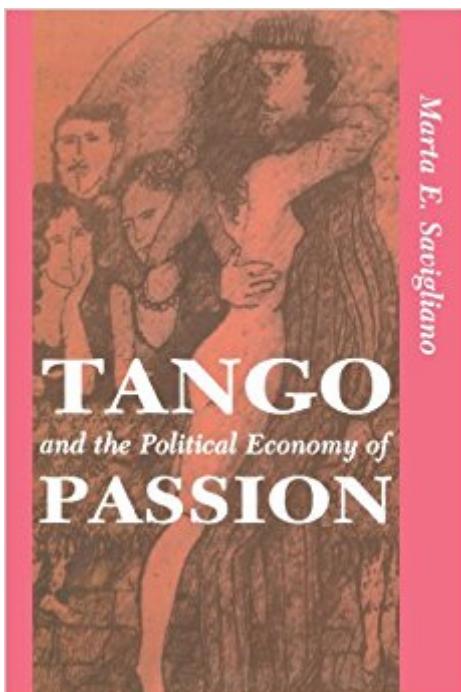


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# Tango And The Political Economy Of Passion (Institutional Structures Of Feeling)



## Synopsis

What is tango? Dance, music, and lyrics of course, but also a philosophy, a strategy, a commodity, even a disease. This book explores the politics of tango, tracing tango's travels from the brothels of Buenos Aires to the cabarets of Paris and the shako dansu clubs of Tokyo. The author is an Argentinean political theorist and a dance professor at the University of California at Riverside. She uses her "tango tongue" to tell interwoven tales of sexuality, gender, race, class, and national identity. Along the way she unravels relations between machismo and colonialism, postmodernism and patriarchy, exoticism and commodification. In the end she arrives at a discourse on decolonization as intellectual "unlearning." Marta Savigliano's voice is highly personal and political. Her account is at once about the exoticization of tango and about her own fate as a Third World woman intellectual. A few sentences from the preface are indicative:

"Tango is my womb and my tongue, a trench where I can shelter and resist the colonial invitations to "universalism"; a stubborn fatalist mood when technocrats and theorists offer optimistic and seriously revised versions of "alternatives" for the Third World, an opportunistic metaphor to talk about myself and my stories as a 'success' of the civilization-development-colonization of América Latina, and a strategy to figure out through the history of the tango a hooked-up story of people like myself. Tango is my changing, resourceful source of identity. And because I am where I am outside, tango hurts and comforts me: "Tango is a sad thought that can be danced." Savigliano employs the tools of ethnography, history, body-movement analysis, and political economy. Well illustrated with drawings and photos dating back to the 1880s, this book is highly readable, entertaining, and provocative. It is sure to be recognized as an important contribution in the fields of cultural studies, performance studies, decolonization, and women-of-color feminism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book explores the politics of tango, tracing tango's travels from the brothels of Buenos Aires to the cabarets of Paris and the shako dansu clubs of Tokyo.

Marta E. Savigliano is assistant professor of dance history and theory at the University of California at Riverside.

I'm happy with both books. thank you

This book is basically unreadable. I tried several times to wade through it and eventually gave up. I am sure there are some valuable points here but they are under deep layers of academic self indulgence. Tango dancers beware! This book is more about political theory than the dance.

Histories of the Argentine tango are often polemical. Questions of propriety, national identity and social position have colored and distorted the perceptions of both authors and readers. In this tradition, Marta E. Savigliano, Assistant Professor of dance history at the University of California, Riverside, explores the history of the Argentine Tango as a dance form using sex/gender, wealth/class and color/race categories. As a woman, a feminist and a dancer of tango, Savigliano is willing to investigate aspects of the tango that both attract and disturb many people. What is different and most provocative in Savigliano's history of the tango is her exploration of the sex-gender dynamics. Her description of tango includes its emotional context: "As a powerful representation of male/female courtship, stressing the tension involved in the process of seduction, the tango performance has gone through several successive adjustments as it has been adopted and legitimized by the upper classes and by Western hegemonic cultures." Savigliano's legitimization road introduces us to upper-crust Argentine lads slumming in the brothels of Buenos Aires, takes us through left-bank Paris of the 1910s, explains romantic reinterpretations of tango as it became THE dance of the Argentine middle class by the 1940s. We even visit more recent

Japanese tango revivals. Is the tango a display of unequal male-female power relationships? Who seduces whom? Savigliano speaks as someone who knows well the tango, notably the heart and soul and the passion-tension in the dance. She views the tango woman not as a victim, but as a co-conspirator. The follower may not lead the tango, but she often knows more about what's happening than the leader: "Translated into tango choreographic terms, [Tango] lyrics suggest that milonguitas could provoke the dance (call the attention of their target through their glances, figure, and dancing abilities) and tempt the class/race status quo into motion, but they would never lead or "mark" (marcar) in the moment at which the special steps were performed. So Savigliano's answer is that the follower provokes and teases, and maybe controls the leader's heart and intentions, even while the leader is choreographing the dance, in spite of the fact that the economic power relationship may be quite unequal. There are not many English language histories of the tango, so Savigliano's effort is a welcome contribution. On the whole, the writing style is accessible for an intelligent reader, although sometimes the academic approach is over-stressed and other times it is too artistic or impressionable. The strength of this book is that human emotions and the male-female dynamic of tango have been brought into its historical analysis. The tango dance is quite unusual in this regard because without the experience of dancing tango an armchair historian simply pursuing primary-source material would miss some of the most important elements no matter how deep the investigation. Tom Stermitz Chautauqua Publishing

Extremely helpful as part of my research for my graduate thesis.

In response to the reviewer below - why a non-academic would bother to try and read a book containing the phrase "political economy of passion" in its title is beyond me. What did s/he think it would be like? This is one of those books that is absolutely incredible for those with the formation to read it, and probably completely meaningless to those without: those who don't have a graduate education ought to be scared off by the title, as intended. Don't blame a book because you don't happen to fall within its target audience: simply look for something that's more within your abilities.

I couldn't agree more with Mr. Stermitz.-student of dance and cultural sociology

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