argentine tango. The images arriving from abroad did not coincide with local practices, and many began to feel that “there is something subtle, intrinsic, and noble about the [tango] that only a true \textit{porteño} can understand or portray.”\textsuperscript{75} While the tango was popular abroad, it had been taken out of the hands of the locals and out of its cultural context. However, according to scholars Joseph Chan and Eric Ma, “transculturation allows many in non-European countries—especially elites and intellectuals—to appropriate foreign themes and institutions and to selectively reject many of their undesirable aspects in building up their new modern tradition.”\textsuperscript{76} Thus, in repatriating the tango, Argentine elites took what was popular in Paris and simultaneously attempted to make it Argentine again.\textsuperscript{77} The repatriation was a demonstration of national pride and an attempt to shape the international image of Argentina from within.\textsuperscript{78}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{74} (Baim 87-88)
\item \textsuperscript{75} (Baim 87)
\item \textsuperscript{76} (Chan and Ma 8)
\item \textsuperscript{77} (Baim 87)
\item \textsuperscript{78} It is important to note, however, that within Argentina there are strong regional differences, with different regional cultural forms. As described in the introduction, the tango is unique to Buenos Aires and its immediate vicinity.
\end{itemize}
It is widely believed among tango scholars that the tango became repatriated as a local cultural form throughout Buenos Aires around 1920. This coincided with the ban of brothels in March of 1919,\(^79\) which helped create a cleaner, more wholesome image of the tango that the upper class was ready to accept and show off as their own. The tango was now danced in theatres, in posh cafés, and in dance halls. The tango moved “up-town,” from the dingy port area, where many of the brothels had been, to the up-scale city district of Palermo and the theatre district on avenues Lavalle and Corrientes.\(^80\) This allowed tango to be seen and enjoyed by a wider audience of middle and upper class clientele. No longer was the tango only associated with lower-class immigrants, dock workers, and criminals; but also with the more refined and European population of Buenos Aires. This also showed the world that Buenos Aires, and by extension, perhaps, all of Argentina, was a modern and refined society.

**The Transition into Tango’s Época de Oro**

The tango’s Época de Oro, or Golden Age, was a cultural explosion, the height of tango’s popularity and national significance. It is important to distinguish this Golden Age as a local phenomenon, as this was the period in which Buenos Aires actively reclaimed its national dance and fostered a national symbol.

The tango, created by the marginal people of the *arrabal*, proved so dynamic a creation that it was able to take its place at the heart

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\(^79\) (Baim 99) As discussed in the introduction, the tango was commonly associated with brothels and similar establishments of the port area of Buenos Aires, as this is where many lower class workers had the opportunity to learn and practice the dance. This fact was a large contributor to the upper class’ initial distaste for the tango. It is interesting to note, as pointed out by Baim, that prior to this year, prostitution was perfectly legal in Buenos Aires and strictly regulated. Thus, the objectionable connection between the tango and the brothels was not necessarily one of legality vs. criminality; rather one of morality and a specific concept of decency.

\(^80\) (Castro 179)
of popular affections when Buenos Aires passed, as it did in the 1920s and 1930s, into the new era of mass popular culture.  

Tango’s Golden Age ranges roughly from 1920 to 1950. Tango scholar Donald Castro argues that the Golden Age was bracketed by two specific events, one cultural, the other political: the invention of the tango-canción by Pascual Contursi in 1917 ushered in a new era of tango music intended to be sung and performed and not necessarily danced to, giving rise to national heroes, such as Carlos Gardel. And in 1943, the military coup that overthrew the government of Ramón Castillo brought Colonel Juan Domingo Perón to power in 1946, as well as the era of Peronism. While Perón played an important role in nationalizing the tango, this marked the end of the Golden Age, because the tango’s development was now dependent on a top-down approach from national political forces. Both of these phenomena will be discussed in greater detail below.

The Golden Age of tango was essential in establishing tango as a national symbol from within Argentina. It was the first time that a large part of the Argentine population shared a cultural form that “belonged” to them. As Arjun Appadurai explains, “the modern nation-state […] grows less out of natural facts—such as language, blood, soil, and race—and more out of a quintessential cultural product of the collective imagination.” The Europeans had created a strong cultural link between Argentina and the tango, but it could not become a national symbol until porteños collectively claimed ownership. Originally, the tango did not belong (culturally) to all residents of Argentina, but as the international community began to project this image on Argentina, the Argentines rose to the occasion and accepted it.

81 (Collier, The Popular Roots of the Argentine Tango 99-100)  
82 Although some of the most famous tango-canciones were sung with dancing in mind and could be enjoyed aurally or by dancing to them.  
83 Carlos Gardel (1890-1935), a tangueros and international tango star, was one of the most important figures of the Golden Age of tango. He is also one of the tangueros most associated with the tango-canción.  
84 (Castro 164)  
85 (Appadurai 161)
Technological advances in the early twenties, including phonographs and moving pictures, further propelled the commodification and acceptance of the tango, and brought it to a wider audience. Radio stations in Buenos Aires began to broadcast tango music, as well as the new *tango-canciones*, to the whole city. Tango was now accepted by all classes in Buenos Aires and became a socially acceptable profession for many musicians and dancers. Local tango artists and consumers continued to commodify the tango as it became a local cultural symbol. It is therefore fitting that the first well produced Argentine sound film, in 1933, was called *Tango*. This film was distributed nationally, throughout Argentina with the purpose “of ‘nationalizing’ the *porteño* cultural form of the tango.” This was a clear attempt to create a national symbol out of something that had started as a cultural form of the lower class.

The *porteño* upper class began to take interest in the tango music before the dance, which was still considered vulgar by many due to the close, physical contact between dance partners. Although it is difficult to know exactly how the tango was danced before its export to Europe, we have a fairly good idea of what the new, “traditional” tango looked and sounded like. The cultural give and take between Buenos Aires and Paris, as described by Chan and Ma, effectively meant that the tango could never return to its “pure” form. The upper-class *porteños* who attempted to make the tango more Argentine ironically preferred many elements of the Europeanized version to the original tango. Therefore, certain European characteristics lingered in the new “authentic” form of the tango. The tango danced in the Golden Age was more rhythmically fluid, which was an influence from such European dances as the waltz and foxtrot.

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86 (Castro 179)
87 (Baim 101)
88 (Castro 180)
89 (Denniston 63)
90 This is due to the difficulties in recording dance steps and musical practices of early music and dances entirely accurately.
91 (Chan and Ma 4)
Another European influence was that women danced increasingly frequently by moving backwards, as opposed to a more balanced backward-forward motion from previous generations. Tango music was also now marketed as a hybrid dance and vocal music. Most tangueros (vocalists or instrumentalists) would sing, keeping dancers in mind while performing, and not take too many rhythmic liberties so that their talents could be showcased on the dance floors of porteño milongas.

The Golden Age was an era of deep and rich interpretation and innovation of the tango, in which choreographed dancing was hardly practiced. This set the tango apart from most European ballroom and folk dances. Technique was tango’s driving force; the dancers had the ability to spontaneously create movements that were not choreographed.92 It was this spontaneity in tango, which was one of the original characteristics of the dance that set the porteños apart from European and American versions. Through improvisation, local sentiments and practices could be explored.

Tango music also underwent some changes during the Golden Age. In 1917, with the birth of the tango-canción, many singers, including Carlos Gardel93 and José Razzano, found a new medium to showcase their voices. Tango-canciones were primarily meant for dancing, but also featured vocalists and lyrics about love, loss, nostalgia, and other aspects of the porteño experience. As the tango-canción became a success, various tangueros, including Gardel, toured the provinces of Argentina, sharing the new form of tango music. This continued the

92 Information from this paragraph taken from (Denniston 72-79)
93 Gardel toured both domestically and internationally, spreading the image of the “authentic” Argentine tango to the rest of the world through music and film. And most importantly, Gardel became a symbol for Argentina and the tango around the world. The great irony of Gardel’s role as tango’s first superstar is that he was not born an Argentine; however, he is known and celebrated as one of Argentina’s greatest celebrities. He was an immigrant, who lived a rags-to-riches lifestyle, the dream of every immigrant.
commodification and dissemination of the tango, and continued the spreading the local symbol to the rest of the nation.

The Golden Age also created a new image for the tango. In 1923, the tango was danced in the presidential palace in Buenos Aires to honor the visiting Prince of Wales.94 Carlos Gardel, who performed at this event, wore gaucho garb, which reinforced the image of Argentina and the tango that the Europeans had shaped.95 This is important to note, as Gardel did not wear gaucho garb later in his career. As part of repatriation of the tango, Carlos Gardel and other contemporary tangueros created a new, upper-class image for the tango, replacing the gaucho images.

For male vocalists the importance of the use of the smoking jacket and of being portrayed as a macho is significant and also serves as an important key to the porteño psyche. Tango vocalists adopted a life style that emulated the idle rich and were often portrayed in publicity photographs dressed in a “smoking jacket” [...]. The “smoking jacket,” which at first may seem to be nothing more than an item of dress, was an important tango symbol of the cabaret tango canción. [...] It represented an end to a work week with long hours and poor pay (Monday through Saturday) and was a time to forget real life and escape. The tango was escape.96

This changed image of the tangueros was in part aimed at correcting the typical image of Argentines abroad. No longer was the tango associated with the rugged, uncultured gaucho or beef barons, but a Europeanized, refined man of wealth and status. Locally, the smoking jacket helped create a more refined look for the tango and disassociated it from the compadritos of the previous generation.

The new image for the tango was a conscious manipulation. “The tango vocalists, for the most part, were not of the upper-class, but through their use of the smoking jacket they

94 (Baim 100)  
95 (Goertzen and Azzi 68)  
96 (Castro 181)
symbolically became part of it and through them so did their followers."\(^{97}\) This applies directly to Carlos Gardel, who was not born into the upper class and yet became a poster child for the tango Golden Age, experiencing immense success and popularity. Embodying the rags-to-riches immigrant success story, he earned his wealth by using the voice of his new homeland, Argentina. Gardel became the symbol of his nation through tango, and had a tremendous unifying influence both at home and abroad. He promoted an image and a cultural form that belonged to every porteño, and by extension, every Argentine.

\[\text{Carlos Gardel, 1933}\] \(^{98}\)

\(^{97}\) (Castro 182)
Internationally, Gardel created a new, revamped, and more civilized image of the tango and, in turn, also of Argentina. Gardel made many trips to Europe, primarily Spain and France, and to the United States, where his influence spread. His records sold throughout South America, making him a household name in most Spanish-speaking countries.\(^{99}\) In the early 1930s, Gardel found many opportunities with Paramount Corporation in France. Hollywood still largely controlled the film market in South America, and began to cast Gardel in Spanish language films. He became arguably the best-known Spanish American film star of the 1930s and was a driving force of the dissemination abroad of the Argentine image and the authentic tango.

Gardel died tragically in his forties in 1935 in a plane crash while on a tour of South America that would further promote his films and tango music. His death in Colombia at the peak of his career was a shock to the entire nation of Argentina, and most of South America as well. But he continued to serve (and still does today) as an immortal symbol of the authentic tango of the Golden Age. He is now considered to be a martyr for tango. Tango, the emblem of national identity that he sought to spread, was enhanced and deepened through his death. Ignacio Corsini, a contemporary of Gardel, and also a tanguero, solidified Gardel’s immortal image on the sixth anniversary of his death in 1941, when he publicly declared: “Gardel está en cada pájaro cantor del monte, de la sierra, del valle y de la pampa. Gardel no ha muerto. Gardel es inmortal.”\(^{100}\) Truly, still today one can find Gardel’s face throughout Buenos Aires. He is still remembered as a national hero who popularized the tango and blended its fame with his own.

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\(^{99}\) (Collier, The Life, Music, and Times of Carlos Gardel 89)

\(^{100}\) Quoted in (Castro 199); Translation by Castro: “Gardel lives in the birds’ song in the mountains, in the foothills, in the valleys, and in the Pampa. Gardel is not dead. He is immortal.”
Peronism and the Political Manipulation of the tango

After Gardel’s death in 1935, tango’s popularity began to decline due to increased exposure to North American popular music, such as crooning Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, and other Latin American dances, such as the Cuban rumba and the bolero. The tango was beginning to seem old-fashioned and dated in the eyes of Argentina’s youth, who did not necessarily grow up with the music or dance. Later, when Perón came to power, his agenda called for La Argentina Nueva, a program to revamp and modernize Argentina. This at first seemed not to coincide with the old-fashioned tangos, and may have suggested a complete fading from Argentina’s consciousness; however, this did not come to pass. Peronism, which “took its voice from marginal sectors of society” and “used the interests of the popular classes,” politicized the tango to empower the working class and to attempt to unite Argentina.

Peronism became a leading driver in the development of both Argentina and the history of the tango. “The Peronist Era (1946-1955) [marked] a new orientation for “popular” culture because of the political inclination of Perón to form his power base in the urban and rural popular class and his focus on nationalism.” Peron strategically and effectively used culturalist movements and nationalism to differentiate Argentina from the rest of the world. While tango had become accepted by all classes in Buenos Aires, Perón renewed the link between the tango and the working class for political gains.

The tango underwent some changes during the Perón years in style and execution, but was also an important political tool for the Peronists to further their nationalistic and populist agenda. “As a nationalist government, they chose to encourage anything that was identifiably

101 The New Argentina
102 Information in this paragraph was taken from (Castro 206)
103 (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ’50s, 27)
104 (Castro 164)
Argentinean. […] Tango was, originally, at least, the culture of the working class, the section of society that Perón relied on for his support.”

La Argentina Nueva focused inward. Perón made clear that he wanted to promote nationalism and no longer to allow Argentina to be corrupted by foreign ideas, as he argued it had been for decades. In promoting local cultural forms, such as the tango and its music, Perón continued to isolate Argentina culturally from the rest of the world. Thus, the tango could not simply fade away. In particular, the Peronist government largely controlled the media, and decreed that radio stations had to be Argentine owned, and had to promote, by law, the music of Argentine composers, which included mostly folk music and tango music. Scholar John O’Flynn notes the important connection between national identity and music, and argues that the “relationships between national identity and music are always socially constructed.” This relationship between argentinidad and the tango music therefore was overtly manipulated by the Peronist government to rally support from the working class.

During the same period, the role of the Catholic Church in Argentine politics was prominent and conservatism swept through Buenos Aires. In the early ‘30s, a movement among clerical leaders and linguists sought to “purify” the Argentine language and remove slang terms. As a result, just as Perón sought to nationalize the tango, lunfardo, unique to the Río de la Plata area, was suppressed. Many tangos from previous generations were thus deemed to be inappropriate due to profane language or use of lunfardo, and were therefore banned or ordered by the government to be “cleaned up” for the radio, so as not to corrupt Argentine youth.

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105 (Denniston 77)
106 (Castro 208)
107 (Castro 209-210)
108 (O'Flynn 24)
109 (Castro 210-213)
110 (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ‘50s, 32)
111 (Castro 210)
newer, cleaner version of tango was promoted. The image of the nation was important to Perón, and he sought to make Argentina sophisticated and unadulterated by foreign influences.

Because of the Peronist efforts, the 1940s were a decade of tango revival. Tango was often featured in magazines, radio programs, and newspapers. The dance was also promoted, which meant dance halls became fashionable again, and kept the dance traditions alive. The revival of tango dancing also had implications on the size and orchestration of tango ensembles. As dance halls needed larger bands to play, arrangers also needed to orchestrate instrumental

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112 9th August 1947: Eva Peron (1919 - 1952), second wife of Argentine president Juan Perón, dancing the tango with Enrico Celio, Swiss Minister for Post Office and Railways, at a reception given in her honor at the Hotel Bellevue Palace at Berne. This photo demonstrates the official promotion of the tango as a national symbol by the government. (Photo by Keystone/Getty Images), Source: http://cache2.asset-cache.net/xc/3163054.jpg?v=1&c=IWSAsset&k=2&amp;d=45B0EB3381F7834D8EF05D736B37AA2B4FF8EE2F2B99ED8E23FEF406871B787
113 (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and '50s, 34)
versions of famous tangos. This also enabled them to avoid the lunfardo censorship problem. The promotion of the dance thus was a way for the state to promote a unifying cultural form, while at the same time creating jobs for the working class.

Most important was the impact that Peronist policies had on the nationalization of the tango. The tango, despite attempts made by Gardel to spread it more widely through Argentina, was still mainly found in Buenos Aires until the 1950s. Perón understood the necessity of the political support of the working class throughout the entire country. He further understood the importance of uniting the entire country under one cultural symbol devoid of international influences. Ironically, however, the tango had been repatriated as an Argentine symbol after European approval and changes. Thus, Perón ironically was imposing a national symbol that carried foreign influences, against which he so strongly fought. This focus on local culture had strong political implications. “Culturalism, put simply, is identity politics mobilized at the level of the nation-state.” Peron was an extremely proficient politician in this regard. He understood the importance of unifying the Argentine state under a nationalistic narrative, and he mobilized the power of music in order to accomplish these goals.

Few or perhaps no “Peronist tangos” explicitly promoted the government’s agenda. Still, Perón promoted the national musical form, and many tango artists were also vocal supporters of the president. Perón changed unionizing laws that affected every tango musician, and suited some performers better than others. Perón controlled all trade unions in Argentina, and his new labor laws made hiring and firing musicians a more difficult process, as well as

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114 (Castro 248)  
115 (Appadurai 7)  
116 (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ‘50s, 28)  
117 (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ‘50s, 28)
pressed all tango bands to perform nationalistic music.\textsuperscript{118} This led Piazzolla and many other tango bandleaders to dissolve their bands.\textsuperscript{119} Piazzolla did so in 1949, after refusing to play at a lavish benefit concert for Evita Perón’s Social Aid Foundation.\textsuperscript{120} Piazzolla, who was openly anti-Peronist, found Perón’s laws stifling. After he disbanded his tango band, he continued to write new tango arrangements for other tango band leaders, including greats such as Aníbal Troilo, Osvaldo Fresedo, José Bassom and Francini-Pontier, but found this less enjoyable.\textsuperscript{121}

Piazzolla was not the only musician who found Perón’s rule oppressive due to the labor laws he imposed and the nationalistic pressure he put on all tangueros. Political disobedience was not tolerated. Well-known and beloved Argentine composer Ariel Ramirez\textsuperscript{122} remembers: “The Peronist government bought out the [radio] station [I worked for] and demanded employees sign a statement of political loyalty. I was an independent and my father was an active radicalista, so I was out of a job.”\textsuperscript{123} Some tango artists, who were either openly anti-Peronist or thought to be Communist sympathizers, were banned from dancehalls and stages, and even imprisoned, such as Osvaldo Pugliese.\textsuperscript{124} Pugliese, unlike some other bandleaders, however, did not dissolve his band. Rather, when he was imprisoned or banned, his band would perform regardless, and merely placed a single red carnation on the piano to “symbolize the presence of the maestro.”\textsuperscript{125} While these were trying times, musicians found ways to keep the authentic tango alive.

\textsuperscript{118} (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ’50s, 28-34)
\textsuperscript{119} Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992), was a tango master, prolific composer, having written over three thousand works, arranger, band-leader, and a virtuoso bandoneón player.
\textsuperscript{120} Piazzolla was just one of the many bandleaders to dissolve his band in response to Perón’s laws. Others include Ángel D’Agostino, Carlos Di Sarli, Horacio Salgán, and Ricardo Tanturi. (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ’50s, 35-36)
\textsuperscript{121} (Gorin 46)
\textsuperscript{122} Ariel Ramirez (1921-2010) was not a tanguero, but as a musician (pianist, music director and composer) was subject to the same laws and scrutiny as the tangueros.
\textsuperscript{123} As quoted in the obituary article on Ariel Ramirez by (Bernstein)
\textsuperscript{124} (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ’50s, 29)
\textsuperscript{125} (Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla, 29)
Piazzolla was not satisfied merely repeating and rearranging the tangos of previous
generations; he wanted to create a new, hybrid version of tango, a *nuevo tango*, influenced by the
jazz and classical music that he heard in New York in his youth. Piazzolla studied under
Argentine composer Alberto Ginastera, who encouraged him to take risks and explore his
musical talents to the fullest. Although Piazzolla was successful in Buenos Aires despite Perón’s
laws, “the constraint was popular taste. The enthusiastic dance public of Buenos Aires wanted
its bands to be dance bands; Piazzolla wanted his orchestra to be *listened to.*” As he rejected
the tango traditions he grew up with and experimented with the tango, many of the conservative
tangueros and audiences in Buenos Aires rejected his music, claiming it was not authentic tango.
“He fought not only against the establishment by creating the ‘new tango,’ but he came to
represent a new Argentina with new sounds, needs, and resources.” Astor Piazzolla was
interested in the tango in its purest form, in that he wanted it to speak broadly to all people.

“Traditional tango emanated from the *barrio*, but Buenos Aires’s identity had changed,
and Piazzolla was the expression of a new metropolis.” Piazzolla drew on musical influences
that were foreign and popular abroad, the very same that were discouraged by the Peronist
government. The time he spent abroad as a child opened his eyes to jazz and new classical
music from the Unites States and Europe, which also had profound influences on his music. The
influence of music of George Gershwin, Bela Bartók, and Igor Stravinsky, among others, crept
into his music. This exposure to the world also made him yearn to return to foreign lands. He

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126 Astor Piazzolla, born in 1921 in the Argentine coastal city of Mar del Plata, moved to New York with his parents when he was only two. With brief returns back to Mar del Plata, Piazzolla lived in New York for fourteen years. In New York, Piazzolla was exposed to a variety of foreign cultural forms, including jazz and contemporary classical music. It wasn’t until 1937, when he was sixteen years old, that Piazzolla moved back to Argentina, and arrived in Buenos Aires. His cosmopolitan upbringing and exposure to foreign cultural forms heavily influenced his music and his view of the world. (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ’50s, 38)


128 (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ’50s, 35)

129 (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ’50s, 37)
created a symbolic and effective bridge between Argentina and the international community that starkly contrasted with the inward-looking Peronist period.

Perón linked the tango with nationalist sentiments and with his nationalist agenda. During the Peronist era, the tango was fostered as a national symbol and politicized. This had major implications for the decades following Perón’s government, when a military junta ruled the country. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the military junta tried to suppress anything associated with the Peronist era, which included the tango. Had the tango not been so politicized by Perón, the junta might have left it untouched. However, the tango had to go underground in Argentina and find a home internationally, with the help of Piazzolla and other Argentine expatriates, since the political situation in Argentina was hostile towards the tango and its artists.
III. The Tango Renaissance

How the international tango renaissance helped revive the tango

Great political unrest in Argentina followed the Golden Age, and had major repercussions for the tango. During the military junta that succeeded Perón and, later, his wife Isabel, the tango had to retreat underground, as Peronist symbols were purged. This led many tangueros to become marginalized or to flee their native land, to countries where local audiences were ready to accept the tango. Thus, the tango remained alive outside Argentina and experienced an international renaissance, due to the mingling of Argentine expatriates and enthusiastic foreigners. This era was characterized by newer and more modern interpretations of the tango that once again show a cultural give-and-take, as well as the tango’s dynamism and ability to endure anywhere.

The Political Situation in Argentina

After Perón’s death in 1974, his second wife Isabel Martínez de Perón succeeded him as president. Martínez de Perón was a weak leader who had many political enemies. While in office, she signed decrees encouraging the military and police forces to seek out and annihilate members of the left-wing opposition. Her weakness led to her ouster in 1976 by a right-wing military junta led by Jorge Rafael Videla. Videla’s military dictatorship started what is now known as la Guerra Sucia. Videla, and later Roberto Viola and Leopoldo Galtieri, led an era of

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130 (Chan and Ma 4)
131 Videla and his followers were part of a right-wing faction known as los Montoneros. Originally part of the Peronist party, they were expelled from the party in 1974 for their radicalism. This led to much anger among this extreme right-wing faction. Many members of this faction were in the military. They waited until Perón’s death and seized the opportunity to oust Martínez de Peron in 1976.
illegal arrests of left-wing political opponents and civilians, torture, murder or forced disappearance of thousands of people.

The military dictatorship, dissatisfied with how the Peróns had governed, used their power to “de-Peronize” Argentina.\(^{132}\) While the tango was not one of Peron’s primary political tools, it held enough symbolic power to arouse suspicions. In order to maintain firm control over the nation, the junta began to discourage tango, first by closing cafés and theaters, and later by persecuting or arresting some of the loyal Peronist \textit{tangueros}. While tango didn’t disappear overnight, by the mid to late 1970s, it was merely a shadow of its former glory. Eduardo Markaroff, a Latin rock guitarist from Argentina, notes that when he “was playing rock in Argentina during the ‘70s, tango was absolutely stagnant.”\(^{133}\) A few \textit{tangueros} soldiered on, but the social and cultural climate had changed dramatically.

At first, many \textit{tangueros} who were openly anti-Peronist and who performed more modern tangos were not persecuted. Piazzolla, as an anti-Peronist, was one of the favored few. However, his personal life in Argentina became more difficult with increasing brutality from the government throughout the ‘60s and ‘70s. Piazzolla was arrested for one night in 1966 for making a snide remark to a police officer who demanded to see his documents, only to be released many hours later through a connection he had with someone who worked at the \textit{Casa Rosada}.\(^{134}\) This increase in violence began to affect even the “safe” \textit{tangueros}. In a 1983 interview, Piazzolla answered the following questions: “\textit{What does a policeman suggest to you?}—Antipathy. I feel revulsion for anyone who carries a weapon […] \textit{Your ideology?}—My

\(^{132}\) (Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla 60)
\(^{133}\) (Lechner 46)
\(^{134}\) While the military junta did not take over until 1973, governmental violence and social unrest was part of Argentine life throughout the 1960’s and ‘70s. (Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla 97)
only politics is music. I believe in the avant-garde, in freedom, in revolution.”¹³⁵ These words reflect the experience Piazzolla had in Argentina during the government of the junta. The sense of artistic repression in Argentina at the time, especially for tangueros, led the tango to go underground.

While Piazzolla and a few other tangueros who embraced the nuevo tango enjoyed relative acclaim at home in the ‘60s and early ‘70s, he looked to the international scene for artistic freedom. On December 1, 1974, Piazzolla was quoted in the porteño newspaper, El Clarín, saying, “My dream is to impose my music, my country’s music, all over the world.”¹³⁶ Piazzolla moved to Europe in the mid 1970s, where he would remain on and off until the end of his life. In the mid ‘70s, in Paris, he recorded some of his most famous tangos, including “Libertango,” a play on words, uniting libertad¹³⁷ and tango. This was fitting, as his new life in Europe represented just that: the absolute freedom to create the tango that he desired, without fear of the political turmoil in Argentina.

The turmoil in Argentina sent the tango abroad for a second time. However, when tango originally made its trip overseas, it was because porteño middle class merchants and dock-workers came into direct contact with foreigners and shared with them something that was local and unique to their culture. The second exodus was politically motivated, and was necessary for the endurance and survival of both the tango and the tangueros.

¹³⁵ Excerpt from an interview from La Semana, on July 21, 1983; As quoted in (Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla 133)
¹³⁶ As quoted in (Azzi, The Tango, Peronism, and Astor Piazzolla during the 1940s and ’50s, 39).
¹³⁷ Spanish for liberty, freedom
New Life Abroad—the Renaissance

The international tango renaissance began in the early 1980s. While tango in Argentina was merely a shadow of what it once was, it was finding new life abroad, and room to breathe and develop. The tango renaissance, more than any other era in the tango’s development, shows the fluidity and adaptability of tango as a cultural form. In Paris in the 1920s, the tango was molded and marketed for a European elite audience. Due to the rise in globalization in the following 63 years, the market for tango broadened, deepened and constantly evolved. “The process by which modernity spreads around the world is not linear. At every step of the way, it is adapted to suit local situation.”\textsuperscript{138} The tango would once again prove that it could evolve with that demand. The tango in the 1980s was like a dandelion puff: the wind began to blow, and its seeds floated far and wide, took root, and produced even more tango. Its power to spread, reach distant audiences, and thrive was remarkable.

The Dance survives—Performance Tango

International ballroom tango remained part of the core competition dances around the world, though its resemblance to the Argentine tango has since nearly vanished. Still, the ballroom version was the primary image of the tango that had prevailed in the West during the period in which Argentina focused inward. With the tango renaissance, the Argentine tango and its unique dance styles would find a spotlight in the West once again. As tangueros fled Argentina and began to market their wares to local audiences in their new homes, renewed interest in the traditional, authentic Argentine tango was born.

The single event that sparked the renaissance is often said to be the show Tango Argentino, which premiered in Paris in 1983. The show, created by Claudio Segovia and Héctor

\textsuperscript{138} (Chan and Ma 7)
Orezzoli, two Argentine expatriates living in Europe, showcased choreographed Argentine tango (as opposed to the spontaneous social tango of the Golden Age), but remained true to its authentic image by taking Golden Age dance practices and building on them, making them more suitable for the stage and adding flair, in the form of stylized dips, jumps and twirls that would not have been found in *milongas* during the Golden Age. It was met with roaring success in Paris, London, New York, and Japan.139 “Everywhere that *Tango Argentino* played, it left behind it a small but enthusiastic group of people determined to learn to dance the Tango.”140 While a number of these people traveled to Argentina in hopes of finding a tango teacher,141 many sought Argentine expatriates to teach them the tango basics, which encouraged more expatriates to share their national dance.

*Tango Argentino* further sparked interest in Argentine tango music. It featured many of the classic *tangueros*, from Villoldo to Troilo, from Pugliese to Piazzolla.142 The show featured five pieces by Piazzolla and its “extraordinary success did not escape [him]. The show certainly revived American interest in the tango. […] Piazzolla surely sensed that the time was ripe for further incursions into “that second homeland of [his, that he had] still to conquer.”143 Thus, Piazzolla, who was looking to spread his *nuevo tango* to the world, was ready to share his musical wealth with the audiences that had been so enthused by tango. “And there began to be an active market for tango teachers, principally in Europe, the United States and Japan, and also for tango shows and tango recordings.”144 Record companies even began to re-release

139 *(Denniston 94)* See the Appendix for more information about the Finnish and Japanese response to the tango.
140 *(Denniston 94)*
141 The military junta in Argentina ended in 1983, and democracy was restored. Therefore, many tourists began to venture back to Argentina and sought out *tangueros* and dance instructors that had not fled during the 1970s.
142 *(Collier, Cooper and Azzi 188)*
143 *(Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla 249)* Piazzolla grew up partially in New York; this is why he often referred to the United States as “his second homeland.”
144 *(Denniston 94)*
recordings from *tangueros* from the Golden Age, including those of Carlos Gardel, which had been unavailable for decades.

Piazzolla, in particular, found the US market very welcoming and undertook a hugely successful North American tour in August 1987 with his Quintet. This success, among others, allowed him to tour (from Europe, to Turkey, to the Far East), to perform in major venues around the world, such as Avery Fischer Hall in New York, and to collaborate with major musicians. For example, in the late 1980s, Piazzolla performed his work “Five Tango Sensations” with the famous Kronos Quartet at Lincoln Center. His name was becoming more and more recognized in the international realm, which helped in the dissemination of the tango seeds.

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145 Image source: [http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_3skZfxeruAw/Sb1Wm_TPAVI/AAAAAAAAA1s/HGnFopbQ0pQ/s400/astor_piazzolla_bandoneon_2.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_3skZfxeruAw/Sb1Wm_TPAVI/AAAAAAAAA1s/HGnFopbQ0pQ/s400/astor_piazzolla_bandoneon_2.jpg)

146 ([Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla 252](#))

147 The Kronos Quartet is a contemporary classical string quartet from San Francisco, California. They perform a wide variety of musical genres. ([Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla 271](#))
Meanwhile, the tango show was doing so well that it sparked spin-offs and side projects. For instance, two of the dancers from *Tango Argentino*, Miguel Angel Zotto and Milena Plebs, who had starred in the Broadway show from 1986 to 1989, decided to put on their own show. They toured the world with *Tango x 2*, a tribute to tango’s hero and martyr, Carlos Gardel.149 The show, which received high critical acclaim, was a theatrical condensed history of the dance from the Parisian-influenced tango to the spontaneous, improvised tango of the Golden Age, to the more choreographed tango found in many tango shows today that features influences from ballet and modern dance. Plebs, who wanted to create a positive image of Argentina with their show, said, “Argentineans are tired of the image of tango as being sad, and liked only by old people.”150 Our shows are optimistic and accessible to young people. We feel that our performances of *Tango x 2* have been important for the tango in Argentina.”151 While this is true, as it refocused the connection between Argentina and a positive cultural symbol, it also had important effects on non-Argentines, as the market for tango continued to grow. It also appealed to a younger audience, which has been key in reviving the tango.

In 1994, the show *Forever Tango* by Argentine expatriate Luis Bravo premiered in San Francisco and became a sensation. After receiving high critical acclaim on the West Coast, the show moved to Broadway, and then further to fifty cities all over the world, including in Italy, Mexico, Japan, Taiwan, and Argentina. It won many awards, including the Antoinette Perry Award from the Tony Awards from 1997 through 1999.152 “Due to its box-office success the show has been extended indefinitely as an open-ended run [on Broadway]. *Forever Tango* is

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149 (Collier, Cooper and Azzi 191)
150 She is referring primarily to the generation that lived through the Golden Age of tango that was known to be tango’s most loyal customers.
151 Information and quotes from this paragraph taken from (Squires 50)
152 (Forever Tango)
now the longest-running tango production in Broadway history. This show continued to change the image of the tango. For example, the dancers exaggerate some of their movements, leaning into their partners more than dancers would have in the Golden Age. This was a common move by Carlos Gavito, one of the dancers in the show. The image shows him with his partner Marcella.

11 Carlos Gavito and his partner Marcella, demonstrating the exaggerated tango stance found in *Forever Tango*.

This change demonstrates the continued innovation and spontaneity that are characteristic of the Argentine tango. It also impacted the image of the tango, and reemphasized the passion and exoticism that were found in Paris in the early 1900s. This in turn affected tango’s use in performance works by non-expatriates, including its appearance on the big and small screens.

Since the renaissance the tango has seen significant exposure in film as well as on television. Non-Argentines again realized the appeal and the power of the tango, and capitalized

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153 *Forever Tango*  
154 *ToTango.Net*  
155 Image Source: [http://totango.net/gavitowork.html](http://totango.net/gavitowork.html)
on it. Numerous movies feature tangos as do many television series. With the popularization of dance competition television series, such as *Strictly Come Dancing* in the United Kingdom, or *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think you can Dance?* in the United States, tango dancing, both Argentine and ballroom, make frequent appearances. In addition, many movies also use tango in a pivotal way, usually as a selling point.

Some of the films are aimed at portraying important figures in tango’s history. For example, predating the tango renaissance by a few years, the 1977 movie *Valentino* from British director Ken Russell pays homage to tango’s first international movie star, Rudolph Valentino. Another film, whose Hollywood production is currently stalled, focuses on the personal life of Carlos Gardel. It was scheduled to be released in 2010 as *Dare to Love Me.*

Many movies feature scenes with the tango, usually demonstrating the sensual characteristics that have come to be associated with the dance. Martin Brest’s 1992 film *Scent of a Woman* features Al Pacino, who plays a blind former military officer, dancing a tango with much younger co-star Gabrielle Anwar. He says that there are “no mistakes in tango… Not like life… If you get all tangled up, you just tango on.” While cryptic, the quote alludes to the resilience and endurance that tango represents. More notable is that they dance tango to an instrumental version of *Por Una Cabeza*, one of Carlos Gardel’s most famous *tango-canciones*. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s 1994 film *True Lies* opens with him dancing to the same tango with co-star Tia Carrere. The scene does not add to the plot, but sets the tone of the film, and establishes a possible romantic relationship between Schwarzenegger and Carrere. Tangos indeed have become almost a Hollywood cliché for unspoken sensuality.

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156 The reasons for the postponing are unclear. Websites such as [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) no longer have the movie listed. Some internet gossip sites claim it is because Lindsay Lohan was fired from her role and they are looking for a replacement female lead.

157 (Collier, Cooper and Azzi 175)
Other movies explore tango’s nature still more deeply. British director Sally Potter’s 1997 *The Tango Lesson* is one such film. In this semi-autobiographical film, Potter engages Argentine dancer and choreographer Pablo Verón, who danced in the Broadway hit *Tango Argentino*, to teach her how to dance the Argentine tango in exchange for putting him in one of her films. The soundtrack to the movie features some of the great *tangueros*, including Carlos Gardel, Astor Piazzolla, Aníbal Troilo, and Osvaldo Pugliese. This film explores, among other things, the nature of learning the tango, the difficulty in being able to give oneself to the dance fully, and the allure of “authentic” Argentine tango.

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158 Image source: [http://www.stardusttrailers.com/gallery_film/%28220509232615%29scentofwoman_1.jpg](http://www.stardusttrailers.com/gallery_film/%28220509232615%29scentofwoman_1.jpg)
**Tango Music and Musical Hybridization**

As mentioned, the tango renaissance saw the demand for tango music grow, primarily in the United States and Europe. However, the demand was not uniform. On the one hand, the demand for “traditional” tangos by Golden Age artists such as Gardel increased.\(^{159}\) This in part was due to the increased exposure of the great tangueros through tango shows and the exposure of tango in movies. Conversely, a demand for more modern tangos also grew, as younger generations became more interested in the tango. As Piazzolla proved with his *nuevo tango*, tango music is capable of undergoing stylistic hybridization and enduring popularity. This has been especially true in the new millennium, with a new type of electronica\(^{160}\) tango, also sometimes referred to as electro-tango.

The concept of electronic tango is not a new one. In fact, Piazzolla, who was determined to be at the heart of all revolutionary tango movements, created an Electronic Octet in 1975, which he called the “electrified group.”\(^{161}\) This group featured the usual traditional tango instruments, but added his son, Daniel Piazzolla, on the synthesizer.\(^{162}\) Piazzolla performed this new tango in Carnegie Hall in New York in April 1976, and brought the house down.\(^{163}\) Again, the seeds had been planted for further experimentation.

Since 2000, there has been a boom in electronica artists taking on the tango. The leading group in this movement is the Paris-based trio known as Gotan Project,\(^{164}\) which released its

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\(^{159}\) (Denniston 95)

\(^{160}\) Electronica refers to a musical genre that includes a wide range of contemporary electronic music. The music can be intended as dance or background music, and features both slow and up-beat tempi.

\(^{161}\) (Azzi and Collier, *Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla* 181)

\(^{162}\) A synthesizer is an electronic instrument that most often features a keyboard, whose sound is generated electronically by synthesizing various sound waveforms.

\(^{163}\) (Azzi and Collier, *Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla* 190)

\(^{164}\) The Gotan Project is based in Paris and is comprised of Argentine expatriates as well as Frenchmen. The name Gotan Project is a play on words, translating to “Tango Project.” In *lunfardo*, the heavily-Italian influenced immigrant slang in Buenos Aires. *Lunfardo* was often found in early tango lyrics. One of the characteristics of
debut album, *La Revancha del Tango*, in 2001. Soon thereafter, a Los Angeles based group produced by Argentine expatriate Gustavo Santaolalla known as Bajofondo Tango Club emerged in the same genre. What characterizes the electro-tango is a “combination of thumping electronic beats and the sound of the *bandoneón*.” This is particularly interesting, because the characteristic sound that sets electro-tango apart from other electronica is the *bandoneón*, which was the instrument of none other than Astor Piazzolla. In one journalist’s opinion, “No doubt about it: The late Piazzolla would have loved Gotan’s daring attempts to transpose tango into the new millennium.” The new electro-tango builds on hybrid ideas from Piazzolla, and meshes local and international practices. In a sense, electro-tango represents the Argentine expatriate *tanguero* experience: the mixing of Argentine and non-Argentine in an attempt to preserve and develop their art form.

Eduardo Markaroff, another Argentine expatriate and one of Gotan’s founding members, even founded his own record label, Mañana Records, which “looks for artistically daring projects that celebrate the roots of tango while looking at its future with confidence.” Markaroff seems to understand tango’s dynamic character and sees continued market potential for the tango. “I think it’s safe to say that [the tango] will always continue to evolve.”

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*lunfardo*, was the practice known as vesre, which comes from the Spanish word “*revés*”; in which syllables would be switch to the opposite order. Therefore “tango” became “gotan.”

165 Spanish for “The Revenge of the tango”
166 Spanish for “Underground Tango Club”
167 (Lechner 44)
168 (Lechner 44)
169 (Lechner 45)
170 Spanish for “Tomorrow Records”
171 (Lechner 45)
172 (Lechner 46)
The tango renaissance revived international interest in the Argentine tango. Argentine expatriates, both tangueros and tango aficionados, shared their cultural form beyond their own borders. This led to a mixing of cultures, and many new younger interpretations of the tango. The lesson learned from the tango renaissance is that it is a truly dynamic and fluid global phenomenon. In 1983 the military junta in Argentina fell, and tango, with all its fluidity and dynamism, again returned to Argentina, more popular than ever.
Tango returns home again, but remains alive everywhere

The year 1983 was a landmark for the tango renaissance internationally, and it was a very important year for the Argentine nation, as well. In 1983, the junta was disgraced and general elections were held, restoring democracy to the nation, and bringing Raúl Alfonsín to power as president. One byproduct of the fall of the military junta was the repatriation of the tango once again by the people of Argentina. Three major forces have been at work in the second homecoming of the tango: the need of the Argentine nation for a positive national symbol; foreign demand for authentic tango, manifested partially through increased tourism to Argentina; and the enthusiasm of younger Argentines, who are adopting the tango and creating new hybrid tangos.

With the international success of the tango renaissance, it is not surprising that the birthplace of tango would try to reclaim its national dance once freedom was restored. Chan and Ma describe this phenomenon: “There is a strong tendency for people to reproduce what seems to be their own cultures. On the other hand, people tend to make use of new cultural resources that are made available to them for renewing their cultural heritage.” Thus, with the influx of tourism caused by the tango renaissance abroad, and foreign hybrid tangos, young Argentine dancers and musicians began to put their own stamp on the tango and market the tango as a purely Argentine product.

173 The word “authentic” can inspire much debate; however, in this instance I am using term to mean provenance authentic, as Young describes it: “We may say that a work is authentic when it is in a style and genre of a given culture and insiders (relative to that culture) have produced it. Otherwise it is inauthentic.” (Young 46)

174 (Chan and Ma 9)
First, though, the nation was in need of a positive image. After the horrors of la Guerra Sucia, music and dance were attractive and lucrative forms of redefinition.

In Argentina when the junta fell, there was a sudden burst of interest in dancing Tango. Tango represented something that was fundamentally Argentinean, and young people who had lived through a horrific period where their pride in their national identity had been stretched to the limits, could once again find joy in saying ‘eso es lo nuestro’—this is ours.175

Symbolically, therefore, the tango represents something larger than just a dance or its music; it is a reminder of better times, an outlet for physical and emotional expression. The success the tango found internationally, symbolically legitimized the tango as a cultural form, and made it attractive to the Argentine people again.

Secondly, the success abroad caused tourism in Buenos Aires to flourish.176 Tango enthusiasts and newcomers alike flock to Buenos Aires to visit the streets where tango was born. “Much of the modern support of the tango in its birthplace comes from outsiders, especially tourists, whose images of the tango must therefore be accommodated.”177 Therefore, many areas that are more touristic tend to feature more tango shows and shops with various tango paraphernalia, including tango posters, books, and recordings.178 “Most of Buenos Aires’ tango clubs now cluster in San Telmo, confirming their tourist orientation by their location.”179 This has created a split in the tango found today in Buenos Aires: tango for tourists, and tango for

175 (Denniston 93)
176 Tango tourism started after the fall of the military junta in 1983 in response to the popularity of Tango Argentino, and other tango shows. Since 2002 when the Argentine economy recovered from an economic depression, however, the tango industry has become a large part of the Argentine economy. “The so-called tango economy that is growing 25 per cent a year - triple the pace of overall economic expansion.” (Reuters)
177 (Goertzen and Azzi 69)
178 Regarding the makeup of tourists; most come from the United States, Europe, or Japan. Tourists tend to be more interested in visiting live tango shows, but their role in the demand for tango music is also important: “While live performance for visitors to Buenos Aires provides some financial support for the tango, sales of recordings are also important. Most of these consumers (both fans and souvenir-gatherers) are Latin American, though significant numbers of Japanese, Europeans, and North Americans buy tango recordings, too.” (Goertzen and Azzi 70)
179 (Goertzen and Azzi 70)
locals. While tourists flock mainly to San Telmo for tango, locals know where to find tango elsewhere in the city.

The tango has once again become an enticing symbol of Argentina and its marketing affects all groups of Argentines. “Taken together, the public and private institutions supporting the tango comprise much of the elite, formal side of Argentina’s heritage industry, while heritage tourism constitutes the complementary but much larger populist arm.” This shows tango’s value as an identity symbol for all Argentines, especially porteños.

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13 Milonga at La Confitería Ideal, Buenos Aires, December 2009

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180 In my own experience in visiting Buenos Aires, I have found the following: there are streets where every store seems to have something related to tango in it to draw tourists in. The large tango shows have big signs outside their establishments, and people will stop you in the street and ask if you are interested in seeing a tango show. In some of the other places, however, that are less touristy, I found locals (both young and old) dancing with each other, and they seemed to be regulars at these establishments.

181 (Goertzen and Azzi 71)

182 Photo taken by the author, December 2009, during a visit to Buenos Aires.
And lastly, the younger generations are re-discovering their cultural heritage, both in learning to dance socially at milongas, and also by recreating tango music.

The tango is now undergoing a renaissance in Argentina. As the middle class refocuses attention on the tango, dance studios are proliferating and newspaper coverage of tango events increasing; a new television station devoted exclusively to the tango now supplements the all-tango radio station. These changes reflect an upswing in popularity of the jazz-influences younger tango, particularly the music of Astor Piazzolla, who died in 1992.183

Even the electro-tango, which is perhaps even more revolutionary than Piazzolla’s nuevo tango is turning heads in Argentina. Leandro Herbstein, an Argentine in charge of media relations with Putumayo Records said, “The first Gotan record gave me the opportunity to discover a musical style from my country that had never really interested me before. Now I listen to the vintage recordings and I like what I hear. Gotan had a fantastic idea. They’ve added fire to a genre that had lost steam.”184 Younger Argentines have accepted and internalized the hybridism and dynamism of the tango and have begun to claim it as their own.

One such group that has taken up the tango is the porteño group Tanghetto, which formed in 2001 and has since been nominated for two Latin Grammys. The group has made a name for itself in the world of electro-tango, and even in the larger genre of electronica. Tanghetto, which includes bandoneón, violoncello, acoustic piano, acoustic guitar, electronic and acoustic drums, and electronic samplers and synthesizers, fits comfortably into the electro-tango fusion genre.185 When asked, they confessed that their “principal reference is Piazzolla for his music and for his way of dealing with tango: providing diverse and fresh sounds, trying to do something different and new.”186 Tanghetto was inspired by “communities of Argentines living abroad who come

183 (Goertzen and Azzi 72)
184 As quoted in (Lechner 45)
185 (Gimenez 64)
186 (Gimenez 65)
together to share memories of their country and their music, their feelings of displacement, gathering to rediscover their identity even thousands of miles from their homeland. [...] As if it were a ghetto tango." In this way the group pays homage to Argentina’s recent history, and shows the pride that the tango can produce in Argentines.

The second homecoming of the tango has demonstrated that the tango remains an important part of Argentine national identity. So much so, that the Argentine government felt it was appropriate to petition UNESCO (with the help of the Uruguayan government) to have the tango placed on the world heritage list. In turn, the fact that UNESCO has agreed to add tango to its list and help preserve the tango shows that the tango is understood to be a cultural treasure, one whose history is important to not just one nation, but the world.

The evolution of the tango has been characterized by one transnational flow after another. It is considered to be the national symbol of Argentina on an international level and within Buenos Aires, but it would not be what it is today without its time abroad, where it has been pulled, stretched, changed, and recreated time and time again. The tango is a fluid and very dynamic cultural form that is so closely tied to the history of the modern Argentine nation, that its character reflects it.

Music can be involved in the construction or reconstruction of national identities in both material and symbolic ways. Nation-states continue to promote the idea of music as cultural symbol and/or national product, just as the global market has an interest in

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187 (Gimenez 65)
188 Why and how the Argentine government began the process of the petition, and how the Uruguayan government has factored in is not very clear, and not well documented.
189 While most Argentines will acknowledge tango’s place in Argentine history, not every Argentine, especially those outside Buenos Aires identifies with it. However, since Buenos Aires is the capital of Argentina, it is often assumed (both locally and internationally) that tango applies as a national symbol to all Argentines.
perpetuating and commodifying musical difference at the level of the nation.\textsuperscript{190}

The \textit{argentinidad} of the tango therefore is closely related to and dependent on the international view of the tango. The bottom-line is this: “If the genealogy of cultural forms is about their circulation across regions, the history of these forms is about their ongoing domestication into local practices.”\textsuperscript{191} Appadurai explains that there cannot be a national without an international to frame it; and there cannot be a cultural form that crosses borders without undergoing changes because of its journey. This summarizes tango’s history, and its hybrid nature. It has become the national symbol that it is today because of the international forces that have shaped it for the past century. The tango, therefore, is \textit{porteño}, is Argentine, is foreign, is international, is mine, is yours, is for everyone.

\textsuperscript{190} (Young 37)
\textsuperscript{191} (Appadurai 17)
Appendix

While the following examples do not exactly fit the chronology I set forth in my argument, I find them to be telling and important examples of tango’s widespread appeal and dynamism. Tango found its way to Finland and Japan around the same time that it arrived in Paris, but unlike the rest of its history, the tango in Finland and Japan took a slightly different developmental path, more independent from American and European market forces. These examples show that tango’s popularity is neither fleeting nor based solely on popular trends, but rather exhibits independent development and the creation of a path of this own.

Exotic Foreign Encounters: From Finland to Japan

While the influence that tango has had in Western Europe and the United States has been discussed, and is relatively straightforward, it may seem, perhaps, strange that the tango would have had such tremendous effects in remote corners of the world, such as Finnish villages; or would have traveled as far as Japan. And yet, when examining the tango’s influence on the world, we find that the Finns have adopted tango as a native folk dance, and that Japan still today is fascinated by the tango.

The tango first reached Finland at the time of its first mass export, circa 1913, when some novelty-seeking dance instructors stumbled upon the Scandinavian nation. While it caught on at first, it was not as popular as some of the more traditional European dances, such as the waltz or the foxtrot. Later, however, during World War II and in the post-war period, the tango became a huge hit. At this point, a “modified tango became the central folk dance” of the
nation. As Joseph Chan and Eric Ma explain, “through transculturation and globalization, what was once local is rendered global, and what was foreign is made indigenous.”

Its popularity is based on the strong, somber and pure emotions associated with tango music and lyrics. Various Finnish scholars have agreed that these sentiments speak to the Finnish people on a deep emotional level.

Tango strikes a chord with the Finns because they are, to a large degree, conservative, stubborn, and very serious people. In the Finnish national character, these Nordic traits are often complemented by Eastern European melancholy, pessimism, and even a strange, Arctic kind of masochism—features also found in many tango songs.

Tango’s popularity in Finland peaked in the early 1960’s, before such international sensations as the British invasion began to dominate many Western music markets. However, as part of the 1980’s tango renaissance, there too was a tango renaissance in Finland. New and young artists such as Arja Koriseva and Topi Sorsakoski began releasing new tango, that remained faithful to original forms of Finnish tango, but also included rock’n’roll and pop themes. Even the Finns demonstrate the tango’s hybrid nature. “The popularity of tango, and its influence on pop and rock music in Finland, proves that the genre appeals to enthusiasts around the world.” In Finland, tango influenced pop-music is a major portion of the Finnish-language music market, and even more traditional tango still attracts large Finnish audiences.

Even Piazzolla was attracted by the Finnish love for the tango. In 1990, just two years before his death, Piazzolla performed at a summer festival at Ikaalinen, though the response was disappointing. Piazzolla was confused by the Finnish version of the tango, calling it, “very European, not Argentine.” Meanwhile, the Finns were frustrated by the violent style of tango.

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192 (Goertzen and Azzi 69)  
193 (Chan and Ma 7-8)  
194 (Isokangas 78)  
195 (Isokangas 78)  
196 (Isokangas 1)
Piazzolla had been developing. One critic described Piazzolla’s music as “nonsense you can’t make head or tail of.”\(^{197}\) This shows that there are various interpretations of what the tango truly is, and that there is no single, “correct” answer.

And yet, tango lives on in Finland on TV, on the radio, in dance halls, and in many other forms. Many restaurants and even small bars in Finland have dance floors or small spaces designated for dancing the tango.\(^ {198}\) Ilpo Hakasalo, author, journalist, and leading historian of the Finnish tango, went so far as to say that “tango can be considered the only truly Finnish form of popular music. […] If there is anything originally Finnish in Finnish rock music, it is the same melancholy tango is known for. Call it the spirit of tango.”\(^ {199}\)

Japan also caught the tango fever early on. In the early twentieth century, Japan imported cultural forms from all over the world. One such import was the Argentine tango. The tango found its way to Japan as early as the 1920s, and has existed there since in a variety of forms. The Japanese imported tango directly from Argentina, as well as from Europe. Thus, Japan’s image of tango was not a unified one.

Regarding tango dancing, the *porteño* style was largely ignored, and the European versions became immensely popular. The French and English versions of the tango were targeted and marketed to different sectors of Japanese society. The French tango was a luxury good suited to the Japanese aristocracy; whereas the British ballroom style was mass produced

\(^{197}\) Information and quotes from this paragraph taken from (Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla 275)
\(^{198}\) (Huuhtanen 74)
\(^ {199}\) As quoted in the Billboard article, (Isokangas 78)
and aimed at the Japanese middle class. The Argentine style of dancing was largely ignored until the 1980s. Japan picked up tango dancing from British ballroom dancing instructors in the 1930s. This version of the tango is still the style most frequently danced in Japan today. The ballroom version of the tango is a much more conservative and less physical adaptation of the Argentine dance, but this seems to have suited the Japanese quite well. As a Japanese ballroom instructor explained, “Japanese people are not drawn to show affection like the latinos; we don’t hug, kiss, and agitate like [them].”

The music was a different story. The Japanese imported all forms of tango music, though Argentine tango music was a sensation. Japanese musicians also began to create their own tangos, in the style of the great Argentine tangueros. All-Japanese orchestras became popular, and often ironically gave their bands such names as Orquesta Típica Porteña or Orquesta Típica San Telmo. Even more curious is the fact that they would often perform on stage dressed in gaucho attire, perpetuating the Parisian and Hollywood stereotypes that Gardel and others tried to change. One of the most famous Japanese tango artists of the era that coincided with the Golden Age was Ranko Fujisawa, dubbed “the queen of the tango” in Japan, whose tango-canciones, sung in transliterated Spanish, became very popular back in Argentina. She even traveled to Argentina in 1953 to perform for Argentine audiences.

Historically, tango was allowed to prevail in the Japanese music market, because of political alliances. During World War II, when the Japanese government banned Western music, few exceptions were made. They included the music from fascist Germany and Italy, and the

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200 (Savigliano 186)
201 As quoted in (Savigliano 183)
202 Spanish for “Typical Orchestra from Buenos Aires” or “Typical Orquestra from San Telmo”
203 Information from this paragraph taken from (Savigliano 173)
fascist-sympathetic Argentina. This meant that tango was allowed to provide a “substitute for the banned modern West.”

Tango remained a semi-popular dance and musical style in the decades after the war, only to experience a revival with the internationally touring tango shows, such as Tango Argentino and Forever Tango, which experienced great success in Japan. In the late 1980s, for example, Piazzolla toured Japan for the only time in his life. Matti Kemiläinen, a director of music publishing Finnish for a Finnish music company stated that “Japan is the most promising market for Finnish tango, because the Japanese love sad, melodic music like this.” So it seems as though the sentiments behind the tango, the exoticism of the tango, is what is attractive to the Japanese, not necessarily any particular kind of tango.

But perhaps the most important aspect of Japan’s fascination with the tango is its effects on Argentina’s sense of national identity. As Argentine dance historian Marta E. Savigliano writes,

“Japan’s acceptance and valorization of the tango legitimates our existence as a nation, culture, and people. But it is more than that. Japan is, to argentinos, the Far East, far away, over there. The tango in Japan means that our tango is even there. It is thrilling, flattering—our farthest flung, least likely cultural conquest.”

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204 (Savigliano 187)
205 (Azzi and Collier, Le Grand Tango: The Life and Music of Astor Piazzolla 260)
206 As quoted in the Billboard article, (Isokangas 78)
207 (Savigliano 170)
Author’s Note about the Cover Art:

The cover art is original, and created with Photoshop Elements by the author. The image, however, is a distortion of a photograph I found on the internet.208

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Bibliography


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