



Review: [Untitled]

Reviewed Work(s):

Tango and the Political Economy of Passion by Marta E. Savigliano
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This extraordinary work contains interviews with and performances by about one hundred flamenco artists, both famous and obscure. Washabaugh's treatment of *Rito y Geografía* personifies his interpretive approach: to read such documents as texts that reveal more about the agendas of their author-producers and the political climate in which the films were made than about the personalities or art of their subjects. For instance, in his chapter on women in flamenco he shows how the series producers helped reshape the dichotomous and restrictive gender images of the Franco period. In contrast to the invisibility of women in Franquista politics and the widespread association of flamenco with the exclusively male settings of taverns and bordellos characteristic of the time, female flamenco performers are prominent in *Rito y Geografía*, where they are presented as powerful familial figures of irrefragable honor. In these sequences wine appears not as a symbol of debauchery but as an element in the rites of Andalusian domestic life. In other chapters Washabaugh further deconstructs the *Rito* series in relation to its promotion of flamenco as an element of Gypsy identity and reveals the complex, dialogic nature of intent and effect involved in its production.

Washabaugh's deconstructive, text-oriented approach, the historical sweep of much of his analysis, and his heavy use of secondary sources for background distance this work not only from more positivist theoretical orientations but also from anthropology's ethnographic enterprise. With the exception of a very useful description of the formal contents of the *Rito y Geografía* series and the author's discussions of this material, there are few new data in this book. This is not to say that Washabaugh lacks interest in the direct encounter as a tool of anthropological understanding. His infrequent but well-chosen personal anecdotes belie such an assertion. So does his very perceptive treatment of the flamenco Body, the final, ineffable core of the art and the key to its power to affect us. Nonetheless, it is through his specific and very sophisticated theoretical frame—not through the process of ethnographic encounter—that Washabaugh has advanced our understanding of flamenco to a new stage. In my opinion those who would study flamenco as an embodied art will still need to do so through full participation, not only in the world of aficionados and scholars, but in the core of the art form, performance itself.

Tango and the Political Economy of Passion.
MARTA E. SAVIGLIANO. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995. 289 pp., index, illustrations.

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This is not a book that can be picked up and read from beginning to end in the usual linear fashion. It is an embodied story that has to be felt, heard, tasted, sung, and danced. Any illusions to the contrary are dispelled by Savigliano's two introductions—the first that begins with opening the tango

box, and the second, much more familiar in its neatness. Seduced and comforted by this orderliness, we are brought up again by an aside on the "micropolitics of reintroducing": "Tango is not an example; it is the main ingredient in this exercise in decolonization. It is an inviting metaphor that asks theories to dance, corporealized in the specificity of sweaty, sensual, fully efforted bodies" (p. 4).

Exile is named only once, in the preface, where the author notes the intimate association of tango and exile. But in a primary sense the book is about exile if we understand that to mean being away from one's home in contexts where the symbols that signify home are misunderstood or appropriated. The tango is exiled, appropriated, returned, and Savigliano too is exiled in the person of a Latina, a woman, an intellectual. So the tango becomes home and Savigliano's tango method "is an attempt to poke fun at scholarly exercises that alienate, immobilize, and justify nonsensical politics by logically, rationally, and academically making sense" (p. 17).

How does this tango method accomplish such a critique and, at the same time, reveal something very fundamental about the politics of passion, gender, exoticism, race, and colonialism (including post-, neo-, and de-)? We experience imagined tango performances narrated by the choreocritic, let passages of poetry in Spanish and English wash over us, scan double columns of authorial discourse with commentary by *tangueros*, feel the magic of counterspells, and fall under the spell of Don Beto of the "simmered erotic passion" (p. 226).

At the center of this feast of the senses are Savigliano's descriptions of dance. Whether you like it or not, you find yourself in the body of the dancers. Here is just one example:

you cannot afford to let anything drop. Your ears start buzzing and the whizzing in your hairs stretches your spine, tail heavily held down to the ground, weak knees but a strong pulling, curving your neck at the top, lifting your shoulders in upheaval. If this is the case, and you clearly feel that unless your feet start moving endlessly, you have lost your balance, you are ready for it. Arrogant and defiant, burdened and ready to tango. Step after step, the outer edge of the ball of each foot sliding as close as possible to the ground, leaving clouds of dust behind you; knee against knee as in making fire; a slight torsion at the waist turning shoulders and hips into opposite alignments and a casual but definite grave thrust. [p. 157]

Unorthodox but perfect in its power to put you in the middle of the dance. And as your body tangos, you know, as you never knew before, exile, appropriation, and resistance. Caught up in the seduction of the tango, your attempts at resistance "carry along old traces, recombine old stereotypes with new territories; rejected identities stick to new desires" (p. 70). Caliban must use Prospero's language even to curse him (p. 220).

We learn about the tango in its exilic wanderings and transformations, especially in the very different settings of France and Japan. But do not expect an Arthur Murray primer on *tangueando* (tangoing).

If there is a criticism to be made of this extraordinary book, it is the disjuncture when Savigliano leaves her embodied voice for the disembodied voice of the intellectual. The shift is abrupt and unwelcome though it may be part of the tango-method, making us painfully aware of the colonialized Other.

You can “read” this book as *“La Otra,”* observing its observations from the safe distance of a scholarly exercise. It is better to abandon the familiar and absorb it in the way in which it was created—out of the heart and body and mind but always “knee against knee as in making fire.”

***The Informal City.* MICHEL S. LAGUERRE. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. xvi + 180 pp., notes, references, index.**

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What do the semilegal street vendor, the gardener, and the manager of the big firm have in common? Besides having the city as a common arena, they also engage in activities that are not always recognized by the formal system as it is represented by the official authorities of the city. The street vendor obviously engages in activities that are not approved by formal authorities, but the gardener, who does not register for taxation, and the manager, who bends the rules of the company to get things done, also engage in activities that constitute an important but often hidden dimension of urban life—the informal.

This dimension is the main focus point in Michel S. Laguerre's book *The Informal City*. The city in question is the San Francisco–Oakland metropolitan area, from which Laguerre draws his empirical data about informal activities. His aim is to create a formal analytical structure by which it is possible to identify relationships between the formal and the informal. Despite being a book on informality, it is strikingly formal.

One important distinction to which Laguerre draws our attention is that between “raw” and “cooked” informality. Activities that are in opposition to, and in need of hiding from, the formal system are raw, as opposed to activities that are condoned—cooked—by the system. “Cooked” informality often serves as a necessary ingredient in a formal system in order to make it function more smoothly. It is an often noted, but seldom analyzed, fact that if everyone in a system strictly abides by the rules, the system will eventually cease to function. Therefore, a formal system, in order to function, must create safety valves of informality. Laguerre makes an important point by stating that informality cannot be defined in an essentialist mood. Informality, regardless of whether it is “raw” or “cooked,” must be constructed in relation to formality. That is why informal activities always take place in symbiosis with the normal, formal society. Neither could function without the other. This is the reason why there must be contact areas in which the informal can be transformed to the formal, and vice versa. The informal must also have its own geography.

Certain parts of the urban area are more suited to informal activities than others, as are certain parts of office buildings. Laguerre states that informal space is formal space turned informal; thus spaces in themselves are not formal or informal. The relation between the formal and the informal is always a social one, defined by relations between people. And if informal space is a social construction, and here Laguerre refers to Foucault, it is also political. Formal space is often created through the political sphere, and, since informal space is intertwined with the formal, informal space must also be political.

The fact that the informal is a social construction also leads to a recognition of the fact that the informal is processual. People are always located in different stages of the process of moving in or out of the formal. Laguerre notes different ways in which the formal is tied to the informal in the political sphere. The informal can, for example, provide a way to save face or to get out of an embarrassing situation. It can also serve as a backstage rehearsal where political compromises are made and strategies developed.

Commercial firms comprise another of Laguerre's examples that pinpoint the meaning of informality. In hiring, training, and managing people, informal procedures play a pivotal role. Gossip communicated through informal talk may have multiple effects: formally outstanding applicants for jobs may be turned down, or an inability to learn the informal knowledge about when and when not to break the rules may mean that an employee will not succeed in the firm. Often there is a “godfather” with whom an employee must relate in order to succeed in the informal game of the firm. I can only note in passing that an analysis of the academic world from Laguerre's perspective should prove very revealing. In one of the last chapters of the book Laguerre addresses the question of interethnic relations. Laguerre identifies the fact that minority groups are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis the formal political system because they often lack access to the informal arenas that are intertwined with formal political arenas. Different ethnic enclaves provide the base for informal political activities, but this form of informality is not linked to the informality of the mainstream political sphere. One of Laguerre's concluding remarks is in view of this, that informal practices not only strengthen minority organizations, but also hinder the process of gaining access to political power.

As I stated previously Laguerre's book is very formal. It would have benefited from more empirical exemplifications—or more “meat on the bones,” as we say here in Sweden. At the same time, the formality does provide the analytic tools with which to regard the hidden dimension of the city. For researchers engaged with this dimension of city life, Laguerre's concepts help clarify thoughts, as well as provide very useful complements to other works such as Michel de Certeau's nearly poetic descriptions of everyday life.

***Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe.* BARBARA DALY METCALF, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. xix + 264 pp., illustrations, notes, works cited, contributors, index.**