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*Antioch University - PhD Program in Leadership and Change*

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RHYTHMS OF REBELLION:  
ARTISTS CREATING DANGEROUSLY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

SUSAN J. ERENRICH

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership & Change Program  
of Antioch University  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

August, 2010

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled:

RHYTHMS OF REBELLION:  
ARTISTS CREATING DANGEROUSLY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

prepared by

Susan J. Erenrich

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy in Leadership & Change.

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date

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date

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Philomena Essed, Ph.D., Committee Member

date

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Stewart Burns, Ph.D., External Reader

date

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### **Dedication**

In loving memory of my mom and dad, Wilfred and Louise Erenrich. I think about them  
and miss them every day.

## **Acknowledgements**

“What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from” (T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, as cited in Wiwa, 2001, xi).

Where does this story begin? Where does it end? Like most narratives, it has a beginning, middle, and end, but they are superficial boundaries. In actuality, “Rhythms of Rebellion: Artists Creating Dangerously for Social Change” was launched long before I entered Antioch’s Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program. The journey will continue beyond the dissertation defense. Even so, there were many people who assisted me along the way. Too many to include now; but you know who you are. I would like to take a moment, however, to express my appreciation to the ones who played prominent roles during this scholarly sojourn.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my awesome Chair, Jon Wergin. Jon and I forged a meaningful alliance early on. He is the consummate professional and my best Antioch pal. He supported me throughout this adventure; trusting me as I pushed through traditional academic borders, even when neither of us knew where I was going or at what point the pilgrimage would come to a close. Most importantly, he allowed me to follow my heart.

Laurien Alexandre is the sister I never had. As program director, she always had my back. As my advisor, she rooted me on. And, as a member of this committee, she encouraged me to finish the race. Laurien is the reason I am here. Our first conversation occurred during the developmental stages of the program. After a 12-year doctoral search for the perfect place to hang my hat, Laurien convinced me that Antioch was an

ideal match. It was. Enrolling in this institution was one of the most significant decisions I have made in my life. Thank you, Laurien.

Philomena Essed is a kindred spirit. We both joined the Antioch higher education experiment in July of 2005, Philomena as a new faculty member, and I as a budding enthusiastic student. We immediately clicked. A smile or a nod from Philomena from across the room provided comfort and affirmation, putting me at ease in a setting that could be quite contentious at times. Philomena was also a valuable resource. She is responsible for securing my interview with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. I waited 26 years to meet this man, who is one of East Africa's most prolific writers, and a focal point in this study. I am forever grateful to Philomena for helping to arrange this opportunity and for serving on my dissertation committee.

Stewart Burns is my external reader. Our paths have never crossed. I look forward to making his acquaintance after my defense.

I would like to give a shout out to Deb Baldwin, the Antioch Leadership and Change librarian. Deb taught me how to maneuver around the extensive collection of books and journals contained in the system. As a result, I was able to take advantage of desired obscure documents, which enhanced my study.

My heartfelt thanks to Augusto Boal for his extraordinary Theatre of the Oppressed annual spring gatherings at the Brecht Forum in New York City. His workshops transformed my life. Without Augusto's influence and mentorship, this dissertation would have gone in a totally different direction. Sadly, Augusto passed away on May 2, 2009. I was not ready to say goodbye.

On December 11, 2008, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o charitably granted me an interview. A substantial portion of our conversation is accentuated in the text. Ngũgĩ generously shared his time, wisdom, and insights. The dialog was consequential and lasting. Our get-together was one of the highlights of the dissertation process.

Words can never adequately express my gratitude to the countless Mississippi Civil Rights Movement veterans, volunteers, and artists who welcomed me into their lives, entrusted me with their most precious thoughts, and participated in my projects. I am indebted to each and every one of them. The enclosed portrait barely touches upon their contributions to the freedom struggle in the United States. Hopefully, it still captures the essence of a courageous band of brothers and sisters, who took on America, shook her to her core, and changed the world.

Guy and Candie Carawan warrant special recognition. They eagerly and conscientiously proofed the initial Mississippi Caravan of Music draft portrait, and provided crucial edits and information, which helped fill historical gaps. Candie also forwarded an unpublished paper she authored on Zilphia Horton. A portion of her research is included in my dissertation.

A number of secondary sources, familiar with the featured artists, served as congenial consultants and material collaborators. They include Donaldo Macedo, Richard Schechner, Julian Boal, and Staughton Lynd. Their knowledge proved invaluable.

Lucy Bonner dug deep into the Amnesty International London archives and located Ngũgĩ’s Prisoner of Conscience file. The dossier aided in the crafting of Ngũgĩ’s motif.



The Fifth Avenue Apple Store One-To-One Trainers assisted me throughout my academic exploration. On a weekly basis, they patiently advised me of the latest technology, helped me convert and enhance my interviews, provided instruction and ingenuity as I developed my dissertation presentation movie and keynote address, and taught me computer shortcuts. They all deserve medals and wage increases.

Brad McKelvey, my best friend and compatriot was always by my side. For 26 years, he has been my rock. Brad consoled me through all of my doctoral trials and tribulations, he humored me during the developmental stages of this odyssey, he provided friendly antidotes as I sifted through mounds of content-related material, and intently listened to every word in this document as I read them aloud over the telephone.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my mom and dad. Wherever you are, this moment is for you. I miss you. I love you.

## **Abstract**

On December 14, 1957, after winning the Nobel Prize for literature, Albert Camus challenged artists attending a lecture at the University of Uppsala in Sweden to create dangerously. Even though Camus never defined what he meant by his charge, throughout history, artists involved in movements of protest, resistance, and liberation have answered Camus' call. Quite often, the consequences were costly, resulting in imprisonment, censorship, torture, and death. This dissertation examines the question of what it means to create dangerously by using Camus' challenge to artists as a starting point. The study then turns its attention to two artists, Augusto Boal and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who were detained, tortured, and imprisoned because they boldly defied the dominant power structure. Lastly, the research focuses on a group of front-line artists, the Mississippi Caravan of Music, involved in the contemporary struggle for civil rights in the United States. The individual artists and the artist group represented in the dissertation are from different parts of the globe and were involved in acts of rebellion, resistance, revolt, or revolution at varying points in history. Portraiture, a form of narrative inquiry, is the research method employed in the dissertation. The qualitative approach pioneered by Harvard scholar Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot "combines systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities and scientific rigor" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). The dissertation extrapolates concepts from the traditional literature and expands the boundaries to make room for a more integrated understanding of social change, art, and transformational leadership from the bottom up. Artists and artist groups who create

dangerously is an area often overlooked in the field. The electronic version of this dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, [www.ohiolink.edu/etd](http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd).

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## Chapter I: Introduction

On December 14, 1957, after winning the Nobel Prize for literature, Albert Camus challenged artists attending a lecture at the University of Uppsala in Sweden to *create dangerously*. He ended his speech with a passionate plea to the artists to immerse themselves in the thick of battle:

Great ideas, it has been said, come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear, amid the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, the gentle stirring of life and hope. Some will say that this hope lies in a nation, others, in a man. I believe rather that it is awakened, revived, nourished by millions of solitary individuals whose deeds and works every day negate frontiers and the crudest implications of history. As a result, there shines forth fleetingly the ever-threatened truth that each and every man, on the foundation of his own sufferings and joys, builds for all. (Camus, 1988, p. 272)

Even though Camus never defined what he meant by his charge, throughout history artists involved in movements of protest, resistance, and liberation have created dangerously. Slaves sang “No More Auction Block For Me” under their breath, out of earshot of the master as a statement of purpose or defiance; songwriter Joe Hill courageously faced a five-man firing squad on November 19, 1915 after working tirelessly with the Industrial Workers of the World; following the September 11, 1973 Chilean coup, folksinger, Victor Jara, boldly stood in Santiago’s stadium before he was tortured, beaten, electrocuted, and machine-gunned to death; Musicians United For Safe Energy (MUSE) demonstrated, performed, and raised money for the anti-nuclear movement; Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali known for his political criticism of Israel, was mortally wounded after being shot in the face by unknown persons in London in 1987. Their art served as a form of dissent during times of war, social upheaval, and political unrest. Many artists have also participated in demonstrations, benefit concerts,

and have become philanthropists in support of their favorite causes. Often, these artists have been overlooked or given too little attention in the literature on leadership and social movements, even though the consequences for creating dangerously, quite often, were costly resulting in imprisonment, censorship, torture, and death.

“Rhythms of Rebellion: Artists Creating Dangerously for Social Change” examines the question of what it means to create dangerously by using Camus’ challenge to artists as a starting point. It is a question I have contemplated for quite some time.

As a cultural activist who spent the past three decades working for social change, I have made a concerted effort to study artists who have created dangerously and made a significant difference in this world. Many of them participated in projects I spearheaded. Others showed up in my work: portraits of courageous movers and shakers who stood up to social systems in the face of tyranny. This dissertation is a continuation of that journey. It builds upon my past, informs the present, and shows promise for the future.

Even though my interest in art as activism began in 1968 when I attended my first demonstration against the war in Vietnam, it was 1982 before I chose to bridge the gap in my own life between straight activism and art as a tool for social change. I went to Cambridge, Massachusetts for a three-week intensive workshop with the Wallflower Order Dance Collective. The collective was founded in Eugene, Oregon in the 1970s. Themes during the early years were feminist in nature. As the collective grew, the company’s attention shifted to issues of global importance, such as South Africa, Chile, and Central America. Through dance, theatre, music, sign language, and the martial arts, the Wallflower Order powerfully delivered their message to every one who crossed their path. The experience was transforming. After three weeks of technique, Wallflower



repertory, and collective choreography, which culminated in a sold out benefit performance with proceeds donated to women of war-torn El Salvador and women in prison, I found my calling. Not only was I going to create dangerously, I was going to paint portraits of fallen unsung heroes and heroines who were no longer here to tell their stories.

I enrolled in American University's master's program in performing arts. My first semester, I choreographed *Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida* for the fall concert. A description of the dance follows.

A woman clad in revolutionary garb burst onto the dark stage. She was running from DINA, the secret police in Chile. When the U.S. backed military coup toppled the democratically elected Popular Unity Party on September 11, 1973, General Augusto Pinochet and his henchmen wreaked havoc on the country. The woman on stage feared for her life. She slowly kneeled next to a rocking chair clutching one of its arms. Another woman with a photo album cautiously took her place in the chair as three musicians hung in the background. The woman with the photo album gently rocked and read. One line in English, another in Spanish:

Michelle Pena Herrera, 27, was arrested by the DINA on June 20, 1975 in Santiago, Chile. Following her arrest she was seen at Villa Grimaldi, one of the notorious torture centers, but since then she has neither been seen nor heard from. (Near, 1978, album notes)

The music began, a haunting eulogy for the disappeared—*hay una mujer desaparecida en Chile* (there is a woman missing in Chile). *Y la junta sabe donde esta oculta, muriendo* (and the junta knows where she is hiding and dying).

The woman next to the rocking chair released her grip and began to move. The memory of President Salvador Allende's last speech on Popular Unity Radio Stations gave her strength. His words boomed over the airways:

I am certain that the seeds we have sown in the conscience of thousands and thousands of Chileans cannot be completely eradicated . . . neither crime nor force are strong enough to hold back the process of social change. History belongs to us, because it is made by the people. (Jara, 1998, p. 226)

In sign language she narrated the story—the people of Chile will not be silenced. Pinochet can disappear, torture, and murder the good people of our nation, but he will never kill ideas. The struggle will continue. The woman on stage acted out the brutality unleashed after the coup. This was Chile's September 11th. Throughout the dance, the woman clothed in revolutionary garb took on the portraits of eight women who disappeared, a snapshot of lives snuffed out.

- Michelle Pena Herrera
- Nalvia Rosa Mena Alvarado
- Cecilia Castro Salvadores
- Ida Amelia Almarza
- Clara Elena Cantero
- Elisa Del Carmen Escobar
- Eliana Maria Espinosa
- Rosa Elena Morales

The musicians hummed and the woman in the rocking chair spoke again, one line in English, the other in Spanish:

I hate to think about torture, whether in Chile, the Philippines or the U.S.  
 Detesto pensar en la tortura, ya sea en Chile, en Filipinas or en Estados Unidos.  
 But not thinking about it doesn't make it go away.

Pero el no pensar en ella no la hace desaparecer.  
 And the effect of fascism is in all of our lives.  
 Y el efecto del fascismo permea todas nuestras vidas.  
 So. Michelle (and thousands of others). We call out to you . . . for you and for ourselves.  
 Michelle (y miles de otras). Te llamamos . . . por ti y por nosotras. (Near, 1978, album notes)

One last line eerily sung in perfect harmony—and the junta and the junta knows.

The lights dimmed. An empty chair rocked back and forth.

I choreographed this dance for the tenth anniversary of the coup in Chile. The three musicians on stage, Steve and Peter Jones, and April Powers, originally sang the song, written by Holly Near, for the annual Letelier/Moffett commemoration.

On September 21, 1976, a bomb planted in Orlando Letelier's automobile while he slept, exploded on Embassy Row near Sheridan Circle in Washington, D.C. Orlando's legs were severed, killing him instantly (Freed, 1980). Orlando, a Chilean economist who served as an ambassador to the United States during Salvador Allende's presidency, went into exile after the coup and was working at the Institute for Policy Studies at the time of the blast. Ronni Karpen Moffitt, a junior staffer at the Institute, died along with Orlando. Her husband Michael was injured, but survived. April Powers, one of the singers in the dance was Isabel Letelier's administrative assistant. Isabel, an accomplished sculptor inspired this piece. At the time, it was the worst act of terrorism on American soil.

For four nights, we presented the dance to full houses. The audience did not know how to react. Should they clap? There was always a delay. As the political climate changed in Chile, so did the end of the dance as I resurrected it during subsequent anniversaries:

Missing in Brazil  
 Missing in Uruguay  
 Missing in Guatemala  
 Missing in El Salvador  
 Hay un hombre  
 Hay un nino  
 O los ninos  
 Hay una mujer desaparecida  
 A spirit sings in Chile  
 New lives, new songs are rising up  
 A spirit lives in Chile  
 New lives, new songs  
 In Chile. (Near, 2002, Insert Booklet)

Similar to the portraits in the commemorative piece for the women who disappeared after the 1973 Coup in Chile, this dissertation paints elaborate motifs of two artists and one artist group who created dangerously. Two portraits focus on artists who were detained, tortured, and imprisoned. The third portrait examines a group of front-line-artists who were committed to the struggle for civil rights in the United States. Although these artists took risks, they returned home physically unscathed. All of the artists represented in the dissertation are from different parts of the globe and were involved in acts of protest, rebellion, resistance, revolt, or revolution at varying points in history.

### **Three Portraits**

Throughout history, artists and artist groups from all parts of the globe have created dangerously, sacrificing much to struggles of protest, resistance, and liberation. Their spirits live on in the hearts of those left behind. With so many choices and limited space, selecting portraits for this dissertation was a difficult task. I consulted friends and colleagues, and put out a call for names on numerous websites. In the end, I chose artists and an artist group who have a deep emotional connection to my past: artists and an artist

group portrayed in choreography or ones affiliated with Cultural Center for Social Change projects. The Cultural Center for Social Change is a labor of love organization I founded in 1991 to (a) educate the public about historic, social, and political movements in this country and abroad; (b) collaborate with artists involved in projects for social change; and (c) provide arts programming to underserved populations. Like the mission of the Cultural Center for Social Change, this dissertation covers arts genres from across the spectrum. The following artists and artist group are included in this dissertation.

**Augusto Boal.** Augusto Boal was a political activist, director, playwright, author, teacher, chemical engineer, a major innovator of post-Brechtian theatre, and the father of Theatre of the Oppressed. He served as Artistic Director of the Arena Theatre in São Paulo from 1956 to 1971. In 1964, his theatre productions were censored after the Brazilian coup and, in 1968, during the state of siege, he boldly produced and directed Feira Paulista de Opinião (São Paulo's Fair of Opinions). After an 80-page script came back to him from the state censor with 65-five pages cut, Augusto had enough. Augusto thought:

How can an artist work under a dictatorship if the artist is the body who, when free, creates the new, and the dictatorship is the body which, by shutting people up, preserves the old? Art and dictatorship are incompatible. The two words loathe each other! (Boal, 2001, p. 266)

The show went on with the original script intact, an act of civil disobedience. When the military arrived, artistic solidarity had its say. "The artists decreed a general strike in the city's theatres and came to join us. Never before had there been such a concentration of artists per square centimeter: no one was missing. Even the most timid turned up" (Boal, 2001, p. 266). The dictatorship caught up with Augusto in the 1970s. He came under attack, resulting in his imprisonment, torture, and exile. Augusto returned to Brazil after

the political climate changed. He continued to create dangerously until his death on May 2, 2009, spreading the seeds of the Theatre of the Oppressed system he devised.

**Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.** Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is one of Kenya's most prolific authors. Always on the side of the poor and oppressed, he writes about economic injustice and cultural domination, encouraging his readers to liberate themselves by resisting the powerful forces that hold them down. In the 1970s, while a professor at the University of Nairobi, Ngũgĩ was invited to participate in a literacy project sponsored by the Kamĩĩĩĩĩũ Community Education and Cultural Centre in Limuru, his home village. He co-authored a popular play, which agitated the neocolonial government. Kenyan authorities promptly shut down the theatrical production. Ngũgĩ was arrested and detained in a maximum-security prison for almost a year. He lost his job at the University of Nairobi. After his release, he rejoined the Kamĩĩĩĩĩũ venture and drafted another controversial script. The performance was banned, the community organization was deregistered, and the open-air theatre built by the local peasants and workers was smashed to the ground. Ngũgĩ went into a self-imposed exile. Currently, he is the director of the International Center for Writing and Translation at the University of California, Irvine.

**Artists in the Mississippi Caravan of Music.** In the summer of 1964, close to 1,000 college students from the North joined civil rights workers in a dangerous operation to bring about social reforms. Brave soldiers in this domestic war were united with artists in this pivotal, historic moment known as the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. One group, the Caravan of Music, joined forces with the infantry on the ground. They went south for varying periods of time, traveling and performing at more than 30

projects in the Magnolia State. The Caravan was the cultural arm of the Freedom Summer Project. Bob Cohen, the director of the Caravan of Music wrote about the organizing experience in a 1964 issue of *Broadside* magazine:

Singing is the backbone and balm of this movement. Somehow you can go on in the face of violence and death, cynicism, and inaction of the FBI, the indifference of the federal government—when you can sing with your band of brothers. (Cohen, 1999, pp. 182-183)

### **Working Questions for Creating Dangerously**

Besides telling the stories of the above named cultural activists, this dissertation attempted to establish benchmarks for the create dangerously phenomenon, which goes beyond Camus' directive. Camus is not very clear in his challenge to artists, leaving room for misinterpretation by leadership scholars, and others, who have taken the speech out of context. Through the analytical inquiry devised below, I was able to shed light on the topic by determining whether the artists and artist group created dangerously and if they had, ascertain how. Questions that guided me through this exploration included do artists and artist groups create dangerously when they:

1. Threaten the social, economic, and political status quo?
2. Mobilize for systemic change?
3. Introduce new practices and tactics into a community?
4. Openly express the hidden transcripts of opposing views?
5. Keep the stories of repressive power alive?
6. Assist ordinary people usually locked out of the political process to write their own scripts (i.e., popular education)?
7. Lead without authority?

These questions are based upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework and decades of reflective practice. As an artist, activist, and student of social movements and change, I built a foundation representative of educational training in sociology, conflict analysis and resolution, the performing arts, and leadership and change. At the heart of my sojourn are the writings of scholars, organizers, and artists who have impacted my life in a profound way such as Paulo Freire, Ella Baker, Guy and Candie Carawan, Augusto Boal, Saul Alinsky, Myles Horton, Howard Zinn, Staughton Lynd, Albert Camus, Ronald Heifetz, James C. Scott, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Scores of authors of the vast scholarship on social movements and change, revolution, rebellion, resistance, dissent, protest, revolts, and liberation shaped my understanding of these concepts. There are too many to name and the aforementioned ones are directly linked to the create dangerously questions fashioned for this dissertation.

The guiding questions for this work also come from deep self-reflection and observation of on the ground involvement in various movements of protest, resistance, and liberation. From the battlefields of the Civil Rights Movement to the encampments and settlements of Brazil's Landless Worker's Movement, I have participated, documented, or peripherally observed mobilization efforts culminating in publications, audio recordings, performances, educational programs, or some form of direct action.

By developing and defining Camus' create dangerously directive, this dissertation bridges a major gap in the literature. Artists and artist groups have played significant roles in struggles against oppression from all parts of the globe. Their platform—visionary, revolutionary, and transforming—helped to collapse many repressive regimes. Quite often, their actions, like the artists and artist group represented in this dissertation,



were costly, resulting in censorship, imprisonment, torture, and death. By catapulting artists and artist groups, who created dangerously into their rightful place in history, “Rhythms of Rebellion: Artists Creating Dangerously for Social Change” will connect them with others, who have left a rich legacy for future generations of cultural activists and ordinary citizens who want to change the world.

### **How This Dissertation Related to Leadership and Change**

Albert Camus, in his 1957 address challenged artists to create dangerously. Leadership scholar Robert Greenleaf (2003) took Camus’ challenge out of context and applied it to servant leadership. This dissertation puts the question “what does it mean to create dangerously?” back into context and proposes to answer that question in the broad terms Camus intended, but never specified. In doing so, this dissertation extrapolates concepts from traditional leadership literature and expands its boundaries by making room for a more integrated understanding of social change, art, and leadership. For instance, Howard Gardner’s (1993) study, *Creating Minds*, and James McGregor Burns’s (1978) introduction to transforming leadership are used as a foundation to make way for radical thinkers, such as Paulo Freire, Myles Horton, Ella Baker, Howard Zinn, Staughton Lynd, and Saul Alinsky, who, like Camus, have theoretical ideology grounded in practices of social change combat. Ronald Heifetz’s illustration of leading without authority and martyrdom goes to the heart of the create dangerously phenomenon espoused by Camus who believed “Art advances between two chasms, which are frivolity and propaganda. On the ridge where the great artist moves forward, every step is an adventure, and extreme risk. In that risk, however, and only there, lies the freedom of

art” (Camus, 1988, p. 268). “Danger makes men classical, and all greatness, after all, is rooted in risk” (Camus, 1988, p. 271).

In spite of the strides made in the study of leadership, there is very little written about artists’ offerings to the field. Howard Gardner (1993) is one of the few leadership scholars that discuss artists in his book, *Creating Minds*. Although the book makes a bold attempt at highlighting artists from the 20th century who made significant breakthroughs in their respective professions, his argument never touches artists’ contributions towards societal change.

### **How This Dissertation Contributes to a Victory for Humanity**

As the two artists and artist group in this study sought to achieve some victory for humanity, so too, does this dissertation. Every cultural activist mentioned in this dissertation, without exception, joined forces with others to sever the chains of oppression in lieu of accepting a more docile comfortable existence. By telling their stories, this dissertation preserves their memory and serves as a catalyst and blueprint for future activists and organizers who take to the streets in hopes of moving one step closer to the creation of a more just, egalitarian, and peaceful world.

“The only real committed artist is he who, without refusing to take part in the combat, at least refuses to join the regular armies and remains a free-lance. The lesson not of selfishness, but rather of hard brotherhood” (Camus, 1988, p. 267).

### **Methodology**

Portraiture, a form of narrative inquiry, is the primary research method used in “Rhythms of Rebellion: Artists Creating Dangerously for Social Change.” Social historian, Joseph Featherstone (1989), referred to portraiture as a “people’s scholarship,

[a scholarship in which] scientific facts gathered in the field give voice to a people's experience" (p. 375).

We hear the sound of a human voice making sense of other voices, especially those not often heard, voices of women and of people of color. We trace the line of a story set in a historical context, placing the actors in a long-running moral and political drama. The text itself enacts the writer's deepest moral and political values, the eclecticism of method and material. (pp. 375-376)

"Rhythms of Rebellion: Artists Creating Dangerously for Social Change" falls into Joseph Featherstone's (1989) categorization of portraiture as "people's scholarship" (p. 375). The narratives of the artists and artist group, standing alone and in tandem with the collective whole, will help advance a new kind of social change agenda. Voices formerly stifled due to issues of race, class, age, lack of respect, perceived irrelevance, and interest by many media outlets and publishers, and death, have a space for their stories. Testimonials relayed to the masses by the artists and artist group in the heyday of various struggles through multi-mediums served as emergency narratives, mobilizing a nation against social injustice, repression, and violence. Their stories formed the basis of social movements then, and serve to inspire and motivate generations of activists now.

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, who pioneered the method, described the goals of portraiture in a book she co-authored with Jessica Hoffmann Davis. They wrote that the research method aims to:

Combine systematic, empirical description with aesthetic expression, blending art and science, humanistic sensibilities, and scientific rigor. The portraits are designed to capture the rightness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural non-text, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences. The portraits are shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one participating in the drawing of the image. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3)

Unlike the way Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) used portraiture, by interviewing, observing, and interpreting the stories of living persons, in this dissertation, I veered from mere imitation of traditional uses of the method and tailored it to suit this study. First, and foremost, I provided space for the artists to express themselves in their own words. Staughton Lynd (1997), the acclaimed historian and labor lawyer, named this type of relationship between the protagonist and professional associate accompaniment or history from the bottom up. The concept of accompaniment originated with Archbishop Oscar Romero from El Salvador. It is a political theory that empowers ordinary people to speak for themselves (Lynd, 1997, p. 6).

Molly Andrews (2007) discussed the concept of “giving voice” (p. 43) in *Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change*. She believed marginalized individuals and communities are quite capable of vocalizing for themselves. Quite often, qualitative researchers pride themselves with the ability to assist others in the articulation of their narrative identities. They listen to their stories, and try to make sense of the world in which they live. They “privilege their [our] own ability to know the meaning of someone else’s life, and rarely question the harmful effects that their [our] work may inadvertently cause” (p. 43).

Additionally, I relied upon historic documents and the artists’ written texts to help fill in the gaps. Others, like De Young (2004), have used portraiture in this manner. In De Young’s doctoral dissertation, “Mystic Activists: Faith Inspired Leaders Working for Social Justice and Reconciliation,” interaction with research participants occurred through formerly published works and narratives. My dissertation is a combination of past usages of the method with a specifically chosen adaptation to fit the spirit of this

document. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1995) has also employed the method in an assortment of ways—her book, *I've Known Rivers: Lives of Loss And Liberation*, served as my template. The research is an insightful in depth glimpse into the lives of six African Americans.

In 2005, Lawrence-Lightfoot discussed her aspirations and dreams for this special form of narrative inquiry:

So in the end—it is my hope that portraiture—this dialogue between science and art, this pursuit of truths, insight, and knowledge, projected by the imagination, this “people’s scholarship”—will spread to places where it will be challenging, illuminating and useful. (p. 15)

This dissertation aspires to do just that.

It pushes the boundaries of conventional wisdom to illustrate the importance of the create dangerously phenomenon. The narratives take many forms: songs, literature, testimonials, and theatre. These narratives, argued Davis (2002), are:

The primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. In stories, whether of individuals or collectivities, the meaning of events is created by showing their temporal or causal relationship to other events with the whole narrative and by showing the role such events play in the unfolding of the larger whole. (p. 12)

## **Contents of Dissertation**

Chapter 2 of “Rhythms of Rebellion: Artists Creating Dangerously for Social Change” is a literature review. The review covers the following topics: artists in social movements; artists as change agents; Albert Camus, Joe Hill, and artists/artist groups creating dangerously for social change; working questions for creating dangerously; martyrdom and the cost of struggle; transforming leadership, popular education, and artists/artist groups creating dangerously for social change; Joe Hill’s rallying cry (“don’t mourn—organize!”).

Chapter 3 comprises the five components of portraiture methodology: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. Even though qualitative research methods tend to overlap with elements of arts-based research, case study, phenomenology, historic inquiry, and life story, chapter 3 will concentrate primarily on portraiture.

Chapter 4 through chapter 6 include the three portraits of Augusto Boal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the Mississippi Caravan of Music. At the end of each profile is the lessons learned section where I provide a brief synopsis of the artist or artist group in relation to the create dangerously theme.

Chapter 7 is a mock symposium. It is an innovative vehicle for analyzing and integrating the data. It provides readers an opportunity to compare and contrast the portraits in a holistic way.

I have included an extensive bibliography and an appendix, which includes Albert Camus' entire create dangerously speech delivered on December 14, 1957 at the University of Uppsala in Sweden.

## **Conclusion**

Camus' (1988) profound literary statement to artists has permeated the global cultural fabric for decades. Artists have risen up. Some created so dangerously that they perished in the heat of battle. In the face of danger, others have taken risks and survived to tell their tales. Through it all, whether in life or death, their commitment to justice, freedom from oppression, liberation, and dignity have won many victories for humanity. History has shown that they are a force with which to be reckoned. Through this dissertation, I hope readers will experience the triumphs and sorrows of these heroic

figures, reflect on their commitments and contributions, and continue to dream a better world full of possibility:

Whatever the future may be, they will bear the same secret, made up of courage and freedom, nourished by the daring of thousands of artists of all times and all nations. Yes, when modern tyranny shows us that, even when confined to his calling, the artist is a public enemy, it is right. But, in this way tyranny pays its respects, through the artist, to an image of man that nothing has ever been able to crush. (Camus, 1988, p. 270)

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Preface

Prior to being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, Albert Camus granted an interview titled, “The Artist and His Time.” The conversation was published in *Demain*, issue 24-30, October 1957. Camus discussed art and his alliance with the masses. “The aim of art, the aim of a life can only be to increase the sum of freedom and responsibility to be found in every man and in the world” (Camus, 1988, p. 240).

I feel a solidarity with the common man. Tomorrow the world may burst into fragments. In that threat hanging over our heads there is a lesson of truth. As we face such a future, hierarchies, titles, honors are reduced to what they are in reality; a passing puff of smoke. And the only certainty left to us is that of naked suffering, common to all, intermingling its roots with those of a stubborn hope. (Camus, 1988, pp. 239-240)

Even though this dissertation sets out to define Camus’ Nobel create dangerously challenge, it is important to provide some context of art and the artist and how these concepts are used throughout this paper. Ron Eyerman believed that “definitions of art are notoriously difficult. . . . The idea of art is a contested concept” (Eyerman & McCormick, 2006, p. 16). Eyerman (as cited in Eyerman & McCormick, 2006) dated the modern concept of art back to the 1400s:

Questions concerning what “art” means, in the double sense of what art is and what is art, are relative to time and place. This seems to be a truism today, but that view, too, is historically contingent. For in the unfolding of the history of art, one finds strong claims about universal meaning concerning what art is, and, in addition, what we call art today carries something of those earlier designations about its meaning. The same claims about the historical nature of the meaning of art can be applied to the meaning of the artist. (p. 17)

Eyerman (as cited in Eyerman & McCormick, 2006) provided his own definition of art, relevant to this text because it is grounded in social movement thought and theory:



Art is a frame of reference in constant interaction with a social context. While all social activity is creative, art is defined by this self-understanding. As a cognitive praxis, art is a space for individual and collective creation that can provide society with ideas, identities, and ideals. An imaginative space for the imagination, as well as an ascribed and conditioned social practice, as the production of culture perspective would have it. Like a social movement, art opens a space for experimentation, social and political as well as aesthetic. (p. 19)

In 1898, Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, to whom Camus referred frequently in his writings and conversations, defined art in this manner: “Art is that human activity which consists in one man’s consciously conveying to others, by certain external signs, the feelings he has experienced, and in others being infected by those feelings and also experiencing them” (Tolstoy, 1995, p. 40). Camus was hoping to write “what he called to friends, not jokingly, his *War and Peace*” (as cited in Lottman, 1981, p. 6). Camus wrote about Tolstoy in his journal. “He was born in 1828. He wrote *War and Peace* between 1863 and 1869. Between the ages of 35 and 41” (Lottman, 1981, p. 6).

Besides the aforementioned definitions of art, this dissertation will also adhere to definitions espoused by two playwrights, both in the spirit of Albert Camus’ life and work. First is Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), the German playwright who passed on one year before Camus won the distinguished prize for literature: “Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it” (Brecht, n.d.).

Second is Augusto Boal, the father of Theatre of the Oppressed and one of this dissertation’s create dangerously artists, who transformed my life in a major way, personally and professionally. Augusto emphasized, in his book *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, the importance of defining “what Art this will be” (Boal, 2006, p. 84). “We of Theatre of the Oppressed, are a tendency within an Art greater than ourselves, which of course contains infinite contradictory tendencies” (Boal, 2006, p. 84).

The art in this dissertation is diverse and covers different mediums. The songs and scripts were fashioned by artists, whom were involved in populist campaigns, in hopes of obtaining a better world. Even though all of the portraits include professionally trained practitioners, the term *artist* will be used loosely as defined by Augusto Boal because this definition goes to the heart of the create dangerously phenomenon:

Every human being is an artist; that every human being is capable of doing everything that any one human can do. Perhaps we may not all do it as well as each other, but we are capable of doing it—not better than others, but each better than ourselves. And every time we do it, we are more capable, and better. I am better than myself, I am better than I think, and I can become better than I have been.

This is what art is for: we believe that the act of transforming is transformatory. (Boal, 2006, p. 84)

Boal (2006) quoted Jose Marti, the Cuban poet killed during the War of Independence against Spain in 1895: “‘The best way of saying, is to do!’ And more: *to be is to do and to do is to be*” (p. 85).

Two other terms require some explanation in this preface to the literature review: social change and social movements. For this dissertation, social change is defined as:

A slight shift, an alteration, or a reversal in the status quo that brings about institutional, or systemic change. Social change is embodied in new laws, procedures, and policies that alter the nature of institutions and, in time, the hearts and minds of people. (Collins & Rogers, 2000, pp. 35-36)

Arts of social change projects and the artists who spearhead them are the ones who insist on addressing the root causes of problems rather than the alleviation of symptoms. In most cases, the goal is systemic change.

A social movement, as defined by Jim Riker (2001), is:

The shared activity of diverse actors comprised of individuals, nonprofits and other social organizations to mobilize citizens at all levels of society to influence politics broadly, and ultimately to achieve genuine social change as it concerns

the rules, processes and practices of society, the market, or the government.  
(p. 18)

Riker coined this definition while employed at the Union Institute in Washington, D.C.

Similar to the concepts of art and artists, scholarly analysis of social movement terminology and praxis is controversial. Reed (2005), Director of American Studies and Professor of English at Washington State University, noted “more than 50 years of scholarly analysis has not generated an agreed upon definition of social movements” (p. xiv). Reed believed that this is “less of a problem than one might think, since both ordinary folks and ordinary scholars, though they may argue about borderline cases, know a movement when they see one” (p. xiv).

Even though Riker’s (2001) succinct definition is represented in this dissertation, thoughts on the subject by Sidney Tarrow (1998) are captured here because he is one of the leading social movement scholars in this country:

Contentious politics emerges in response to changes in political opportunities and constraints, with participants responding to a variety of incentives: material and ideological, partisan and group-based, long-standing and episodic. Building on these opportunities, and using known repertoires of action, people with limited resources can act contentiously—if only sporadically. When their actions are based on dense social networks and connective structures and draw on consensual and action-oriented cultural frames, they can sustain these actions in conflict with powerful opponents. In such cases—and *only* in such cases—we are in the presence of a social movement. (p. 10)

Besides familiarizing the reader with terminology, introducing other elements of chapter 2 is necessary in this stage of the dissertation process. First, Joe Hill’s portrait has been inserted into the literature review. It is a tool for organizing the relevant written materials and helps demonstrate portraiture methodology. More importantly, the vignette is an illustration of a create dangerously artist who became a martyr for a cause. The other cultural activists represented in this study survived their activities. They were able

to reflect upon their adventures and document their stories. Joe Hill died. By including his portrait, the reader is able to span more of the create dangerously landscape.

Joe Hill was a singer-songwriter, working class hero, and American labor martyr. Melvyn Dubofsky (as cited in Smith, 1984), writing for *The New York Times Book Review*, referred to Hill's songs as "the very epitome of guts and gallantry" (p. back cover). The reader will learn more about Joe Hill as a catalyst for change later in the text.

While listening for Joe Hill's story, the reader will hear about the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), otherwise known as the Wobblies. Joe Hill was a staunch member and created dangerously for their cause. The Wobblies were a band of revolutionaries, socialists, anarchists, and trade unionists. At their first convention held in 1905, the IWW formed one of the early social movements in the United States. Joe Hill and his compatriots developed an extensive literature and lore all its own. "They used their songs, poems, stories anecdotes, skits, language, and visual symbolism to transmit their own values within the structure of a society they wished to change" (Kornbluh, 1998, p. ix).

Within chapter 2, there is intentional switching back and forth from Joe Hill the artist to the Wobblies, the organization to which Hill belonged. In this case, the artist and movement were interconnected. Whether or not artists involved in movements of protest resistance and liberation prefer "the role of freelancer to that of conscripted soldier" (Sprintzen & van den Hoven, 2004, p. 263), their mission is the same, "to align themselves with the people and articulate their deepest yearnings and struggles for change, real change. Where the state silences, art should give voice to silence" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998, p.129). The artist involved in struggle "paves the way of seeing and

willing a moral universe of freedom, equality, and social justice within and among the nations of the earth” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1998, p. 131). Artists as activists “sleep not to dream, but dream to change the world” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1998, p. 132).

A special intricate relationship exists between artists and social movements. They are encased in what French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu coined the *cultural field*. The cultural field is the “social space where cultural texts exist in relation to each other and in relation to texts in other social, political, and economic fields” (Reed, 2005, p. xvii). The artist and the arts are the key force in shaping, spreading, and sustaining the movement’s culture and through culture its politics. The songs, sculptures, poetry, literature, dance, film, theatre, and murals become personal and movement narratives or a “bundle of stories” that “contribute to the construction of a group’s ‘idioculture’ and are among the interpretive materials from which movement narratives are fashioned” (Davis, 2002, p. 54).

Inserting a portrait into a dissertation literature review is unusual and warrants some additional explanation. By threading the Joe Hill story throughout chapter 2, I attempt “to capture the texture and nuance of human experience” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 6). Opposed to the abstract quality of many dissertations where the literature review stands on its own, as portraitist I seek to use Joe Hill as a way of documenting and illuminating “the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 13). Through this identification, it is my hope that the reader will connect the dots seeing the Joe Hill story as a way of arranging the literature and demonstrating the logic of the create dangerously questions introduced in chapter 1.

In the process, the reader is provided a glimpse of the theoretical framework, which assisted in the crafting of the portraits, and will gain a greater understanding of how portraiture works.

Another reason for the incorporation of the Joe Hill story is language accessibility. If members of academic communities want to broaden the audience for their work, then they must “begin to speak in a language that is understandable, not exclusive and esoteric . . . a language that encourages identification, provokes debate, and invites reflection and action” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 9).

Pulitzer Prize winning author Eudora Welty (1995), whose impact on Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot has been immense, believed:

Writing a story or a novel is one way of discovering *sequence* in experience, of stumbling upon cause and effect in the happenings of a writer’s own life. Connections slowly emerge. Like distant landmarks you are approaching, cause and effect begin to align themselves, draw closer together. Experiences too indefinite of outline in themselves to be recognized for themselves connect and are identified as a larger shape. And suddenly a light is thrown back, as when your train makes a curve, showing that there has been a mountain of meaning rising behind you on the way you’ve come, is rising there still, proven now through retrospect. (p. 90)

Lastly, extensive quotes, lyrics to songs, and Wobbly testimonials are scattered throughout chapter 2. Providing platforms for artists and artist groups to speak in their own voice is at the root of this dissertation topic and the methodology. Theory and practice are inseparable. “Theory is a moment of practice; from the practice is born the theory, and the theory goes back to the practice to be changed and reformulated” (Ferreira & Ferreira, 2008, p. 3).

## Introduction

Approximately 42 years before Albert Camus challenged artists to create dangerously at the University of Uppsala in Sweden, songwriter Joe Hill, a Swedish immigrant, and member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) became one of America's most famous martyrs. On November 19, 1915, Joe Hill was shot by a five-man firing squad in the prison yard of the Utah State Penitentiary. He was 33 years old. His last word was "Fire!" Three of the four bullets went directly into Hill's heart. He was pronounced dead at 7:44 a.m. (Smith, 1984).

Prior to his execution, Joe Hill wrote to Bill Haywood, a founding member of the IWW, otherwise known as the Wobblies. Hill said, "Don't waste any time in mourning. Organize" (as cited in Smith, 1984, p. 172).

He also corresponded with Ben Williams, the editor of the Wobbly publication, *Solidarity*, with his last will and testament:

Tomorrow I expect to take a trip to the planet Mars and, if so, will immediately commence to organize the Mars canal workers into the IWW and we will sing the good old songs so loud that the learned stargazers will once and for all get positive proof that the planet Mars is really inhabited. . . . I have nothing to say for myself, only that I have always tried to make this earth a little bit better. (Joe Hill to editor Ben Williams, *Solidarity*, as cited in Seeger & Reiser, 1991)

My will is easy to decide  
 For there is nothing to divide  
 My kin don't need to fuss and moan  
 "Moss doesn't cling to a rolling stone."  
 My body?—Oh! If I could choose,  
 I would to ashes it reduce  
 And let the merry breezes blow  
 My dust to where some flowers grow.  
 Perhaps some fading flower then  
 Would come to life and bloom again  
 This is my last and final will.  
 Good luck to all of you, Joe Hill. (as cited in Seeger & Reiser, 1991, p. 110)

Born Joel Emmanuel Hagglund, in Gavle, Sweden, he emigrated to the United States in 1902. Once on U.S. soil, he unofficially changed his name to Joseph Hillstrom and then to his pen name, Joe Hill.

In 1910, while working on the docks in San Pedro, California, Joe Hill joined the IWW, one of America's first labor unions. He traveled throughout the West, organizing workers under the IWW banner, composing political songs and satirical poems. Some of his most popular songs include "The Preacher and the Slave," "Casey Jones," "There Is Power in a Union," and "Rebel Girl," written for Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a fiery labor organizer.

In 1914, Joe Hill was arrested in Salt Lake City on trumped up murder charges, for the killing of John G. Morrison, former police officer turned butcher, and his son, Arling. After a controversial trial, Joe Hill was convicted on circumstantial evidence. He maintained his innocence all the way to his grave.

Following his execution, Joe Hill's body was brought to Chicago, where 30,000 mourners marched in one of the greatest funeral processions ever seen in this country. Joe Hill's songs were sung all the way to the cemetery. "As soon as a song would die out in one place, the same one or others would be taken up along the line" (Glazer, 2001, p. 195). Eulogies were delivered in nine languages, including Swedish, Hill's native tongue.

After the funeral, Hill's body was cremated and his ashes were placed into envelopes, distributed to IWW members, and scattered throughout the United States and on every continent. No ashes were dispersed in Utah. Joe Hill said, "I don't want to be found dead in Utah" (Smith, 1984, p. 179).



Joe Hill created dangerously through his music and wit. He was one of the chief songwriters for the Wobblies. His friend, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Joe Hill's "Rebel Girl," said "Joe Hill writes songs that sing, that lilt and laugh and sparkle, that kindle the fires of revolt in the most crushed spirit and quicken the desires for fuller life in the most humble slave" (Smith, 1984, p. 41).

Joe Glazer was a labor organizer, chair and founder of the Labor Heritage Foundation, who recorded more than 30 albums, cassettes, and CDs of labor and political songs prior to his death. Glazer (2001) said of Hill, "He had a knack for turning out easy-to-sing verses for a strike or some other Wobbly cause. He usually set the verses to a popular tune of the time or to a well-known hymn" (pp. 192-193).

Many of Joe Hill's songs were published in the IWW *Little Red Song Book*. The songbook, subtitled, "Songs To Fan the Flames of Discontent" was started by the Spokane, Washington branch of the IWW around 1909. The Wobblies "sold tens of thousands of copies" (Glazer, 2001, pp. 192-193), which were widely used by their members. "It cost 10 cents and could easily fit into a back pocket" (Glazer, 2001, pp. 192-193).

Gibbs M. Smith (1984) revealed the impact of the *Little Red Songbook* in his comprehensive study of Joe Hill:

There have been over thirty editions of the songbook from 1909 to the present time, which have included more than 180 songs. John Greenway has called the IWW songbook "... the first great collection of labor songs ever assembled for utilitarian purposes ... " Over the years, the contents of the "Little Red Song Book" dramatized the class-conscious philosophy of the IWW and reflected in many of the items the spirit, humor, and experiences of migratory and seasonal workers. ... IWW songs were sung on picket lines, in hobo jungles, at mass meetings, during free speech demonstrations-where ever members gathered to agitate for a new world built "from the ashes of the old." (p. 9)

There were numerous songwriters, besides Joe Hill, whose lyrics were published in the *Little Red Songbook*. Among them were Richard Brazier, Covington Hall, Laura Payne Emerson, and Ralph Chaplin, known for “Solidarity For Ever.” They developed the use of labor songs into a fine art. This included the preservation of the memory of their most famous martyr, Joe Hill. After Hill’s execution, numerous songs, poems, and editorials regularly appeared in *The Little Red Song Book*. Included was Ralph Chaplin’s “Joe Hill”:

Joe Hill  
*Murdered by the Authorities of the State of Utah,*  
*November 19, 1915*  
 High head and back unbending-fearless and true,  
 Into the night unending; why was it you?  
 Heart that was quick with song, torn with their lead;  
 Life that was young and strong, shattered and dead.  
 Singer of manly songs, laughter and tears;  
 Singer of Labor’s wrongs, joys, hope and fears.  
 Though you were one of us, what could we do?  
 Joe, there was none of us needed like you.  
 We gave, however small, what life could give;  
 We would have given all that you might live.  
 Your death you held as naught, slander and shame;  
 We from the very thought shrank as from flame.  
 Each of us held his breath, tense with despair,  
 You, who were close to death, seemed not to care.  
 White-handed loathsome power, knowing no pause,  
 Sinking in labor’s flower murderous claws;  
 Boastful with leering eyes, blood-dripping jaws...  
 Accurst be the cowardice hidden in laws!  
 Utah has drained your blood; White hands are wet;  
 We of the “surging flood” NEVER FORGET!  
 Our songster! have your laws now had their fill?  
 Know ye, his songs and cause ye cannot kill.  
 High head and back unbending “rebel true blue”  
 Into the night unending; why was it you? (Smith, 1984, pp. 192-193)

Throughout the decades, others followed suit to ensure that Joe Hill “never died.”

In 1925, Alfred Hayes, a young poet, wrote “I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night.” Earl

Robinson set the words to music several years later and “the song became one of the major factors in the perpetuation of Hill’s story” (Smith, 1984, pp. 194-195).

I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night,  
 Alive as you and me.  
 Says Joe you’re ten years dead,  
 “I never died,” says he,  
 “I never died,” says he. (Seeger & Reiser, 1991, p. 111)

The ballad was recorded by notable artists, among them, Michael Loring, Paul Robeson, and Joan Baez. Other compositions written about Joe Hill were penned by Woody Guthrie and Phil Ochs. Ochs’ song consisted of 22 verses.

Upton Sinclair published a short play in 1924, *Singing Jailbirds*. The jailbirds are Wobblies and their singing revolves around such Hill songs as “The Preacher and the Slave,” “Scissor Bill,” and “The Rebel Girl.” *Singing Jailbirds* was first produced in the late 1920s in Greenwich Village by a group of four young writers, among them Eugene O’Neill and John Dos Passos” (Smith, 1984, pp. 194-195). The show ran for six weeks.

Almost a century after Joe Hill’s execution, his story continues to inspire and generate energy in various circles. Among scholars in the field of leadership, however, Joe Hill the man, the artist, the martyr, the Wobbly, has piqued little interest. In fact, artists in general and artists as leaders in movements of protest, resistance and liberation in particular are often overlooked or given too little attention in the literature on leadership of social change.

In spite of the strides made in the study of leadership, there is very little written about artists’ contributions to the field. Howard Gardner is one of the few leadership scholars that discuss artists in his book, *Creating Minds*. Gardner believed:

Artists create small-scale products, such as preliminary sketches or brief poems, or larger-scale ones, such as murals, operas, or novels. These works embody

ideas, emotions, and concepts, but they are not well described, overall, as efforts to solve problems or to create conceptual schemes. Rather, they are often highly original instances of works within a genre, or attempts to initiate a new genre. (Gardner, 1993, p. 374)

This is not a problem relegated to the field of leadership. Artists and artist groups who create dangerously have been left out of many disciplines. According to Reed (2005), “social movements have had too little to say about culture, and cultural studies scholars have had too little to say about movements” (pp. xv-xvi).

Von Blum agreed, “social and political artists have rarely been given the acclaim they deserve. They receive scant attention in most books, newspapers and journals about social change initiatives” (Von Blum, 1982, p. xvii).

More recently, Raunig (2007) pointed to a field that is “marginalized by structural conservatisms in historiography and the art world” (p. 19). As a consequence, “activist practices are not even included in the narratives and archives of political history and art theory, as long as they are not purged of their radical aspects, appropriated and co-opted into the machines of the spectacle” (p. 19).

These same scholars and others who have attempted to introduce art as activism in their respective fields discuss the value of this age-old traditional form of dissent. None of these authors have a uniform definition, and terminology is used interchangeably: art as activism, the arts of social change, art and revolution, and community cultural development. None of the authors discuss the create dangerously phenomenon. In fact, an exhaustive literature search did not produce any documents on Albert Camus’ Nobel challenge.

Leadership scholar Robert Greenleaf (2003) devoted approximately one page to Camus in his book, *The Servant Within: A Transformative Path*. Greenleaf commended

Camus for “standing apart from other great artists of his time” (p. 38). He quoted from Camus’ Nobel speech. The context, urgency, and intention of Camus’ oratory as it relates to Greenleaf’s theory on servant leadership, however, are difficult to discern due to limited space relegated to the artist.

French intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1945 New York lecture more appropriately summed up Camus’ experiences and placed Camus’ words delivered 12 years later in Sweden in the proper context (as cited in Aronson, 2005). Sartre began his speech by praising Camus, saying he was the best representative of new writers who were profoundly marked by their experience of struggling against the Nazi occupation in France:

In publishing a great many clandestine articles, frequently under dangerous circumstances to fortify the people against the Germans or keep up their courage, they became accustomed to thinking that writing is an act; and they have acquired the taste for action. Far from claiming that the writer is not responsible, they demand that he should at all times be able to pay for what he writes. In the clandestine press not a line could be written which did not risk the life of the author, or the printer, or the distributors of Resistance tracts; thus, after the inflation of the years between the wars when words seemed like paper money which no one could pay for in gold, the written work has regained its power. (as cited in Aronson, 2005, p. 54)

All of the scholars presented in this chapter have tried to fill a void by illustrating significant contributions by artists from all genres involved in movements of protest, resistance, and liberation. Without exception, they argue for inclusion and recognition:

Art is the fountainhead from which political discourse, beliefs about politics, and consequent actions ultimately spring. It should be recognized as a major and integral part of the transaction that engenders political behavior. The conduct, virtues, and vices associated with politics come directly from art, then, and only indirectly from immediate experiences. Works of art generate the ideas about leadership, bravery, cowardice, altruism dangers, authority, and fantasies about the future that people typically assume to be reflections of their own observations and reasoning. (Edelman, 1995, pp. 2-3)

“If revolution can give art its soul, then art can give revolution its mouthpiece” (Raunig, 2007, p. 12).

Since Joe Hill’s execution, artists have also tried to address this grave marginalization of their chosen profession. Pablo Picasso (1984) made the following statement (originally published in 1945):

What do you think an artist is? An imbecile who has only eyes if he is a painter, or ears if he’s a musician, or a lyre at every level of his heart if he’s a poet, or even if he’s a boxer, just his muscles? On the contrary, he’s at the same time a political being constantly alive to heartrending, fiery, or happy events, to which he responds in every way. No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy. (p. 487)

During the Nazi occupation of France, Picasso attended a special gathering with Camus, Sartre, Beauvoir, and others. The gathering took place in Michel Leiris’s living room where an overflow audience viewed a staging of Picasso’s 1920s *Le Desir attrape par la queue*:

Camus was put in charge. He held a large cane with which he struck the floor, French-stage fashion, to indicate a change of scene, and also served as narrator to describe the scenes and to introduce the actors, while directing the cast chosen by Leiris. The reading began at seven; by eleven most of the guests had gone, but the Leiris urged the cast and some close friends to stay beyond the midnight curfew. They drank wine and played jazz records. (Lottman, 1981, p. 297)

Other artists have attempted to address the marginalization problem. In 1987, Mark O’Brien, a founding member of Big Small Theater, a Philadelphia-based organization, was a co-project director of the Voices of Dissent Festival. Following the festival, O’Brien and Little (1990) co-authored *Reimagining America: The Arts of Social Change*. The book “provided a forum for socially conscious artists, cultural presenters, theorists, and activists to share, discuss, and evaluate their work” (p. 9).

More recently, the Annual International Conference on the Arts in Society and Symposium was established. Its mission is:

To create an intellectual frame of reference for the arts and arts practices, and to create an interdisciplinary conversation on the role of the arts in society. They are intended as a place for critical engagement, examination, and experimentation of ideas that connect the arts to their contexts in the world, on stage, in museums and galleries, on the streets, and in communities. (International Symposium on the Arts in Society Program Book, 2007, p. 1)

The first International Conference on the Arts in Society was held in 2006 as part of the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland. A symposium was organized shortly thereafter at New York University in 2007. Art as activism is not the predominant focus of the International Conference on the Arts in Society, but organizers pay close attention to social justice themes and include presentations on the topic.

Even though close to a century separates Joe Hill's life from artists involved in modern day struggles throughout the world, historian Howard Zinn noted:

The parallels are striking . . . the plunging into areas of maximum danger; the impatience with compromises and gradualist solutions; the deep suspicion of politics . . . the emphasis on direct, militant, mass action . . . the migrant, shabby existence of the organizer . . . the songs and humor; the dream of a new brotherhood. (Smith, 1984, p. 1)

These artists did not “stand aside from their time and enjoy the privilege of freedom to create, without accepting the responsibility for the defense of that freedom and the freedom of all whenever and wherever freedom is threatened” (Parker, 1966, p. 149).

Joe Hill, Albert Camus, and the artists and artist group in this dissertation, Augusto Boal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the members of the Mississippi Caravan of Music, put their bodies on the line. They created dangerously.

This dissertation will link these artists and artist group together for the first time attempting to define what Camus meant by his 1957 challenge. The roots of the working

create dangerously questions are described throughout the rest of this section. As stated in chapter 1, the working questions are grounded in the theory and practices of a multitude of disciplines and scholars. The questions are restated here to make them more accessible to readers. Do artists and artist groups create dangerously when they:

- Threaten the social, economic, and political status quo?
- Mobilize for systemic change?
- Introduce new practices and tactics into a community?
- Openly express the hidden transcripts of opposing views?
- Keep the stories of repressive power alive?
- Assist ordinary people usually locked out of the political process to write their own scripts (popular education)?
- Lead without authority?

Joe Hill's story threads the text together and serves as an illustration of the create dangerously theme.

### **Do Artists and Artist Groups Create Dangerously When They Threaten the Social, Economic, and Political Status Quo?**

If the workers took a notion  
 They could stop all speeding trains;  
 Every ship upon the ocean  
 They can tie with mighty chains.  
 Every wheel in the creation  
 Every mine and every mill;  
 Fleets and armies of the nation,  
 Will at their command stand still  
 Joe Hill. (Renshaw, p. 1999, p. 43)

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), founded in 1905 in Chicago, threatened the social, economic, and political status quo. The organization, fondly known



as the Wobblies, welcomed women, immigrants, and African Americans long before other unions. Labor studies scholar, Joyce Kornbluh, discussed some of the groups' contributions on the back of *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*:

The Wobblies from the start were labor's outstanding pioneers and innovators, unionizing hundreds of thousands of workers previously regarded as "unorganizable." Wobblies organized the first sit-down strike (at General Electric, Schenectady, 1906), the first major auto strike (6,000 Studebaker workers, Detroit, 1911), the first strike to shut down all three coalfields in Colorado (1927) and the first "no-fare" transit-workers job-action (Cleveland, 1944). With their imaginative, colorful and world-famous strikes and free-speech fights, the IWW wrote many of the brightest pages in the annals of working class emancipation. (Kornbluh, 1998, back cover)

During the first IWW convention, a Preamble to their Constitution was adopted.

It reads in part:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system. (Kornbluh, 1998, pp. 12-13)

The Preamble was modified in 1908. Hundreds of thousands of copies of the document were printed over the years and distributed throughout the world. It was printed in every songbook and publication. Ralph Chaplin said of the Preamble:

Exploited, homeless, voteless, frequently jobless, and always kicked about from pillar to post, the American migratory worker nailed the IWW Preamble to the masthead and took his stand against the great and powerful of the earth to work out his economic and social destiny without benefit of respectability or law. . . . That was what the unrestrained exploitation and injustice of the early decades of the Twentieth Century did to us. (as cited in Kornbluh, 1998, p. 12)

Joe Hill and the Wobblies addressed the root causes of societal problems within movements of protest, resistance, and liberation. In most cases the goal was systemic change. Conflict with those who held power was often inevitable. Whether the artists

and artist group in *Rhythms of Rebellion* created dangerously by threatening the social, economic, and political status quo will be determined through the crafting of their portraits.

Working question number one—do artists create dangerously when they threaten the social, economic, and political status quo?—is grounded in a theoretical framework explored by multifarious social scientists. Among them is the legendary community organizer, Saul Alinsky, who contended that the power dynamic between the “Haves, Have-Nots, Have-a-Little, and the Want Mores” (Alinsky, 1989, p. 18) generates class conflict. Alinsky, one of the most effective radical community organizers of people’s movements in the United States, saw this paradigm as a setting for “the drama of change” (p. 18):

On top are the Haves with power, money, food, security, and luxury. They suffocate in their surpluses while the Have-Nots starve. Between the Haves and Have-Nots are the Have-a-Little, Want Mores—the middle class. Torn between upholding the status quo to protect the little they have, yet wanting change so they can get more, they become split personalities. (1989, pp. 18-19)

Alinsky (1989) believed within these contradictions and conflicting interests within the have-a-little, want mores “is the genesis for creativity” (p. 19). When organized, this creativity of people struggling for a better world, have enormous power, more than any government:

The unexpected victories—even temporary ones—of insurgents show the vulnerability of the supposedly powerful. In a highly developed society, the Establishment cannot survive without the obedience and loyalty of millions of people who are given small rewards to keep the system going: the soldiers and police, teachers and ministers, administrators and social workers, technicians and production workers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, transport and communications workers, garbagemen and firemen. These people—the employed, the somewhat privileged—are drawn into alliance with the elite. They become the guards of the system, buffers between the upper and lower classes. If they stop obeying, the system falls. (Zinn, 1990, p. 574)

Joe Hill and the Wobblies cleverly took on the elite. They were an intrusion and a menace to existing power arrangements. The looming implication of displacement and disorganization of the status quo unleashed a wave of anger and violence against the challenging groups.

Frederick Douglass, one of the greatest abolitionists of all time wrote about power and struggle in 1857:

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. If we ever get free from all the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and, if needs be, by our lives, and the lives of others. (as cited in Cobb, 2008, inside front cover)

Many scholars from an assortment of disciplines have addressed issues related to the power dynamic between oppressors and the oppressed. With the exception of Howard Zinn, few have included artists or artist groups who threaten the social, economic, and political status quo.

Art is a powerful tool. Artists who utilize that tool for social change, like Joe Hill and the Wobblies, have creatively taken on the power elite leading to significant systemic change. A poem can inspire a movement. A song can spark a revolution. Artists who create dangerously can arouse people and provoke us to think. “When we organize with one another, when we get involved, when we stand up and speak out together, we can create a power no government can suppress” (Zinn, 2007, p. 16).

### **Do Artists and Artist Groups Create Dangerously When They Mobilize for Systemic Change?**

After Joe Hill’s trial, the IWW mobilized its forces and appealed to sympathizers to save his life. Upon reviewing the state’s evidence, the Wobbly newspaper concluded

“that his conviction was unjust [and asked] the many thousands who know Joe through his songs” (Smith, 1984, p. 123) to respond with aid on his behalf. The appeals for help appearing in *Solidarity* were the forerunners of a deluge of articles, songs, poems, letters, and petitions seeking to help Hill.

As part of its appeal to reach supporters, the general secretary of the IWW, William D. Haywood (as cited in Smith, 1984), wrote an essay graphically depicting the tragedy that would occur when Joe Hill was “judicially murdered:”

On that morning as dawn breaks behind the Wassatch Mountains, Joe will be led from the condemned cell into the yard. Surrounded by guards he will be seated upon a rough pine box—his coffin—a bandage will be placed over his eyes, a heart shaped target will be pinned on his left breast over his pulsing, joyful, strong, young heart. A firing squad of six men with five loaded rifles will take their places, with guns to their shoulders. At a signal from the warden, the six hired executioners will pull the trigger, five bullets will tear through the heart of Joe Hill, his tuneful tongue will be silenced forever. No more will his voice be heard in the jungle, in the hall, or on the job.

They are going to kill Joe Hill; he was convicted of murder on the flimsiest kind of circumstantial evidence. If the state takes his life there will be no extenuating circumstances in its favor, except to have killed a man who had done much to solidify the working class. (p. 123)

Haywood (as cited in Smith, 1984) urged readers to raise funds to finance Hill’s appeal for a new trial and to write to Governor Spry of Utah. After insurmountable public pressure, and appeals to the Swedish Government and United States President, Woodrow Wilson, Joe Hill received several reprieves from the deathwatch. As suspected and feared by Utah authorities, the stays of execution gave Wobblies the confidence in its power and methods to continue the fight to save Joe Hill. In an article written for *Solidarity*, “Reflections on Joe Hill’s Reprieve,” the author congratulated Wobbly members for their “indomitable energy” (p. 156) in wresting a workingman from the very

jaws of death, he exulted. “Without using economic weapons, by sheer massed publicity and pressure of opinion, we have gained a point” (Smith, 1984, p. 156).

In the end, the defense campaign, which won the support of the national AFL leadership, the Swedish Ambassador, and President Wilson could not save Joe Hill. The Utah authorities pulled out all of its stops serving as an accomplice in judicial murder.

State persecution was a way of life for the Wobblies. As the organization “grew more effective, the violence directed against its members escalated” (Bird, Georgakas, & Shaffer, 1985, p. 10).

Through its mobilization efforts, “the IWW became a threat to the capitalist class,” said Howard Zinn (1990, p. 324) in *A People’s History of the United States*. They created dangerously and the authorities fought back. “They were attacked with all the weapons the system could put together: the newspapers, the courts, the police, the army, mob violence” (p. 324).

Working question number 2—do artists create dangerously when they mobilize for systemic change?—is firmly planted in Sidney Tarrow’s (1998) theory of contentious politics and social movements:

Contentious politics occurs when ordinary people, often in league with more influential citizens, join forces in confrontations with elites, authorities, and opponents.

Contentious politics is triggered when changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources on their own. They contend through known repertoires of contention and expand them by creating innovations at their margins. When backed by dense social networks and galvanized by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents. The result is the social movement. (p. 2)

Joe Hill and the Wobblies mobilized, bringing new people into oppressive environments. In spite of the violence unleashed by authorities trying to squash their

crusade, Joe Hill and the Wobblies, trudged on even in death, attempting to galvanize the masses. *Rhythms of Rebellion* explored whether other artists and artist groups, such as the ones included in this study, also created dangerously when they rallied for systemic change.

Saul Alinsky (1989) compared the challenges for activists and organizers mobilizing for social change to one of Albert Camus' notorious fictional characters:

Unlike the chore of the mythic Sisyphus, this challenge is not an endless pushing up of a boulder to the top of a hill, only to have it roll back again, the chore to be repeated eternally. It is pushing the boulder up an endless mountain, but, unlike Sisyphus, we are always going further upward. And also unlike Sisyphus, each stage of the trail upward is different, newly dramatic, an adventure each time. (p. 22)

### **Do Artists and Artist Groups Create Dangerously When They Introduce New Practices and Tactics into a Community?**

Beginning in 1906, the IWW introduced a new practice into their organizing efforts, the free speech fights. The Wobblies used the tactic, mostly in the West, as a recruiting mechanism to attract unemployed workers to their cause. Battleground cities included Missoula, Montana; Spokane, Washington; Fresno and San Diego, California.

Approximately 30 free speech battles were conducted from 1907 to 1917. Each followed a similar pattern:

Organizers would issue a call through handbills and press for "foot loose rebels" to come to a certain town where a campaign would be under way. In answer, hundreds of members and sympathizers would arrive by boxcar, attempt to mount soapboxes, and be thrown into jails. Soon the crowded prisons, clogged municipal court machinery, and high costs of supporting extra police and extra prisoners would lead the town fathers to rescind the municipal ordinance against street organizing and to release the jailed radicals. (Smith, 1984, p. 9)

One of the biggest and most memorable free speech fights occurred in Spokane, Washington:

Beginning in 1908, IWW organizers mounted soapboxes directly in front of Spokane employment agencies and urged workers. “Don’t buy jobs.” They crusaded for a boycott of agencies and demanded that employers hire directly through the union hall.

In turn, the employment firms organized themselves into the Associated Agencies of Spokane, which pressured the city council to ban all street meetings after January 1, 1909. For a time the IWW obeyed the ordinance which was applied to other organizations as well. When the ruling was amended to exempt religious groups such as the Salvation Army, the Wobblies decided to fight back.

On October 28, after IWW organizer Jim Thompson was arrested for soapboxing, the *Industrial Worker* sent out a call, “Wanted—Men to Fill the Jails of Spokane.” A follow-up letter was sent to all IWW locals: “November 2nd. Free Speech Day. All lovers of free speech are asked to be in readiness to be in Spokane on that date. . . .

It is of course needless to add that the meetings will be orderly and no irregularities of any kind will be tolerated.”

A five-month campaign defying the street ban began November 2, 1909. On that day, thousands of Wobblies marched from the IWW hall on Front Avenue to court mass arrest.

Speaker after speaker mounted soapboxes to say “Fellow Workers,” before being pulled down by the police, arrested, charged with disorderly conduct, and lodged for thirty days in jail.

Not all the IWW members were able speakers. Many suffered from stage fright. A story is told about the Wobbly who stood on the soapbox, started, “Fellow Workers,” and then in panic yelled, “Where are the cops!” (Kornbluh, 1998, pp. 94-95)

Joe Hill was represented during the Spokane free speech fight. Hill’s song “The Preacher and the Slave,” was introduced by Haywire McClintock, a well-known IWW singer from that part of the country:

Haywire would hide in a doorway with T-Bone Slim. They had a tube and a garbage can lid for percussion and a guitar. A mass of workers would be gathered around the Starvation Army donut dollies. A man would walk by carrying an umbrella and a briefcase and dressed in a tight suit with a string tie and a bowler hat. He looked just like a banker, but functioned like a carny shill. He’d yell, “I’ve been robbed! I’ve been robbed! Help, I’ve been robbed!” Everyone would rush over to him. “What’s the matter, what’s the matter?” they’d ask. When enough had crowded around, he’d shout, “I’ve been robbed by the capitalist system!” And then the boys would jump out from the doorway and start singing Joe Hill’s song:

Long-haired preachers come out every night,  
Try to tell you what’s wrong and what’s right;  
But when asked how ‘bout something to eat,

They will answer with voices so sweet:  
 You will eat, bye and bye,  
 In that glorious land above the sky;  
 Work and pray, live on hay,  
 You'll get pie in the sky when you die.

[That would go for two more verses with the chorus repeated and then it would end:]

Workingmen of all countries unite;  
 Side by side we for freedom will fight.  
 When the world and its wealth we have gained  
 To the grafters we'll sing this refrain:  
 You will eat, bye and bye,  
 When you've learned how to cook and to fry;  
 Chop some wood t'will do you good,  
 And you'll eat in the sweet bye and bye. (Phillips as cited in Bird et al., 1985, p. 28)

The free speech battles were dangerous for the Wobblies:

The boldness and intransigence of the IWW rebels exasperated town officials, aroused wrath and frequent violence among respectable town burghers, and frequently turned the free speech campaigns into bitter, bloody fights. As the *San Diego Tribune* editorialized about the IWW radicals during a 1912 free speech campaign in that city, "Hanging is none too good for them. They would be much better dead for they are absolutely useless in the human economy. They are the waste material of creation and should be drained off into the sewer of oblivion, there to rot in cold obstruction like any other excrement." (Smith, 1984, pp. 9-10)

The hazards associated with participation in free speech fights is further illustrated by Kornbluh (1998) in *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology*:

Besides the intimidation of the prisoners inside the jails, local businessmen organized vigilante committees which terrorized community leaders sympathetic to the free speech campaign. In collusion with the police, the vigilantes would seize prisoners released from jail in the evening, load them into cars, drive out of town, and after beating and clubbing them, warn them not to return to San Diego. (p. 96)

The free speech fight was a formidable weapon for Joe Hill and the Wobblies. They introduced new practices and tactics into their communities, threatened the status quo and were a force to be reckoned with. Through the crafting of the three portraits in



this dissertation, I was able to ascertain whether question number 3 applied to other artists and artist groups who joined similar campaigns for justice.

The theoretical and philosophical framework for working question number 3—do artists and artist groups create dangerously when they introduce new practices and tactics into a community?—is based in the literature of community organizing. Saul Alinsky (1989) discussed tactics at great length in his popular primer *Rules for Radicals*:

Tactics means doing what you can with what you have. Tactics are those consciously deliberate acts by which human beings live with each other and deal with the world around them. In the world of give and take, tactics is the art of how to take and how to give. Here our concern is with the tactic of taking; how the Have-Nots can take power away from the Haves. (p. 126)

Si Kahn (1991), the founder and former Executive Director of Grassroots Leadership, discussed the components of a good tactic in his book *Organizing: A Guide For Grassroots Leaders*:

- A good tactic is winnable.
- A good tactic affects a lot of people.
- A good tactic unites people.
- A good tactic involves people.
- A good tactic is strongly felt.
- A good tactic is simple.
- A good tactic builds the organization.
- A good tactic is fun. (pp. 168-171)

Alinsky (1989) stressed the important element of tactical surprise, which the Wobblies mastered in their free speech battles. “Once a specific tactic is used, it ceases to be outside the experience of the enemy. Before long he devises countermeasures that

void the previous effective tactic” (p. 163). This is why the emergence of new practices is essential within any organizing campaign. Individual artists and groups like Joe Hill and the Wobblies, were forced to be innovative, “reinventing political actions and communication” (Clover & Stalker, 2007, p. 22). This was done “through a creative symbolic language, often carnivalesque and satirical” (Clover & Stalker, 2007, p. 22).

### **Do Artists and Artist Groups Create Dangerously When They Openly Express the Hidden Transcripts of Opposing Views?**

Ralph Chaplin’s (as cited in Smith, 1984) “Joe Hill,” which appeared in the September 12, 1914, issue of *Solidarity*, was the first of many poems about Hill to be written after his arrest.

A rebel we have known for long,  
 Who’s thrilled us often with his song,  
 Has fallen on an evil day –  
 They seek to take his life away!  
 They’d fill his warrior heart with lead  
 And gloat to see him safely dead –  
 His voice forever hushed and still,  
 Our singing, fighting brave Joe Hill!  
 His spirit glorified in the fight –  
 In labor’s sure resistless might;  
 And one big union, staunch and strong,  
 This was the burden of his song.  
 His heart was hot with burning hate  
 Against the bosses, small and great;  
 He told what haughty Sab-cats do,  
 And all about the wooden-shoe.  
 The “Long-haired preachers” feared his name.  
 He filled apologies with shame;  
 While “Mr. Block” so bland and meek  
 With “Scissor-Bill” did take a sneak.  
 Now boys, we’ve known this rebel long –  
 In every land we’ve sung his song –  
 Let’s get him free and he may see  
 The day of our great victory!  
 He made them hate him high and low,  
 They feared his tuneful message so;

He'd fight for us while he had breath –  
 We'll save him from the jaws of death.  
 No harm to him can we allow,  
 He needs our help and needs it now;  
 He's in their dungeon, dark and grim –  
 He fought for us; we'll stand by him. (pp. 123-124)

Public outcry over Joe Hill's scheduled execution reverberated around the globe. Transcripts, once hidden were clearly being openly expressed in the public arena. Three thousand people marched in protest in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In New York City, a giant "Joe Hill Protest Meeting" was held in the Manhattan Lyceum. In San Francisco, four days before Joe Hill would face the firing squad, Tom Mooney, Secretary of the International Workers Defense League was granted permission to present Joe Hill's case at the 35th annual convention of the American Federation of Labor in the hope that a resolution of protest would result and be sent to President Woodrow Wilson and Governor Spry of Utah. A resolution was written and adopted by the assembled delegates. It read, in part:

The Convention of the American Federation of Labor assembled here unanimously adopted the subjoined preambles and resolution:

WHEREAS Joseph Hillstrom, a workingman of the State of Utah, and active in the case of labor, has been sentenced to death by shooting by a Utah court and the date of his execution has been fixed for the nineteenth day of November, nineteen fifteen, and

WHEREAS the circumstances surrounding the said conviction and sentence are such as to make the grounds for this conviction and sentence appear to be utterly inadequate and matters of the gravest doubt in that the evidence was of a purely circumstantial nature and highly improbable and the rights of the said Joseph Hillstrom do not appear to have been sufficiently of all safeguarded, but on the contrary seem to have been violated to such an extent that the said Joseph Hillstrom did not have a fair and impartial trial and

WHEREAS the feeling against the said Joseph Hillstrom as a labor agitator was such as to have militated against him with the jury greatly to his detriment and

WHEREAS we are of the opinion that the said Joseph Hillstrom did not have a fair and impartial trial, therefore be it

RESOLVED by the Thirty-Fifth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor that we urge the governor of the State of Utah to exercise his prerogative of clemency in this case and to stop the execution of the said Joseph Hillstrom and that he be given a new and fair trial and be it further

RESOLVED that the President of the American Federation of Labor is hereby authorized to forward at once copies of these resolutions to the Governor of Utah, to the Board of Pardons of the State of Utah, to the Swedish Ambassador and to the President of the United States and that they be published in the American Federationist and in the official publications of the affiliated unions. May I now prevail upon you to exercise your great influence to at least help in saving the life of Joseph Hillstrom, particularly when there is so much doubt concerning his case.

Samuel Gompers, President, American Federation of Labor (Smith, 1984, pp. 166-167)

Throughout this period, the Wobblies went into overdrive, mobilizing their constituency and reaching out to authorities in Sweden and elsewhere. There was no time for introspection or silence. “Silence,” Camus (as cited in Parker, 1966) said, “implies acceptance of society with all its faults; and since the artist is a part of that society, when he finds certain of these faults intolerable he has no choice but to join in the struggle to correct them” (pp. 149-150).

Working question number 4—do artists and artist groups create dangerously when they openly express the hidden transcripts of opposing views?—is in alignment with James C. Scott, the leading authority on hidden transcripts and the art of resistance. Scott (1990) equated these public acts of defiance against the system with “revolution of the soul” (p. 211). To create dangerously, or openly refuse to accept or comply “with a hegemonic performance is a particularly dangerous form of insubordination” (p. 205).

Scott (1990) believed when previously hidden transcripts become public, like in the Joe Hill case, and succeed:

Its mobilizing capacity as a symbolic act is potentially awesome. At the level of tactics and strategy, it is a powerful straw in the wind. It portends a possible turning of the tables. That first declaration speaks for countless others, it shouts

what has historically had to be whispered, controlled, choked back, stifled, and suppressed. If the results seem like moments of madness, if the politics they engender is tumultuous, frenetic, delirious, and occasionally violent, that is perhaps because the powerless are so rarely on the public stage and have so much to say and do when they finally arrive. (p. 227)

### **Do Artists and Artist Groups Create Dangerously When They Keep the Stories of Repressive Power Alive?**

Ralph Chaplin (1948) remembered when Bill Haywood received Joe Hill's farewell note prior to his execution:

Bill read it without comment, then stared out of the window. I could only see the blind side of his face. He shoved the letter across the desk to Frank Little, who read it aloud, rather stumblingly, to the rest of us:

Goodbye Bill: I die like a true rebel. Don't waste any time mourning—organize! It is a hundred miles from here to Wyoming. Could you arrange to have my body hauled to the state line to be buried? I don't want to be found dead in Utah. —Joe Hill.

Bill scribbled a brief answer: Goodbye, Joe. You will live long in the hearts of the working class. Your songs will be sung wherever the workers toil, urging them to organize. —W. D. Haywood. (pp. 188-189)

Joe Hill became a legendary hero. "His songs-and the story of his tragic life—have lived on in the collective memory even while the political struggles that shaped them, and to which they sought to contribute, have long since disappeared" (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998, p. 58). Artists and artist groups who learned the songs and picked up the baton continued to create dangerously following in the footsteps of Joe Hill and their Wobbly predecessors.

Part of the Wobbly appeal, according to Howard Zinn (1990), was:

Their energy, their persistence, their inspiration to others, their ability to mobilize thousands at one place, one time, made them an influence on the country far beyond their numbers. They traveled everywhere, they organized, wrote, poked, sang, spread their message and their spirit. (pp. 324)

Joe Hill's memory has continued to reverberate around the world for almost a century. Even Utah has celebrated his contribution to workers' struggles. Joe Glazer (2001) recounted an event that took place in his book, *Labor's Troubadour*:

The Utah labor movement and others organized a colorful outdoor festival in Salt Lake City to pay tribute to Joe Hill on the seventy-fifth anniversary of his death. The prison where Joe Hill had been locked up for twenty-two months and where he was executed in 1915 had been demolished. In its place was a lovely park where the festival was held. Union families and friends picnicked on the grass on a beautiful day under blue skies and warm sunshine and listened to the songs of Joe Hill.

Earl Robinson was there to sing his famous ballad. Pete Seeger played his banjo and sang several Joe Hill favorites. Utah Phillips, a self-professed modern-day Wobbly, sang "There Is Power in the Union," one of Hill's finest compositions. (p. 196)

Working question number 5—do artists and artist groups create dangerously when they keep the stories of repressive power alive?—is a recurring theme for Howard Zinn (1990), who wrote:

If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. (p. 208)

Historian James Green (2000) believed the past is a powerful tool in building the progressive movements of the present and the future:

Ongoing struggles for social justice are seen as extensions of older stories still unfolding. In their telling, these stories can become part of popular effort to shape a different future from the one global capital has in store for us, a future in which new crusades for equality, democracy, and social justice appear as extensions of nearly forgotten stories kept alive within movement culture by activists and historians working together. (p. 21)

Joe Hill and the Wobblies left an indelible impression. The cultural work of these artists, who battled against injustice in the early 1900s, provided a legacy for new generations who picked up the torch. Cutting edge, create dangerously activists, like the

ones in *Rhythms of Rebellion*, carried on where Joe Hill and the Wobblies left off. They continue to “Fan the Flames of Discontent” (Smith, 1984, p. 9).

**Do Artists and Artist Groups Create Dangerously When They Assist Ordinary People Usually Locked Out of the Political Process, to Write Their Own Scripts? (Popular Education)**

Long before Paulo Freire coined the term *popular education*, Joe Hill and the Wobbly songwriters sought to educate and empower members of the “One Big Union” through direct action.

Direct action means industrial action directly by, for, and of the workers themselves, without the treacherous aid of labor misleaders or scheming politicians. A strike that is initiated, controlled, and settled by the workers directly affected is direct action. . . . Direct action is industrial democracy. (Zinn, 1990, p. 323)

For Joe Hill, song was an integral part of the direct action process and more effective than a pamphlet:

A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read but once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over; and I maintain that if a person can put a few cold common sense facts in a song, and dress them up in a cloak of humor to take the dryness off of them he will succeed in reaching a great number of workers who are too unintelligent or too indifferent to read a pamphlet or an editorial on economic science (Joe Hill to the editor of *Solidarity*, December 1914, quoted from Reagon, 1975, 54). (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998, p. 59)

Many artists and artist groups, who have created dangerously since Joe Hill’s execution, have used Wobbly techniques now known as popular education. Popular education is at the core of working question number 6—do artists create dangerously when they assist ordinary people usually locked out of the political process to write their own scripts?

Popular education is a methodology customized and disseminated by Brazilian scholar, Paulo Freire. In the 1950s, Paulo began a national literacy program for slum dwellers and peasants in Brazil. The program, sponsored by Catholic Action, was one of the most efficacious organizations in the country. The group used an adroit system of inquiry: to see, to analyze, and to act. In a document published and distributed during a workshop held at the Brecht Forum in New York City in 1993, the authors laid out Paulo's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* methodology:

1. To See the situation lived by the participants.
2. To Analyze the situation, the root causes of oppression (socioeconomic, political, cultural, etc.).
3. To Act to change the situation, following the precepts of social justice. (Ferreira & Ferreira, 1993, p. 1)

Paulo Freire directed the successful national literacy program in Brazil until the 1964 military coup. He was arrested along with his co-workers because popular education was considered subversive. After being released from prison, he went into exile and in the 1970s wrote about his methodology in his world-renowned book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Freire (1992) called popular education "liberating education:"

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors-teacher on the one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education entails at the outset that the teacher-student contradiction be resolved. Dialogical relations-indispensable to the capacity of cognitive actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object-are otherwise impossible. (p. 67)

Paulo Freire was a major influence on Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal, one of the create dangerously artists in this dissertation, who incorporated the principles of popular education into a theatrical practice. Paulo and Augusto first met in 1960, while



Augusto was touring in the poorest region of Brazil. Based on Freire's (1992) principles outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Boal (2001) pioneered Theatre of the Oppressed. While Paulo talked about learning to "read the world" (as cited in Babbage, 2004, p. 20), Augusto emphasized the need for participants to "speak theatre for themselves, rather than be content to watch plays performed by acknowledged experts" (as cited in Babbage, 2004, p. 20). Participants in Theatre of the Oppressed workshops:

Learn theatrical language based on their need to express their own reality, in order to engage with the contradictions of that reality. . . . The trainer is [would be] motivated by a genuine desire for dialog—a belief that in this process the "students" have knowledge which the "teacher" needs to learn. (Babbage, 2004, p. 20)

The approach is similar to Paulo's, who had outlined the methods whereby students within the educational process could make the transition from seeing themselves as objects (unconscious and acted upon by others) to subjects (capable of self-conscious action). Augusto

Identified stages by which the spectator—in his view fundamentally a passive being—could become an actor. The proposed steps are as follows: (1) knowing the body; (2) making the body expressive; (3) the theater as language; and (4) the theater as discourse. (as cited in Babbage, 2004, p. 20)

The Theater of the Oppressed influence is far reaching. Today it is considered an international movement.

Although Myles Horton and Paulo Freire did not meet until their later years, both men believed that real liberation is achieved through popular participation. Decades before they published their conversation on education and social change in *We Make the Road by Walking* (Horton & Freire, 1990), Myles Horton co-founded one of the most known spots for popular education in the United States, Highlander Research and Education Center. When Myles Horton and Don West founded the organization in 1932,

it was called Highlander Folk School. It is located in Tennessee. The first mission statement for the organization is below:

I would like to see a school where young men and women will have close contact with teachers, will learn how to take their place intelligently in a changing world. In a few months, free from credits and examinations, utilizing only such methods as individual requirements called for . . . it is hoped that by a stimulating presentation of material and study of actual situations, the students will be able to make decisions for themselves and act on the basis of an enlightened judgment. (Horton, 1991, p. 56)

Myles Horton (1991) believed learning at Highlander revolved around residential workshops, although they were only one part of the whole process participants engaged in to contribute to social change. The people who were sent to the workshops by their organizations were not sent as individuals. They all had experience working in their own communities, in unions or in other organizations.

Culture was part of the Highlander popular education process. Wobbly songs were among the many introduced and new verses were adapted to suit the political climate of the times. Behind Highlander's philosophy is:

The freedom to act, to take risks, [which] implies freedom to learn and to accept the idea that you can build your strength from the bottom up instead of the top down. These individuals build their strength on representing the people instead of the officialdom of some organization. (Horton, 1991, p. 146)

An egalitarian spirit resonates throughout Highlander. Myles Horton (1991) embodied and promoted the doctrine:

I think of an educational workshop as a circle of learners. "Circle" is not an accidental term, for there is no head of the table at Highlander workshops; everybody sits around in a circle. The job of the staff members is to create a relaxed atmosphere in which the participants feel free to share their experiences. Then they are encouraged to analyze, learn from and build on these experiences. Like other participants in the workshops, staff members are expected to share experiences that relate to the discussions, and sources of information and alternative suggestions. They have to provide more information than they will be able to work into the thinking process of the group, and often they must discard

prepared suggestions that become inappropriate to the turn a workshop has taken. (p. 150)

Saul Alinsky was considered one of the best community organizers in the United States. His book, *Rules For Radicals*, was published in 1971, around the same time as Paulo Freire's (1992) book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For Alinsky, the objective for which any democratic movement must strive is the ultimate objective implicit within democracy—popular education. Saul Alinsky's notion of popular education is grounded in the building of people's organizations like the Wobblies' "One Big Union."

In a People's Organization popular education is an exciting and dramatic process. Education instead of being distant and academic becomes a direct and intimate part of the personal lives, experiences, and activities of the people. Knowledge then becomes an arsenal of weapons in the battle against injustice and degradation. It is no longer learning for learning's sake, but learning for a real reason, a purpose. It ceases to be a luxury or something known under the vague, refined name of culture and becomes as essential as money in the bank, good health, good housing, or regular employment. (Alinsky, 1989, p. 173)

### **Do Artists and Artist Groups Create Dangerously When They Lead Without Authority?**

Two years after Joe Hill's execution, free speech battles continued throughout the West. In 1917, during a confrontation between a sheriff and an unknown IWW member in Everett, Washington, the exasperated sheriff cried out, "Who the hell's your leader anyhow?" The answer: "We're all leaders" (Smith, 1984, p. 1).

Working question number 7—do artists and artist groups create dangerously when they lead without authority?—is based upon a theoretical framework pioneered by Ronald Heifetz (1998) who defined the concept of leading without authority in *Leadership Without Easy Answers*:

When we speak of leadership without authority, we are referring to a very large set of stances, from the person operating from the margins of society even to the

senior authority figure who leads beyond his pale of authority, challenging either his own constituents' expectations or engaging people across the boundary of his organization who would ordinarily or preferably pay him no mind. (p. 386)

Ronald Heifetz (1998) believed there are benefits to leading without authority:

1. The absence of authority enables one to deviate from the norms of authoritative decision-making. Instead of providing answers that soothe, one can more readily raise questions that disturb. 2. One does not have to keep the ship on an even keel. One has more *latitude for creative deviance*. 3. Operating with little or no authority places one closer to the detailed experiences of some of the stakeholders in the situation. One may lose the larger perspective but gain the fine grain of people's hopes, pains, values, habits, and history. One has *frontline information*. (p. 188)

Joe Hill led without authority. He deviated from the norms of authoritative decision-making. He creatively took on the power structure from a decentralized perspective. He was in the center of struggle. In doing so, he attracted the hearts and minds of rebels everywhere.

In an article published a month after Hill's execution, W. S. Van Valkenburgh (as cited in Smith, 1984) captured the spirit of Joe Hill's life that is perpetuated in legend today:

He was a genius in the rough. A poet who . . . wrote prose and verse that stirred his fellows like the gale an aspen leaf. Homeless, moneyless, friendless-in the larger sense-the undaunted champion of an unpopular cause, framed up, convicted on flimsy circumstantial evidence; fore-doomed to destruction, and yet true to himself to the very last. Such a man was Joseph Hillstrom. (p. 190)

Leading without authority has its downside as well. "A leader without authority has to take into account the special vulnerability of becoming a lightning rod. Rather than orchestrating the debate among competing factions, one becomes a faction readily targeted for attack" (Heifetz, 1998, p. 208).

This was certainly the case with Joe Hill and the Wobblies. They stood relatively naked before the people, often appearing to be not only the identifier of a distressing

problem, but also the source of the distress itself. All eyes turned on them and many of those eyes were hostile (Heifetz, 1998). Joe Hill and the IWW's goals to radically change the capitalist system attracted enormous animosity throughout the United States.

In an article published in 1914 for the *New Review*, Max Eastman (as cited in Smith, 1984) wrote:

The church, the press, the state, the host of the people in this country hate the IWW, and they rejoice in every occasion when they can spit upon it. They hate it with a hatred beyond all proportion to its menace against privilege, or against property, or against law and order. (p. 115)

Part of the problem faced by Joe Hill and the Wobblies was that they had little control over their environment:

One can shape the stimulus, but one cannot manage the response: one cannot institute an organizing structure, pick a temporizing side issue, secure a new norm, or provide a calming presence. A leader without authority can spark debate, but he cannot orchestrate it. Without authority, a leader must regulate distress by modulating the provocation. (Heifetz, 1998, p. 188)

Most of the time, artists and artist groups who create dangerously, like the ones presented here, lead without authority. Although separated by time and place they are connected in struggle: links on a chain. In writing about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee of the American Civil Rights Movement in *SNCC The New Abolitionist*, Howard Zinn (2002) illustrated this connectivity point:

What *really* makes SNCC a threat to American liberal society is that quality which makes it a threat to *all* Establishments, whether capitalist, socialist, communist, or whatever: its rejection of authority; its fearlessness in the face of overwhelming power; its indifference to respectability. It constantly aims to create and recreate, out of the bodies of poor and powerless people, a new force, nonviolent but aggressive, honest and therefore unmanageable. It wants to demonstrate to the nation not what kind of "system" people should believe in, but how people should live their lives. So its radicalism is not an ideology but a mood. Moods are harder to define. They are also harder to imprison. (p. 274)

## **Artists and Artist Groups Creating Dangerously: Martyrdom and The Cost of Struggle**

Thousands of men and women involved with the IWW were beaten, jailed, and died in the struggle. Frank Little, Wesley Everest, and Joe Hill “achieved the supreme consolation of martyrdom” (Renshaw, 1999, p. 143). Wesley Everest and Frank Little were brutally lynched by an angry mob and Joe Hill was shot by a firing squad. After their deaths, “in IWW halls from coast to coast, photographs of Little, Everest, and Hill, faded, yellowing, and tattered, hung together as inspiration to Wobblies everywhere. Joe Hill’s picture was almost invariably at the center” (Renshaw, 1999, p. 144).

The New York Times predicted Joe Hill’s martyrdom status in an article published after his execution:

Presumably there will grow up in the revolutionary group of which he was a prominent member a more or less sincere conviction that he died a hero as well as a martyr. . . . This is the regrettable feature of the episode, for it may make Hillstrom dead much more dangerous to social stability than he was when alive. (Smith, 1984, p. 179)

A martyr, as defined by the *American College Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Barnhart, 1954), is “one who is put to death or endures great suffering on behalf of any principle, belief, or cause” (p. 747).

Ronald Heifetz (1998) wrote this about martyrdom: “In exercising leadership, people often are drawn to taking courageous stands. Indeed, leadership may require the willingness to die. It derives from the meaning people give to him and his acts.

Martyrdom is a role created by the community” (p. 246).

Joe Hill’s notoriety as a folk poet helped to elevate his martyrdom status following his execution. The working class community related to the songs and parodies

“set to well-known melodies of the day. The songs mirrored the struggle of a whole generation of wageworkers: they were songs for the inarticulate. Their author knew that a man fights better when he can sing and laugh” (Renshaw, 1999, p. 144).

Joe Hill was buried in Chicago. On November 23, 1915, Ralph Chaplin, Bill Haywood, and other members of the IWW transported Hill’s body from the train station to the Florence Funeral Parlor, where thousands of people filed past his remains. Ralph Chaplin (as cited in Smith, 1984) described the event:

Through that little dim-lit room passed a constant stream of workingmen and women of all ages and nationalities-bare-headed and reverently they tiptoed in single file, gazing briefly at Hill’s clear cut sensitive features, made doubly delicate and life-like by the soft candle light that played upon them, and from which imprisonment, torture and death had been unable to efface the fearless, half-ironical smile of a “rebel true blue.” . . . Many touching scenes took place here. Strong weather-beaten men who were not afraid of anything, were ashamed of their own swimming eyes when they found themselves once more in the hard glare of the street; foreign workers of both sexes who gazed with timid horror as though surprised at seeing, here in “the land of the free” the same inexorably bloody hand of despotism that had driven them from their native lands; stern-faced, dark-haired shop girls who placed tiny bouquets and single crimson carnations or roses upon the dead body of the man whose songs they knew and whose death they admired; social workers, reporters, magazine writers, musicians, and artists-all united in honoring the memory of the murdered minstrel of toil. (pp. 182-183)

The impact of Joe Hill’s execution was global in scope. Masses of people turned out on Thanksgiving Day to celebrate the life of this hero of the downtrodden and working class. Gibb Smith’s (1984) definitive biography of Joe Hill provided intricate details of the funeral. The passages are reproduced here to illustrate the significance of this artist who created dangerously and became a martyr for the cause:

Early on the morning of the funeral, throngs of people began moving into the West Side Auditorium. By 8:30 a.m., all 5,000 seats were filled. Ralph Chaplin reported that “. . . by 10:30 a.m. the streets were clogged for blocks in all directions; streetcars could not run; and all traffic was suspended.” (p. 183)

On the stage inside, the casket was covered with a huge red flag and surrounded by myriad floral decorations. Those attending wore red streamers around their necks, and many wore buttons inscribed, "He died a martyr."

When the services began, the crowd took advantage of the opportunity to vent its emotion with the singing of several of Hill's songs. The audience sang "Workers of the World Awaken." A young Polish girl, Jennie Woszczyuska, sang Hill's "Rebel Girl." "Stung Right" and "The Preacher and the Slave" were sung by the audience, and mass singing in the street outside echoed that in the auditorium. (pp. 184-185)

O.N. Hilton, Hill's attorney delivered the eulogy:

And so, men and women, we delight today to drop a tear upon this coffin and a flower into this grave. I think there is one thought that comes to us all on an occasion of this kind, and that is that our beloved dead do not ever wholly die... So it will be, men and women, with Joe Hill. As you read his inspiring poems, and as your hearts beat in unison with him, when you sing his sweet songs, so ever in tenderest memory he will come to us again a sweet, gentle, musical echo of the ripple of that eternal tide upon the shore of time. And so we say, rest softly, kind mother earth, over this poor mutilated form, and to you, soldier poet, martyr and hero, with the flush of this magnificent oncoming industrial freedom upon your brow, all hail and all hail! (p. 186)

After the oration, the large crowd slowly filed out as pianist Rudolf Von Liebich played Chopin's "Funeral March." Outside the auditorium, the crowd was so tightly packed that Hill's casket could not be removed to the hearse. When the Rockford, Illinois, IWW band began playing, the committee in charge of the funeral asked the band to lead part of the crowd around the block so that room could be made and Hill's body brought out to the hearse. A procession of marchers followed the hearse as it moved slowly on its way to the streetcar station at Van Buren and Halsted streets.

The committee in charge of the funeral, who helped clear the streets, led the procession followed by twelve pallbearers with the casket and the hearse, flower bearers, the band, and the crowd of marchers. Onlookers, who covered the rooftops and jammed the windows, looked down on the flower bearers who formed a walking garden almost a block long. A giant red flag made from crimson colored silk was carried by the representatives of the Rockford IWW. As they moved slowly along, taking possession of the streets they traveled, the mourners sang Joe Hill's songs. When a song from one section of the giant human serpent died down, the same song or another would be taken up by other voices along the line. Ralph Chaplin recalled: "the whole street seemed to move and sing as the throng inched through the west side streets."

Mary Gallagher, whose husband, Douglas Robson, wrote and published songs for the IWW, attended the funeral and followed the cortege to the cemetery. She said it was "... a cold winter day but there was a very long funeral



procession. One thing which struck me, the Irish policemen on the streets who were directing the procession always took off their hats as the hearse passed.”

When the hearse reached the station, the casket was put aboard the train and taken to Graceland Cemetery, located in the suburbs of Chicago. Many of the marchers followed to the graveside where another long memorial service was held. Vincent St. John, Bill Haywood, and Irish labor leader James Larkin spoke. Eulogies for Hill were given in Swedish, Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Spanish, Italian, German, Yiddish and Lithuanian. Joe Hill’s friends stayed at the cemetery, singing his songs late into the night.

The day after the funeral, the IWW committee in charge of the arrangements returned to Graceland Cemetery to witness the cremation. The body was photographed and identified for the last time on the morning of November 26. Then the casket was put on a slab of stone and pushed into a blast furnace. (p. 188)

Chaplin related:

Through a small hole in the side of the furnace, each committeeman viewed the flame-lashed casket containing the fine body and placid features of Joe Hill, dreamer, poet, artist, and agitator, which had four purple bullet holes in his young chest as punishment for the crime of being “true blue” to his class-and to himself. Hill’s ashes were placed in envelopes and distributed to IWW locals in every state but Utah. Envelopes were also sent to South America, Europe, Asia, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. On May 1, 1916, according to Chaplin, the ashes were released to the wind. Joe Hill’s last will was fulfilled. (pp. 186-188)

Joe Hill is a martyr. Many others hold that status, including Albert Parsons, whose wife, Lucy, was a founding member of the IWW. Parsons, along with August Spies, George Engel, Adolph Fischer, and Louis Lingg were sentenced to death after the Haymarket affair on May 4, 1886. The men, proclaimed anarchists, were convicted after a bomb exploded during a demonstration for an eight-hour work day killing several members of the police and protesting workers. Having nothing to do with the bombing, four of the men were hanged on November 11, 1886. Louis Lingg committed suicide before Chicago officials could put a noose around his neck. Parsons’s last declaration has proved to be a rallying cry carrying artists and artist groups like the ones in this

dissertation into combat: “There will come a time when our silence from the grave will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today!” (De Cleyre, 1980, p. 14).

The stories of Joe Hill and the Haymarket martyrs, whose create dangerously activities resulted in death, are much more than a living memorial or tribute to courageous men and women who took on the power elite. Their lives and deaths provided a redemptive narrative for a whole generation of radicals who told their stories repeatedly through songs, speeches, literature, theatre productions, dances, films, and writings. The stories, told in a variety of languages, became legend and were globally circulated.

After the Haymarket trial and execution in Chicago, Emma Goldman, known for her free-spirited, feminist, anarchist thinking, said the case caused her “spiritual rebirth, [giving her a] burning faith, a determination to dedicate myself to the memory of my martyred comrades, to make their cause my own” (Green, 2000, p. 132). Lucy Parsons, who became an active Wobbly, said she “wanted to do more than memorialize the victims of a ‘judicial hanging’” (Green, 2000, p. 133). She picked up where her husband left off continuing the struggle for a just world.

### **Transforming Leadership, Popular Education and Artists/Artist Groups Creating Dangerously for Social Change**

Workers of the world, awaken!  
Break your chains, demand your rights.  
All the wealth you make is taken  
By exploiting parasites.  
Shall you kneel in deep submission  
From your cradles to your graves?  
Is the height of your ambition  
To be good and willing slaves? (Joe Hill as cited in Kornbluh, 1998, p. 142)

Joe Hill composed the words and music to “Workers of the World Awaken,” which appeared in the ninth edition of the Wobblies’ (as cited in Kornbluh, 1998) *Little Red Song Book*. Hill and the Wobblies were leadership practitioners and scholars in their own right long before leadership studies became an acceptable academic field. They used popular education techniques advocating for the transformation of the individual, which in turn, can transform society.

During the first Industrial Workers of the World Convention in 1905 held in Chicago, the Wobblies set the stage for major change in the social order. At the top of the list was the abolition of the capitalist wage system, replacing it with a form of industrial democracy where the workers collectively build the apparatus and own the means of production. From the first convention forward, transforming leadership for Joe Hill and the Wobblies, as defined in 1917 by the unknown frontline activist who exclaimed, “We are all leaders!” during the Everett Free Speech battle, meant leadership without followership.

Fred Thompson, a long-time Wobbly organizer from Canada who took part in the 1920 Halifax shipyards strike before moving to the United States expanded upon this idea in his article “The Art of Making A Decent Revolution.” Thompson was a former editor of the *Industrial Worker*. His article appeared in the publication on July 29, 1957:

Our hope is that workers will build large and effective unions that are run by the rank and file; that the structure of these unions will correspond to the actual economic ties between workers, so that workers on every job will be in a position to determine more and more what happens on that job, and through a collective class-wide structure, decide what happens in industry as a whole.

It is in this way, as we see it, that the working class can reshape its world into something consistent with our better aspirations and with the technical capacities mankind has developed. (Thompson as cited in Kornbluh, 1998, p. 385)

In Thompson's (as cited in Kornbluh, 1998) concluding remarks he made his case for transforming leadership on a personal and societal level:

If you look to the joint action of yourself and your fellow workers to cope with your problems, you move forward with time into situations where steadily you and they cut a larger role in life, where the decisions about your work are steadily more and more made by you fellows, where the product of your labor steadily redounds more and more to your benefit, where the world more and more becomes as you wish it. (p. 387)

Although worlds apart, Fred Thompson and Albert Camus were on the same wavelength. Like Thompson, Camus boldly and courageously stood with the masses in his fight to transform society. In a letter written from Paris on June 30, 1952, to the editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, he lashed out at intellectuals, particularly Jean Paul Sartre, who Camus believed compromised principles in support of communist doctrine during the cold war. Neither a fan of the struggle on the right or left, Camus (as cited in Sprintzen & van den Hoven, 2004) stood steadfast on the side of humanity and justice:

If we agree to liberate the individual in theory while admitting that in practice and in certain conditions man can be enslaved; if we allow everything that contributes to the fertility and future of revolt to be sneered at in the name of everything in it that aspires to submission; and if, finally, we believe we can refuse every political choice without stopping to justify the fact that, among the victims, some will be accorded a place in history and others relegated to a never-ending oblivion. (p. 127)

Transforming leadership for Camus included justice, which is "both a concept and a warmth of the soul. Let us ensure that we adopt it in its human aspect without transforming it into that terrible abstract passion which has mutilated so many men" (Cruickshank, 1963, p. xix).

James MacGregor Burns, a world-renowned scholar, defined transforming leadership in his 1978 book titled *Leadership*. Even though Burns' concept of transforming leadership has limited relevance to this dissertation due to his belief in

followership, it is important to include him in this discussion because he is known as the authoritative figure on the topic.

According to Burns (1978), leadership is defined as:

Leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—*of both leaders and followers*. And the genius of leadership lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own and their followers' values and motivations. (p. 19)

Burns (1978) went on to say:

Transforming leadership occurs when one or more persons *engage* with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out as separate but related become fused. Power bases are linked not as counterweights but as mutual support for common purpose. Transforming leadership ultimately becomes *moral* in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both. (p. 20)

Burns has critics besides those who do not subscribe to followership. One of those critics is Joseph Rost, author of *Leadership For The Twenty-First Century*. Rost (1993) did not believe that Burn's theory of transforming leadership assists leaders and followers "with the conceptual ambiguities of the ethical content of leadership" (p. 164). Rost had three major problems with Burn's theory:

- Burns focuses on individual motivation and morality. That locus of control may be a good place to start, but it is wholly inadequate to deal with the ethics of changes that leaders and followers may propose to solve complex modern problems.
- Burns emphasized that "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality." There is nothing in his notion of transformational leadership that speaks to organizations and societies being raised to higher levels of motivation and morality.
- Burns, and even his followers who have adopted transformational leadership as *the* model of leadership, assumes that leaders and followers know what the higher moral ground is regarding the many controversial issues in the United States and the world. The reality of ethical pluralism is that there is no consensus as to the higher moral ground. (pp. 164-165)

Joseph Rost (1993) provided his own definition of transforming leadership in *Leadership For The Twenty-First Century*:

Transformation is about people intending real changes to happen. Transformation is insisting that the changes reflect the mutual purposes of the people engaged in the transformation. Transformation happens when people develop common purposes. In leadership writ large, mutual purposes help people work for the common good, help people build community. (pp. 123-125)

Rost (1993), however, also saw followership as part of the transforming leadership equation. In this dissertation, transforming leadership is grounded in popular education as described in working question number 6—do artists and artist groups create dangerously when they assist ordinary people usually locked out of the political process to write their own scripts? In popular education pedagogy, everyone is a leader and the nature of the transforming process is part of an individual's evolution toward emancipation. In the field of leadership, Burns' (1978) and Rost's ideas serve as a framework for expanding the boundaries of the academy to include popular education theories, praxis, and action.

Joe Hill, Albert Camus, and the artists and artist group in this dissertation (Augusto Boal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the singers-songwriters involved in the Mississippi Caravan of Music) see transforming leadership as a liberation and humanitarian pedagogy where every one is a leader. Paulo Freire (1992) described the stages of transformation in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

In the first, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression and through the praxis commit themselves to its transformation. In the second stage, in which the reality of oppression has already been transformed, this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of all men in the process of permanent liberation. In both stages, it is always through action in depth that the culture of domination is culturally confronted. In the first stage this confrontation occurs through the change in the way the oppressed perceive the world of oppression; in the second stage, through the expulsion of the myths created and developed in the

old order, which like specters haunt the new structure emerging from the revolutionary transformation. (p. 40)

Transforming leadership in this dissertation is deeply entrenched in Paulo Freire's (2006) *Pedagogy of Hope*. *Pedagogy of Hope* is the second book in his trilogy: the first being *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1992), and the third, Paulo's last book prior to his death, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998). For Freire, hope is an ontological need:

Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings, and become a distortion of that ontological need. When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for a fierce struggle that will recreate the world. I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of an existential, concrete imperative. (2006, p. 2)

César Augusto Rossatto (2005) examined Paulo's doctrine of hope.

Transformative optimism for Rossatto is the foundation of transformational leadership:

*Transformative optimism* is an expression of a deep sense of emancipatory hope; the transformative optimist does not merely hope for or believe in the opportunity for emancipation from hegemonic and repressive socioeconomic structures, but indeed sees himself or herself as a necessary and viable participant in the collective process of social change. The transformative optimist not only hopes for the best possible outcomes, but sees himself or herself as a vital instrument in the realization of those outcomes. Transformative optimism transforms the present through a consciousness of solidarity and a clear vision of a better future that can be realized through individual responsibility within a context of collective effort. (p. 81)

This is a dissertation about hope and possibility. At its core are artists who believed they could create a new world, a better world, an egalitarian world, and a just world. They dreamed about that world and engaged in struggle to transform the present by analyzing the past in order to build the future. Some of them did not live long enough to realize their dreams, but their legacy lives on and the struggle continues.

### **Don't Mourn-Organize!**

In 1950, Wobbly George Carey sent a letter to Miss Agnes Inglis, the librarian in charge of the Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan Library. Carey described his role in the distribution of a packet of Joe Hill's ashes in 1916. Around 1919, Carey found another packet of the ashes in a Toledo, Ohio IWW hall. The hall had been raided and destroyed. He made numerous attempts to deliver the ashes to a member in the organization to no avail. He decided to fulfill the task himself:

It was June 26, 1950, that I finally decided to try and carry out Joe's last wish to the best of my ability.

On this early June morning I awoke to one of the most beautiful June days that I have ever known anywhere. Nature seemed to have outdone herself that day when I awoke to the realization that I was grown old and that I had an obligation to carry out. The thought came to me. I was all alone. Why not do as he requested? Here was a spot. The grass was green, there was a yard covered with flowers and trees. Birds were singing all over the place. No place could be more fitting. I arose and walked out into the garden and with no more ceremony than a murmured "Good Bye, Joe," I carefully scattered the contents of the little envelope over the soil. I felt at ease. My pledge had been kept.

Printed on the envelope that contained the ashes was the following:

Fellow Worker:

In compliance with the last will of Joe Hill, his body was cremated at Graceland Cemetery, Chicago, Illinois, Nov. 26, 1915.

It was his request that his ashes be distributed.

This package has been confined to your care for the fulfillment of this last will. You will kindly address a letter to Wm. D. Haywood, Room 307, 164 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill, telling the circumstances and where the ashes were distributed.

WE NEVER FORGET

JOE HILL MEMORIAL COMMITTEE. (Smith, 1984, p. 188)

Ten years after Joe Hill's last wish was fulfilled, Albert Camus met his death in a tragic automobile accident. Jean Paul Sartre (as cited in Lottman, 1981) published a eulogy in *France-Observateur*:

He represented in this century, and against History, the present-day heir of that long line of moralists whose works constitute what is perhaps most original in French Letters. His stubborn humanism, strict and pure, austere and sensual,



delivered uncertain combat against the massive and deformed events of the day. But inversely, by the unexpectedness of his refusals, he reaffirmed, at the heart of our era, against the Machiavelians, against the golden calf of realism, the existence of the moral act. (p. 673)

In 1961, Guy Durmur (as cited in Parker, 1966) wondered about Camus' achievements had he lived. "He would have been a force in reserve, a bridge between the past and the future: he would have been one from whom we awaited a response that, when it came, would have been heard by all" (p. 169).

Whatever the works of the future may be, they will bear the same secret, made up of courage and freedom, nourished by the daring of thousands of artists of all times and all nations. Yes, when modern tyranny shows us that, even when confined to his calling, the artist is a public enemy, it is right. But in this way tyranny pays its respects, through the artist, to an image of man that nothing has ever been able to crush. (Camus, 1988, p. 270)

This dissertation is a living testament to artists and artist groups "of all times and all nations" who have answered Camus' call. They have participated in this unique expressive form of protest speaking strongly to their audiences with the fire of vision and the kindle wood of love. They tapped what is universal in struggle and conveyed their message with an urgency impossible to ignore.

Up until now, artists and artist groups as leaders in movements of protest, resistance, and liberation have been overlooked or paid too little attention in the literature on leadership of social change. This dissertation will help rectify the situation and bridge the gap by bringing artists and artist groups into the fold.

Augusto Boal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and members of the Mississippi Caravan of Music have made significant contributions in the battle for human rights and social justice. They are from different periods of time. The impact of what they have done has resonated through the decades. Their stories presented here are merely examples of

artists and artist groups who have created dangerously throughout history. Literally thousands of examples are available. Due to the limitations of this dissertation, a few are illustrated to provide a framework for further exploration into a dimension of change that has been severely ignored in studies on leadership.

### Chapter III: Portraiture

Portraiture is the predominant method utilized in this dissertation. This “people’s scholarship” (Featherstone, 1989, p. 375), which intertwines the social science of analysis, and aesthetic presence of voice, remembrance, and solidarity is employed to illuminate the powerful role the selected artists and artist group played in movements of protest, resistance, and liberation. Social movements are “constituted by the stories people tell to themselves and to one another. They are constructed from the interweaving of personal and social biographies” (Kling, 1995, p. 1). In this dissertation, the portraits illustrate how artists and an artist group, who created dangerously, helped to shape, mobilize, and sustain various struggles throughout time and around the globe. In doing so, they put themselves at great risk.

The arts of these courageous activists are incorporated into each portrait to capture the essence of frontline cultural combat. Through first person narratives, songs, poetry, literature, theatre, and archival material, I hope to push the boundaries of conventional wisdom to demonstrate the importance of this create dangerously phenomenon.

Through portraiture, the voices of the artists and artist group in this study are more evident and play a bigger role. Their stories and art forms, which served as tools for social change, enabled marginalized groups to “unveil the world of oppression and through praxis commit themselves to its transformation” (Freire as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 688).

The fine and performing arts are about action. People are engaged in activity. When used as a tool for social change, the arts create open and safe space for inquiry and

expression. This dissertation provides a venue for dialog. Through portraiture, connections are made between the artists and artist group who created dangerously and the political dynamics that framed these historic moments through an array of media. This dissertation is a place where, as Henry Giroux (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) argued, “cultural work is both theorized and made performative” (p. 689). From within the spaces established by arts-related research and portraiture, “people—ordinary people, you and me, researchers as participants as audience—can implement new visions of dignity, care, democracy, and other postcolonial ways of being in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 689).

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1995) not only pioneered portraiture methodology, she continued to introduce new applications of the method to the field of narrative inquiry. Her book, *I’ve Known Rivers: Lives of Loss and Liberation*, is one variation on the theme. The publication served as a template for this dissertation:

The portraits in *Rivers* are deep and intimate, based on a year’s worth of intensive dialogue with each person. The life stories of the actors call up powerful responses in me, shaping my interpretations and my construction of the narrative. It is crucial, therefore, that the reader hears my story as the framework, as the lens through which I will regard and investigate the journey of the book’s protagonists. (p. 96).

### **Essential Features of Portraiture**

There are five essential components of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. Through these features, this dissertation illuminates the bold perilous acts of courage the artists and artist group took in solidarity with the oppressed. Each portrait provides an analytical framework and platform to deepen conversations on the essential role artists as activists play in movements of protest, resistance and liberation. The artists and artist group in this dissertation did not

stand on the sidelines. They actively participated in the struggles of their day. Their art not only engaged and broadened their audience, it served as an intervention.

So, too, does portraiture. In the process of painting portraits, this “people’s scholarship” (Featherstone as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 12):

Enters people’s lives, builds relationships, engages in discourse, makes an imprint . . . and leaves. The portraitist engages in acts (implicit and explicit) of social transformation, she creates opportunities for dialogue, she pursues the silences, and in the process, she faces ethical dilemmas and a great moral responsibility. (p. 12)

## **Context**

Portraiture “is a conscious process of nesting stories in the dimensions of time, history and culture” (Featherstone, 1989, p. 376). The “context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 41).

James Baldwin (1998) believed:

History does not refer merely, or even principally to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. (pp. 722-723)

Through portraiture, this dissertation connects those great forces of history referred to by Baldwin. Set in climates of political and social unrest, this dissertation paints portraits of committed individuals and groups willing to risk it all to fight oppression, totalitarianism, and domination. Their art was their most powerful weapon. Their stories told here fill gaps in the literature of important figures formerly omitted from the pages of the past.

For instance, Albert Camus’ 1957 Nobel lecture, which is barely mentioned in the literature on leadership and ignored in other academic arenas, is the starting point for this dissertation. It is important for the reader to know something about the context in which

this address was delivered. As portraitist, I might contain the backdrop for this momentous occasion that took place on the campus of Uppsala University, one of Sweden's oldest educational institutions. Herbert Lottman (1981), Camus' biographer, described the scene:

In the sober brick University House facing Uppsala's famous cathedral, the party moved into the large auditorium, the Aula, used for the bestowal of doctoral degrees. On that wide stage—a rotunda, resembling the sanctuary of a church, amidst gilt flowers on columns and ceilings—Camus delivered his lecture, which he called “L'Artiste et son temps.” It was a wide-ranging speculation on the necessary involvement of the artist in affairs of the world, with a sharp critique of the dangers—the subordination of art to the state, socialist realism. (p. 619)

As part of the context, I may also include a portion of Camus' Nobel banquet speech, given a few days prior to the lecture, because for Camus his writings were “an effort to understand the age into which he was born” (Cruickshank, 1963, pp. viii-ix). Both presentations, the Nobel banquet speech and the lecture, were put into a historic framework for “The Artist And His Time:”

These men who were born at the beginning of the first world war and were twenty at the time of Hitler's coming to power and the first revolutionary trials, who were then confronted, to complete their education, with the Spanish war, the second world war, the universal concentration camp, Europe ruled by the gaoler and the torturer, had now to bring up their sons and produce their works in a world threatened by nuclear destruction. Nobody, surely, can expect them to be optimists. And I believe, indeed, that we should understand, while continuing to oppose it, the mistaken attitude of those who, through excess of despair, have asserted the right to dishonor, and have rushed headlong into the nihilism of our day. Nonetheless, the greater number of us in my own country and throughout Europe, have rejected such nihilism and have tried to find some law to live by. They have had to forge for themselves an art of living through times of catastrophe, in order to be reborn, and then to fight openly against the death-instinct which is at work in our time. (Cruickshank, 1963, p. x)

For Camus, like Freire (2001), “history was time filled with possibility” (p. 26). With that possibility came an opportunity to create dangerously from his Algerian beginnings with the Theatre du Travail in 1935 until his tragic death in 1960. In between,

Camus' colored past included his 1937 expulsion from the Communist Party, his continued bout with tuberculosis, his move to Paris, his clandestine involvement in the French resistance during Nazi occupation, and the composition of his novels and plays. Put into context, the reader catches a glimpse into an incredible life where contemporaries, admirers, and critics hailed this great author and playwright "the most significant writer of his generation for themselves; a writer who has been both a spokesman and a guide, yet without posturing or pretentiousness" (Cruickshank, 1963, p. viii).

Unlike the example provided above where a mere sketch of Camus' outstanding life was exhibited to provide the reader with a taste of portraiture methodology, within the pages of this dissertation the reader is introduced to three portraits where a detailed motif of each artist and artist group relays a context "rich in clues for interpreting the experience of the actors in the setting" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 41). The portraits of Augusto Boal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the artists in the Mississippi Caravan of Music are framed and shaped by the context.

## **Voice**

In portraiture, the voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative. Voice is the research instrument, echoing the *self* of the portraitist—her eyes, her ears, her insights, her style, her aesthetic. Voice is omnipresent and reflects more about the artist than about the subject. But it is also true that the portraitist's work is deeply empirical, grounded in systematically collected data, skeptical questioning (of self and actors), and rigorous examination of biases—always open to disconfirming evidence. From this vantage point, we see the portraitist's stance as vigilantly counterintuitive, working against the grain of formerly held presuppositions, always alert and responsive to surprise. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85)

In this dissertation, my voice and the voices of the artists and artist group are omnipresent. They are heard through different mediums and framed within the context of history: time, place, social change initiatives, and movements.

Through our collective delivery, readers will develop a sense of the artists' political activist beginnings. Through these beginnings, a tapestry is woven to include decades of activism leading to transformative societal change.

My voice is transparent and present throughout this journey. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) believed the portraitist's voice is everywhere—"overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the central themes" (p. 85).

My voice served as witness as I framed each scene and selected stories relevant to the theme of creating dangerously. Through my personal lens, I interpreted the data and recorded reality. I listened for the artists and artist group's voices: "the timbre, resonance, cadence, and tone—their message, and their meaning" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 99).

In Eudora Welty's, *One Writer's Beginnings*, she made a subtle, but crucial distinction between listening to a story and listening for a story.:

The former is a more passive, receptive stance in which the listener waits to absorb the information and does little to give it shape and form. The latter is a much more active, engaged position in which the narrator searches for the story, seeks it out, and is central in its creation. This does not mean that he or she directs the drama or constructs the scenes. It *does* mean that the narrator participates in identifying and selecting the story and helps to shape the story's coherence and aesthetic. (as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, pp. 10-11)

While listening for the stories of the artists and artist group in this dissertation, I listened for my own story. The autobiographical account of the portraitist is a critical



component of this qualitative research method. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) said, “the researcher brings her own history—familial, cultural, ideological, and educational—to the inquiry. Her questions, and her insights are inevitably shaped by these profound developmental and autobiographical experiences” (p. 95).

Part of my autobiographical experiences, which led me to the topic of creating dangerously and the use of portraiture as the chosen method for this dissertation, involves my own role as a portraitist. Besides choreography like *Hay Una Mujer Desaparecida*, presented in chapter 1, I have incorporated elements of portraiture in projects for social change throughout my career.

In January of 1990, I was asked to be the editor of a special issue of *Vietnam Generation*, a journal founded to promote and encourage interdisciplinary study of the Vietnam War era and the Vietnam War generation. The publication was a commemorative piece for the 20th anniversary of the Kent and Jackson State shootings. For some, the legacy of Kent and Jackson State is just a forgettable historical incident; but to those most closely touched by the event, it has been the embodiment of their pain and anguish.

Through portraiture, contributors to the collection titled, *Kent & Jackson State 1970—1990* (Erenrich, 1990) were able to convey how Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer, William Schroeder, Phillip Gibbs, and James Earl Green made the ultimate sacrifice for this country. Through various media, which included articles, testimonials, poetry, songs, and photographs, the spirits of the deceased came alive. By looking through the terrible darkness of their deaths, readers were able to see the love that still binds them to the living. Every participant who invested time and energy to make

the anthology possible were the people who have lost the most and said the least—the mothers and fathers, the wounded students, friends of the slain, eyewitnesses, and those who care.

When the publication was released, I invited readers to absorb the lessons of May 4, 1970. I believed then and believe now that we can never deal honestly with the present if we fail to acknowledge the past. The best way to honor the sacrifices of social movement participants and understand the complexities of the phenomenon is to provide platforms for people to tell their stories.

Approximately one year after the completion of the Kent and Jackson publication, I was doing graduate research on songs of the Civil Rights Movement. Once again, as I was digging through *Broadside*, a national topical song magazine from the early 1960s, the power of narrative came through loud and clear. I discovered some of the most powerful and provocative material on racism, segregation, and brutality written by those who dared to dismantle Jim Crow. Through the voices of those who were there, the history of the Civil Rights Movement unfolded before my eyes.

I was inspired and, shortly thereafter, founded the Cultural Center for Social Change for the purpose of preserving some of the rich social movement history that has been overlooked by so many. For the past 18 years, I have collected narratives, produced concerts, choreographed and directed dance/theatre/music performances, and run arts education empowerment programs for underserved populations through this organizational entity. My use of narrative in general and portraiture in particular includes the fine and performing arts. This dissertation is a continuation of this quest.

The use of the artists' voices in this dissertation is a departure from more traditional uses of portraiture methodology. In lieu of simply imitating Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, I have chosen to adapt the method to suit the spirit of this study. In this dissertation, the cultural activists speak for themselves. Historian and labor lawyer Staughton Lynd called this *guerrilla history* or history from the bottom up. It is a symbiotic relationship between the guerrilla, or protagonist, and the researcher. "Most guerrilla history will not be created by guerrillas alone and unaided, but will involve the assistance of a second person, acting as sympathetic listener, transcriber, editor, and/or presenter-to-the world" (Lynd & Grubacic, 2008, p. 138). Everyone is an expert and equal participant in the process. It is a form of accompaniment. Accompaniment is rooted in liberation theology. Archbishop Oscar Romero coined the term prior to his assassination in 1980. Staughton popularized it in the United States.

I conversed with Staughton about these concepts at length on May 12, 2010. During our dialog, I came to the realization that my adaptation of portraiture parallels Staughton's theory and practice of accompaniment. Both methods provide platforms for marginalized people to speak in their own voice. Both methods emphasize true equality between the researcher and the subject of the research. Both methods are three-dimensional.

### **Relationship**

Building relationships with the artists and artist group was at the nucleus of this dissertation. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot described relationship building as:

A complex, subtle, dynamic process of navigating the boundaries between self and other, distance and intimacy, acceptance and skepticism, receptivity and challenge, and silence and talk. And it is the challenging process of negotiating

the often, conflicting demands and responsibilities of ethics, empiricism, and emotion. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 135)

Unlike traditional ways of using portraiture where the “dance of dialog” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 103) chronicles conversations that emerge through trust and intimacy, my research included interactions with the artists and artist group, secondary sources, and a rich array of archival documents. As stated in chapter 1, other portraitists have used the method in diverse ways. For instance, Curtiss Paul De Young (2004) wrote about three faith-based social justice leaders from the 20th century in his dissertation: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Christian German who resisted the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s; Malcolm X, an Islamic African American; and Aung San Suu Kyi, a Buddhist Burmese woman under house arrest. Two of his portraits are deceased and one is inaccessible. De Young acknowledged the difference between Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s model of relationship building and the way he interacted with texts in his introduction:

The major difference between the way Lawrence-Lightfoot used social science portraiture and the approach I used was the relationship with the individuals in the study. Her research was with living persons she interviewed and observed. My research involved the words and life stories (as told by the subjects and multiple biographers) of individuals who were unavailable for interviews due to death or inaccessibility. (DeYoung, 2004, pp. 8-9)

De Young (2004) accomplished relationship building with his portraits through archival work. In narrative research in general and portraiture in particular, the questions asked are the same whether the people studied are alive or dead:

Whose story is it? Who authored this tale? Whose voices were included? Whose voices were silenced? As our attention is called to one facet of an event, what aspects are nudged into shadow? As lives are synthesized, conclusions about what is important and what is equivalent are made. The life of the author filters the experiences of the other, leaving us with one hegemonic tale instead of a symphony of lives. Archived data allow access to the differentiated particular,

helping us to understand the complexities of the past (Morgan-Fleming, Riegle, & Fryer as cited in Clandinin, 2007, p. 82)

Similar to De Young's (2004) study, as portraitist for this dissertation, I felt a tremendous responsibility to build relationships with the artists and artist group in a vigilant way. Like De Young's dissertation, I relied heavily on archival material to fill historical gaps. The portraits represent a wide range in time period and cultural settings. Both dissertations look at activists who were willing to risk it all for a better future. Like De Young, through intensive dialogs with records from the past, I pursued complex truths relating to the create dangerously theme.

Even though there are similarities in the way Curtiss Paul De Young (2004) and I used portraiture and relationship building, the intent and content of our dissertations are vastly different. De Young's dissertation was grounded in faith-based activism with people from various religious orientations. De Young was interested in what drives the individuals in his study. My question—what does it mean to create dangerously?—is an exploration in definition of a phenomenon. The artists and artist group in this dissertation are driven by the political, social, and historic conditions of their day, opposed to religious faith.

My relationships with the artists and artist group in this dissertation were diverse and covered different periods of time. A synopsis is provided below.

### **Augusto Boal**

For more than half a century, Augusto Boal created dangerously. Through this study, and more than 200 Theatre of the Oppressed workshop hours with Augusto and his son Julian, I started to grasp what the powerful create dangerously concept actually meant.

Primary and secondary sources contributed to my scholarly sojourn, as did conversations with intellectuals and practitioners who are deeply entrenched in Theatre of the Oppressed pedagogy. Among them are Donaldo Macedo, a Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and Education at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. Donaldo graciously invited me to his departmental office. He was one of Paulo Freire's colleagues and literary collaborators. Paulo's methods are the centerpiece of Augusto's Theatre of the Oppressed system.

Richard Schechner, a professor in the Performance Studies Department at New York University, corroborated specific details about Augusto's years with Arena São Paulo and beyond. Richard first met Augusto in Brazil in 1968, while touring through Latin America. Augusto was a contributing editor for *TDR: The Drama Review* (1970), a periodical founded by Richard.

Claire Picher and her partner, Bill Koehnlein, offered insight and a point of view vis-à-vis Augusto's Theatre of the Oppressed methods. Claire, who formed the Theatre of the Oppressed Laboratory (TOPLAB) in 1990, along with three others, was responsible for annually bringing Augusto and Julian to the Brecht Forum in New York City. Since Augusto's untimely death, on May 2, 2009, TOPLAB has committed to honoring his memory by carrying on. In 2009 and 2010, Julian made the sojourn from Paris to Manhattan for back-to-back sessions. Sadly, it was a solo affair. I enrolled both years. I am confident my instructive dialogs with Claire and Bill will extend past the completion of this research. All of the aforementioned individuals assisted in the evolution of Augusto's portrait.

Lastly, I attended the yearly Pedagogy of Theatre of the Oppressed Conference in Omaha, Nebraska in 2008; in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2009; and in Austin, Texas in 2010. My participation in these gatherings provided opportunities to engage with others who are deeply connected to the theories and praxis of Augusto and Paulo. The end result was a deeper rumination on the create dangerously theme.

### **Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o**

As I crafted Ngũgĩ's portrait, I learned a great deal about the create dangerously motif. Primary and secondary literary sources assisted me on this journey. Ngũgĩ recommended many of the books during my interview at the University of California, Irvine.

Here again, my face-to-face meeting with Richard Schechner on February 10, 2009, proved invaluable. Richard was a former colleague of Ngũgĩ and Augusto. In 1964, he was also one of the producing directors of the Free Southern Theater, which commenced at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. He is the only person I know who was personally connected to all of the profiles in this dissertation.

Donaldo Macedo, who I visited at the University of Massachusetts in Boston on October 14, 2008, provided assistance with Ngũgĩ's portrait as well as Augusto's. Paulo Freire's pedagogy was the heart and soul of both of the artists' work.

First and foremost, it was Ngũgĩ's eyewitness account that framed the vignette. The four hours we spent together and the publications he authored provided a bird's eye view of an artist who dreamed of a better world and risked everything to make it real. Ngũgĩ created dangerously and he survived. Many have benefited from his story.

## **Mississippi Caravan of Music**

Many people contributed to the development of the Mississippi Caravan of Music (Caravan) portrait. Even though I relied heavily on the written testimonies of surviving Caravan participants, without eyewitness accounts from movement veterans, volunteers, and artists, and the rich archival materials from historians and journalists, placing the narrative in the proper context would have been impossible. The Caravan was the cultural arm of the Freedom Summer Project. Most of the singers-songwriters toured through the Magnolia State for short stints, supporting the dangerous frontline operation. Their job was to provide sustenance to the troops and draw attention to the racist practices perpetuated by southern whites throughout the Black Belt region. Following their pilgrimage to Mississippi, Caravan artists educated audiences through their lyrics and raised money for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), and other organizations that were combating segregation. They accompanied the freedom struggle in vital ways.

It was the day-to-day grueling tedious work by local leaders, SNCC, CORE, and COFO organizers, however, that broke the back of Jim Crow with assistance from their northern friends. The indigenous folks and civil rights warriors were the decision makers. They were the planners. They endured the routine harassment and brutality. They were in Mississippi for the long haul.

Due to the distinctive nature of the Mississippi Caravan of Music create dangerously profile, I enlisted the assistance of a number of people who graciously helped to illuminate the behind the scenes activities of the Movement. I also frequented numerous events.



First off, Guy and Candie Carawan proffered incredible insight regarding Highlander's role in the civil rights battle for emancipation for southern Blacks. The couple generously rendered time to converse on a number of occasions during movement gatherings and joined me for lunch while I was attending a Highlander Popular Education and Organizing Workshop during the weekend of December 5, 2008. Candie shared an unpublished paper on Zilphia Horton, edited the original Caravan portrait draft, and apprised me of historic gaps.

On January 20, 2009, I watched the presidential inauguration with Matt and Marshall Jones, two of the SNCC Freedom Singers; Avon Rollins, a member of SNCC's Executive Committee; and family and friends. It was a new era. Tears, laughter, and joy permeated the mid-sized apartment overlooking the Hudson River in Manhattan. It was unfathomable to the amassed guests that a Black leader would occupy the world's most powerful office in their lifetimes. Much had changed since the Caravan of Music traveled to the red clay country in 1964. The SNCC veterans reminded me that there was still much work to be done.

My trip to Mississippi was informative. From June 17, 2009, to June 22, 2009, I immersed myself in the state's extraordinary past. I flew into the Jackson-Evers International Airport, which is named for the murdered NAACP field secretary. While there, I visited the Medgar Evers airport pavilion, which honors the civil rights pioneer.

During my stay in Jackson, Jerry Mitchell, the award winning Clarion Ledger reporter, escorted me to Medgar Evers' House for a private viewing, and I spent meaningful time with the curators at Eudora Welty's residence. Eudora Welty, the famous Mississippi author, indirectly influenced the shaping of portraiture methodology.

For the remaining time, as noted in my introduction to the portrait, I participated in the 45th commemorative activities for the killings of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.

Two additional functions provided opportunities for me to interact with Mississippi Civil Rights veterans. The first was the Freedom Summer: Unity and Change, Then and Now Conference held in Oxford, Ohio from October 9, 2009, to October 11, 2009. The second was the SNCC 50th Anniversary Reunion Conference, which took place in Raleigh, North Carolina from April 15, 2010, to 18, 2010.

Lastly, while crafting the Caravan of Music portrait, I continued to engage with a number of the singers-songwriters, whose experiences are depicted in this dissertation. I invited some of them to perform at the Peoples' Voice Café in New York City. The Café is an all-volunteer collective that provides space to artists involved with humanitarian causes. I book shows for the venue. Some of the Caravan participants who performed during the research and writing stage of this process included Alix Dobkin, Carolyn Hester, and Jackie Washington. I also scheduled a Phil Ochs Song Night and invited members of the SNCC Freedom Singers to celebrate their half-century milestone.

### **Emergent Themes**

The development of emergent themes related to the create dangerously phenomenon reflected my first effort “to bring interpretive insight, analytic scrutiny and aesthetic order to the collection of data” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185). As portraitist, I entered the setting with a perspective, a framework, and a guiding set of questions that were the result of my previous experience, my reviews of the literature, and my conceptual and disciplinary knowledge (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Emergent themes in this dissertation were based upon the working questions established in chapter 2. Do artists and artist groups create dangerously when they:

- Threaten the social, economic and political status quo?
- Mobilize for systemic change?
- Introduce new practices and tactics into a community?
- Openly express the hidden transcripts of opposing views?
- Keep the stories of repressive power alive?
- Assist ordinary people usually locked out of the political process to write their own scripts (popular education)?
- Lead without authority?

Because Albert Camus' Nobel lecture was the starting point for this dissertation, it was important for me to familiarize myself with the man, the artist, the activist; in search of clues regarding his risk taking. What did Camus mean by his challenge to artists to create dangerously? I read several of Camus' books: *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (1988), as well as his controversial essay, "The Rebel" (1991). I perused his notebooks and skimmed articles written for the clandestine underground paper "Combat" (Lévi-Valensi, 2006). Publications written by Camus scholars were also devoured including the beautiful biography written by Herbert Lottman (1981), two books on the Camus-Sartre friendship and altercation, the first by Ronald Aronson (2005) titled *Camus & Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It*; the second by David Sprintzen and Adrian van den Hoven (2004), *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*. Other documents consulted include *Albert Camus: The Artist in the Arena* by Emmett Parker (1966), *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* by John

Cruickshank (1963), and *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* by David Carroll (2007). Themes emerged about a man who was a conscience for his generation: a humanitarian who always sided with truth, freedom, and justice—and, a man who created dangerously from his humble Algerian past until the end of his life, where his manuscript “Le Premier Homme” was found in Camus’ briefcase (maybe his long-awaited-for *War and Peace*).

Through my search, I discovered that Camus was an intellectual, but he was also a man of action. In 1935, Camus fought the censors during his stint with Theatre du Travail. In Algiers, when city hall cancelled the public performance of *Revolte dans les Asturies* because “the subject was dangerous during an election campaign” (Lottman, 1981, p. 102), Camus took matters into his own hands. He published the play and distributed it for all to see. He went on to found Theatre de L’Equipe following his expulsion from the Communist Party in 1937. During the Nazi occupation of France, Camus joined *Combat*, an underground Paris newspaper. *Combat* was a dangerous operation:

For each issue, the layout had to be perfect before it was sent to press; words had to be counted, for example, for no editor would be available at the underground printing plant. The method employed at the time was to set the type and make up the newspaper pages, then to reproduce them by photogravure in reduced format, after which zinc plates were sent to printers scattered around the country. Copy for the newspaper was compiled by correspondents who listened to the British radio (the BBC) and other shortwave broadcasts, or who received information from Switzerland or other foreign sources. Funds were parachuted from London earmarked for the Combat movement, sent from Free French headquarters. Helpers would carry supplies, distribute finished copies. (Lottman, 1981, p. 301)

Camus always fought the good fight. He was a committed activist. He took plenty of risks. These risks catapulted him into the public eye following the war, leading

to the ultimate prize, Nobel. More important was his desire to transform society a path he followed throughout his life.

Similar to my exploration for emergent themes with Camus regarding his create dangerously challenge, in this dissertation I listened for the stories of this study's artists and artist group to shed light on the theme. The difference was that I had personal relationships with this dissertation's cultural activists. I never met Camus.

Through these emerging themes, I drew out the refrains and patterns and wove a thematic framework for the construction of a create dangerously narrative. I gathered, organized, and scrutinized the data, searching for convergent threads, illuminating metaphors, and overarching symbols, and constructs, making coherence out of subject matter that the actors might experience as unrelated or incoherent (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185).

It is from this juncture that I moved forward, examining the collected information of the artists and artist group: Augusto Boal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the Mississippi Caravan of Music cultural vanguard. I searched for the create dangerously story line that eventually emerged.

As portraitist, I was active in selecting the themes that were used to tell the story, strategic in deciding on points of focus and emphasis, and creative in defining the sequence and rhythm of the narrative. What was left out was often as important as what was included—the blank spaces, the silences, also shaped the form of the story (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005).

For the portraitist, then, there is a crucial dynamic between documenting and creating the narrative, between receiving *and* shaping, reflecting *and* imposing, mirroring *and* improvising . . . a string of paradoxes. The effort to reach

coherence must both flow organically from the data *and* from the interpretive witness of the portraitist. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 10)

### **Aesthetic Whole**

This dissertation is a carefully crafted story about artists and an artist group who refused to remain silent in the face of oppression. Each case, like a piece of fabric, was stitched together, “weaving the portrait, weaving the tale” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 259), “recognizing that the gestalt is much more than the sum of its parts” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 243). In my role as portraitist, similar to my role as a choreographer, I thoughtfully pondered and considered the compositional components needed to construct a unified whole: variety, contrast, sequence, repetition, transition, balance, proportion, climax, conflict, and harmony. In doing so, I “came face to face with the tensions inherent in blending art and science, analysis and narrative, description and interpretation, structure and texture” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 243).

Ethnographers J. P. Goetz and M. D. LeCompte (as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) saw the qualitative research process as analogous to assembling a jigsaw puzzle:

The edge pieces are located first and assembled to provide a frame of reference. Then attention is devoted to those more striking aspects of the puzzle picture that can be identified readily from the mass of puzzle pieces and assembled separately. Next, having stolen some surreptitious glances at the picture on the box, the puzzle worker places the assembled parts in their general position within the frame and, finally locates and adds the connecting pieces until no holes remain. (pp. 244-245)

No matter how scholars interpret the portraiture process of constructing and articulating the unified whole, the end result is the same. This dissertation merged in a vibrant composite that celebrates the significant part each artist and artist group played in

building a better world. Albert Camus, Augusto Boal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and the Mississippi Caravan of Music participants are from every geographical corner of the world and from different periods of time. Their art was meant to be a shared experience. It is a form of social collectivism. To create dangerously is to invoke the past, honor the present, and transform the future.

### **Limitations of Portraiture**

The stories in this dissertation are interpretive accounts of events that happened throughout time and around the globe. The narratives emanated from the artists and artist group. They chose the prose. They selected the narrative's placement within the context of a larger whole. They strategically crafted their recollections for public consumption. As the portraitist, I decided which of those materials were to be included and which ones were to be left out.

Critics of narrative inquiry call this bias and question the validity and reliability of this method of research. Quite often, a storyteller neglects important factors that have impinged on his or her life.

These same critics fail to reveal that quantitative methods are rife with the same problems. The difference is that the positivist research is not as transparent. Sara

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman Davis (1997) addressed these issues:

In quantitative research where the structure and processes are relatively codified and routinized, it is important to recognize that the researcher's hand is, nevertheless, evident. We see the researcher's imprint in the selection of the research question, in the design of the study, in the data collection strategies, and in the interpretation of data. There is no voice, no soul, in traditional quantitative forms of inquiry, but the researcher's hand—revealed in the conceptual orientation, the disciplinary lens, the methods and design [and probably in personal disposition]—is certainly present and shaping the work. (p. 86)

Howard Zinn, who served as an honorary advisor to the Cultural Center for Social Change, also discussed bias in *Voices of a People's History of the United States*, co-authored with Anthony Arnove (2004). Context is one of portraiture's components and is essential to this study, so I have recorded some of Howard's sentiments below:

From the start of my teaching and writing, I had no illusions about "objectivity," if that meant avoiding a point of view. I knew that a historian (or journalist, or anyone telling a story) was forced to choose, from an infinite number of facts, what to present, what to omit. And that decision, inevitably would reflect whether consciously or not, the interests of the historian.

There is no such thing as a pure fact, innocent of interpretation. Behind every fact presented to the world—by a teacher, a writer, anyone—is a judgment. The judgment that has been made is that this fact is important, and that other facts are not important and so they are omitted from the presentation. (p. 25)

Another weakness in portraiture is the construction and reconstruction of past life history. Imagination, memory, and experience feed into human recollection of events. Quite often it is difficult to get a true representation of an account. The artists and artist group in this dissertation relied on their songs and writings from that time in order to create a new narrative, which made sense to them in the present. Jerome Bruner (2002) said the reason we constantly construct and reconstruct our selves is:

To meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future. Telling oneself about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what's happened, and why we're doing what we're doing. (p. 64)

The stories told in this dissertation have a beginning, middle, and end. In reality, there is no endpoint, only new beginnings. The same is true with all research methods, qualitative and quantitative:

Even data, which appear to stay constant, such as transcripts, change their meaning over time, just as we ourselves come to see new and different aspects of our research. In this way, old stories actually become new stories, quite simply, over time we find new layers of meaning in them. It is not that this new perspective is more adequate than that which we previously held; but it is



grounded in a different standpoint, the place from which we presently see the world. (Andrews, 2007, p. 5)

In spite of the limitations of portraiture, the research method is the best comprehensive vehicle to capture and study lives. Through the five essential features, this unique form of qualitative inquiry, can document, educate, inspire, transform, and speak to the intellect and to the heart.

Realizing the drawbacks of portraiture methodology, I took extra precautions to ensure accuracy. Creating *dangerously* was more about what the artists did opposed to what they said, so I was able to crosscheck factual information against primary literary documents as well as secondary sources. I corroborated information with associates of the artists and, in the case of the Mississippi Caravan of Music, Candie and Guy Carawan edited a complete draft of the portrait. Ngũgĩ was provided numerous opportunities to correct his profile and friends of Augusto helped fill in historical gaps.

At the end of each portrait, I included a “Lessons Learned” section where I step back and reflect on the guiding questions that assisted in the crafting of the motifs. Texts; conversations with scholars, artists, and activists; and knowledge gained at conferences and workshops throughout the dissertation research period all helped me formulate my views on the *create dangerously* theme.

### **Closing Remarks**

This dissertation is a story about artists and an artist group who became active participants in their own history. They consciously engaged with major social movements of their day and dared to shape the future for themselves and generations to come. They moved mountains with narratives, be it words, songs, theatre, dance, and the

visual arts. Their narratives were newspaper accounts of the day. Together and alone the collected stories identified them with struggles for equality, justice, and egalitarianism.

As the portraitist, it was my responsibility “to document the specifics, the nuance, the detailed description of a thing, a gesture, a voice, an attitude as a way of illuminating more universal patterns” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 12). By using participant and movement narratives of the selected artists and artist group as a way to study and preserve social movement history, I helped bridge the knowledge gap, bringing new kinds of information to the forefront.

Unlike projects of the Cultural Center for Social Change where I provide platforms for movement artists and activists to tell their stories in an unrevised and uncensored format, this dissertation puts the create dangerously phenomenon into a nontraditional academic theoretical framework, a framework like Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s mentor, W. E. B. Du Bois, who “captured the interdisciplinary as he moved from social philosophy to empirical sociology to autobiography to political essays to poetry and literature to social activism” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 9). Du Bois biographer Arnold Rampersad described the legendary scholar in the following way:

He declined to see the separation between Science and Art, believing that such a distinction violated the integrity of intelligence, which could set no wall between one fundamental form of knowledge and another, since all belonged to the world of nature, of Truth. . . . He devoted himself to a knowledge of this world equal to the power of his mind to imaging a better one. Science—social science, historical science, the daily observation of persons, places, events—became the most to which the sail of the imaginary was lashed. (as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 14)

My use of portraiture in this dissertation is an adaptation of typical practices of the method and a bit more complicated. Besides my personal relationships forged with all of the artists and secondary sources, I relied heavily on a plethora of rich archival

material. Through the arts, these heroes and heroines carry on in life and death inspiring artists and activists who keep their spirit and intent alive.

## Chapter IV: Augusto Boal's Portrait

### Introduction

On Friday, January 24, 2003, I stood in a sea of humanity in Sunset Park in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in anticipation of a speech to be delivered by the new President, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (Lula). The summer heat engulfed the festive crowd, 100,000 strong. The gathered supporters sang Lula's campaign song swaying back and forth like dancers in a Corps de Ballet in between chants of "Ole, ole, ole, Lula, Lula, Lula." I wept as I watched and listened. This was a different Brazil then the one Augusto Boal experienced under military dictatorship. Augusto was in Porto Alegre on that historic day.

Lula took the stage and the jubilant crowd erupted with wild applause. In Portuguese, Lula told the massive group that he was elected "because of the political consciousness of the voters" (Kollbrunner, 2003, para. 4). He acknowledged that the victory was the result of a long struggle: "We have fought and hoped for so long. So many have died before us" (Kollbrunner, 2003, para. 7). The determination of the Brazilian people "made it possible for hope to defeat fear" (Kollbrunner, 2003, para. 6).

Lula discussed his aspirations for the future including the implementation of agrarian reform, quality accessible education for all, comprehensive health care, and "a country where the riches are distributed justly" (Kollbrunner, 2003, para. 9). "I want to be able to look you in the eyes and say that I haven't failed, but that I have built a government for the poor" (Kollbrunner, 2003, para. 7).

Lula ended his speech by praising the organizers and attendees of the third World Social Forum, the event that brought us together 24 days after he was sworn in as the

democratically elected Worker's Party candidate. It was an emotional oration. In the spirit of national pride and solidarity, the Brazilian anthem played as the huge group dispersed.

The significance of this occasion was not lost on me, in spite of the language barrier. Lula burst on the scene in 1978 as the President of the Metalworkers Union of São Bernardo during subsequent repressive regimes. São Bernardo is an industrial enclave on the outskirts of São Paulo. Twenty-five hundred metalworkers in Lula's jurisdiction staged a successful sit-down strike at the Saab-Scania bus and truck factory. The workers "punched their time clocks, assumed their work positions, crossed their arms, and sat down, refusing to start their machines" (Skidmore, 1989, p. 205). The action, which spread to ninety firms throughout the state, involved 500,000 workers (Skidmore, 1989). Lula was a hero. Twenty-five years later, he is the country's leading representative.

I traveled to Brazil as part of a Ford Foundation contingent. In 2002, I was one of 19 nonprofit professionals awarded a two-year fellowship to work at the philanthropic institution. I was assigned to the Media, Arts, and Culture Unit, where I split my time between three portfolios: Justice and Journalism Initiative, Media Policy, and the Media Productions Fund. The Brazilian excursion was one of many perks. The opportunity to study with Augusto Boal as part of my career development package was another.

The Foundation was no stranger to the region. Ford opened its Rio de Janeiro office in 1962, maintaining its presence through 21 years of military rule. The World Social Forum was of particular interest to a number of program officers who saw the World Economic Forum alternative as a way for program staff and grantees to witness

the growing global justice movement. Portfolios were tailored to embrace this great experiment in civil society and participatory democracy as it related to human and civil rights.

For approximately one week, we met, marched, attended sessions, reflected, and debriefed. We discussed grant making with other foundations and visited a Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) encampment and settlement. The MST is Brazil's Movement of Landless Rural Workers. To date, this is one of the most powerful crusades for social change in the world. The MST Culture Collective, founded in 1996, is an integral component to the overall mobilizing effort. Members work closely with the Center of the Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro, the organization founded by Augusto Boal following his return from exile in 1986.

The theme "Another World Is Possible" seemed appropriate for the 2003 forum, which was a counter summit to the World Economic meeting held annually in Davos, Switzerland. The World Social Forum, first held in Porto Alegre in 2001, "is a pedagogical and political space that enables learning, networking, and political organizing" (Fisher & Ponniah, 2003, p. 6). Nongovernmental groups, scholars, funders, celebrities, activists, artists, and educators from across the planet converged on this Brazilian city in the spirit of democracy.

For artists like Augusto Boal, the World Social Forum was a celebration and homecoming. Having battled severe repression after the 1964 coup, and arrest, torture, and exile after the 1968 state of siege, Augusto felt a new day was dawning with the election of Lula. It was unimaginable after decades of censorship, the restriction of civil liberties, outlawed oppositional parties, and the murder and disappearances of ordinary

citizens who raised their voices against all odds. Now, people were marching in the streets without fear of reprisals as police on horseback routed us on.

Organizers calculated the participation of 140,000 at the opening demonstration against the war in Iraq. It was a spectacle by any standard: a carnival-like atmosphere with dancing puppets and colorful placards in a multitude of languages.

Marcus Kollbrunner, a reporter for the Committee for Worker's International, estimated the overall World Social Forum attendance at 100,000, with 20,763 delegates from 156 countries including Argentina, Uruguay, United States, Italy, and France. Impressively, 5,717 nongovernmental organizations represented a variety of causes, and there was a sizable youth presence of 25,000 tenting in the designated camp, and an enormous lodging and meeting place, which was also a center for arts oriented events (Kollbrunner, 2003).

To understand the significance of the World Social Forum's origination and implementation in Porto Alegre during the 21st century, it is important to reflect on the preceding decades of economic chaos, instability, and unrest. Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world. São Paulo, home to Augusto Boal's Arena Theatre, where he served as director from 1955 to 1971, is the second largest metropolis, according to the City Mayors (n.d.) ranking, with Seoul being the first. The gap between rich and poor within Brazil is immense and is reflected in the pattern of land distribution. "A 2000 statistic indicated that around 1% of the population owns half the agricultural land" (Babbage, 2004, p. 2). It is within this climate that Augusto Boal built his arsenal of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. These techniques and the ominous environment where they were created is the focus of this portrait.

## Theatre of the Oppressed Tree

June 5th through June 7th of 2007, I enrolled in an advanced workshop with Augusto Boal and his son Julian at the Brecht Forum in New York City. The session, on Experimental Image Theatre Techniques, was designed for people who were experienced Theatre of the Oppressed facilitators and practitioners. The gathering was also a colloquium on Augusto's most recent book, *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. In this latest work, Augusto expanded upon themes pertaining to the transformative power of art. Having never previously offered this topic, I was excited to partake in Augusto's exploratory venture.

At this particular get-together, approximately 35 people from around the globe converged on Manhattan to study with the Boals. Participant countries included Israel, Brazil, France, England, Morocco, Denmark, Lebanon, Canada, Azerbaijan, Ireland, and the United States. There were African Americans, Native Americans, women, and men. Languages spoken were English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. Each group ranged in age from the mid-20s to the mid-70s. Most of the devotees were theatre practitioners, who worked in a variety of settings. We had one thing in common. We were all there to study with the father of Theatre of the Oppressed and his son.

The workshop was organized by the Theatre of the Oppressed Laboratory (TOPLAB). The group was founded in New York City in 1990 by Marie-Claire Picher and three other enthusiastic Theatre of the Oppressed devotees. Claire was a close associate of Augusto and Julian. She is responsible for introducing the Boals to a host of Theatre of the Oppressed disciples, like me. I was a workshop veteran. I initially



enrolled in Paulo Freire and Theatre of the Oppressed classes at the Brecht Forum in the spring of 2003, shortly after attending the World Social Forum in Brazil.

The three-day session took place at the Brecht Forum. Established in 1975 as the New York Marxist School, the Brecht Forum “brings people together across social and cultural boundaries and artistic and academic disciplines to promote critical analysis, creative thinking, collaborative projects and networking in an independent community-level environment” (Brecht Forum, n.d., p. about us). Throughout the year, the organization presents an array of activities cultivated in collaboration with individuals and groups involved with local, national, and global social change initiatives.

On the first day, I arrived early to help Claire prepare the space. She has become a good friend over the years. In 2005, she allowed me to take one of the workshops for free because I was unemployed. I have never forgotten her generosity.

I noticed several large pieces of paper strategically placed on the wall for participants to read as they entered the venue. In big bright bold letters on one sheet were the workshop objectives:

1. Develop self-expression in order to create images of individual and group situations of oppression.
2. Analyze structures, systems, and relations of power.
3. Practice transforming images of oppression through nonverbal and verbal dialog techniques.
4. Develop cooperation, collaboration, and trust-building skills.
5. Learn movement exercises, group integration games, and narrative techniques that can be used to democratize groups and organizations.

On another piece of paper was the Theatre of the Oppressed Tree. The tree is a symbol. It personifies hope. It helps students comprehend a system of theatrical techniques designed by Augusto during the dictatorship in Brazil, his exile, and beyond.

Augusto commenced every workshop with a discussion of the tree. On this occasion, we gathered around the drawing and Augusto kicked off the afternoon. He started with his mantra: theatre of the oppressed, by the oppressed, and for the oppressed. Then he pointed to the roots and fertile ground—the words, “Ethics, Solidarity, and Philosophy” scrawled across the bottom left side; “Politics, Multiplication, and History” on the right. Augusto emphasized that Theatre of the Oppressed is a blend of unique, independent techniques that are interconnected and that the tree draws its nutrient sap from the roots.

Augusto then directed our attention to the trunk: “Games.” He explained that games incorporated two fundamental societal traits; they have rules and they have creative freedom. “Without rules, there is no game, without freedom, there is no life” (Boal, 2006, p. 4). Games are always played throughout the workshop. They help build community.

Next, Augusto steered us to the branches and leaves, the heart of this portrait. Augusto briefly described his Theatre of the Oppressed armory. “Image Theatre” was on the lower branch. “Forum Theatre” was near the top. Each leaf illuminated the other techniques: “Newspaper Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, Invisible Theatre, and Legislative Theatre.” “Direct Action,” although not a specific Theatre of the Oppressed method, had its own petal. In the context of Theatre of the Oppressed, direct action happens when this extraordinary form of creative expression moves from the stage to the streets.

Lastly, Augusto underscored the fruit on the soil and the bird in the sky. He surmised, when the produce drops to the earth the bird swoops down, grasps it in his/her beak and transports it to other commonwealths. The Theatre of the Oppressed seeds spread and the transformative power of art takes hold.

Augusto then summarized this segment of the session, which is also documented in *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. “The objective of the whole tree is to bring forth fruits, seeds and flowers: this is our desired goal, in order that the Theatre of the Oppressed may seek not only to understand reality, but to transform it to our liking” (Boal, 2006, p. 7).

At the time I crafted this portrait in 2010, I have learned the full spectrum of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. What follows is a detailed account of those techniques, the arms and foliage of the tree, and the context in which they were created.

### **The Early Years: Arena Theatre of São Paulo, 1955-1971**

Augusto returned to Brazil in 1955, following two years of study at Columbia University. For the next 15 years, he served as director and playwright for the Arena Theatre in São Paulo.

Augusto originally traveled to New York City following his graduation in 1952 armed with a degree in chemistry and the desire to hone his skills in the performing arts. He was mentored by drama critic, historian, and artist-producer, John Gassner, as well as artist, author, and activist, Langston Hughes. Through Langston, he discovered Black literature and the theatre of Harlem (Babbage, 2004). Langston introduced Augusto to several of his friends, “Black and White, men and women” (Boal, 2001, p. 127).

Augusto was taken by the group’s determination to break the color barrier. “How

beautiful is the friendship between people who struggle for the same just causes. The skin color, sex, age, nationality doesn't matter" (Boal, 2001, p. 127).

The meeting with Langston Hughes was not by chance. Augusto sought him out. Augusto had previously forged relationships with the theatre community during his time at the University of Brazil, including a friendship with playwright Abdias Nascimento, founder of the group Teatro Experimental do Negro (Black Experimental Theatre) (Babbage, 2004). Prior to his departure to the United States, Abdias gave Augusto a letter for Langston. Augusto hand delivered the note following a cultural program sponsored by Columbia University where the famous poet lectured. Augusto recalled his encounter:

I went to the packed lecture. At the end of the applause, people queued to greet the poet. I joined the queue. My legs began to tremble. I imagined the emotion I would feel when shaking the hand of a world celebrity.

"Mr. Hughes . . . my friend . . . Abdias, you know . . . my very good friend . . . a brother . . . this letter . . . see? It is for you. . . . He wrote it himself . . . by himself . . . for you . . . for himself . . . nao sei . . . It is yours! Take it!" The words were, mostly, right; the style syncopated and the syntax random.

Hughes certainly remembered "our friend and brother" Abdias, of whom he was very fond. He conversed with me for a good five minutes—I understood half of what he said, and luckily in the intelligible half there was an invitation to a round table in Harlem. (Boal, 2001, pp. 126-127)

Augusto's two-year stint in Manhattan helped prepare him for his role as director and playwright for the Arena Theatre of São Paulo. After assuming the position, the company attempted to produce artistically innovative and politically radical theatre, and foster the work of Brazilian playwrights while struggling against heavy financial constraints (Babbage, 2004). The theatrical practice was an evolutionary process. The intellectual and aesthetic decisions made by Augusto and company members were often a consequence of the social, political, and historic conditions engulfing Brazil and the

desire for social change. Artists throughout Brazil were discussing and experimenting with the creation of a new social order during this period. It was a threefold process: “to define a national cultural identity in both form and content; to demolish boundaries between artist and viewer; and to expose Brazil’s poverty and inequality in the hope of stimulating socioeconomic reform by raising public consciousness” (Britton as cited in Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006, p. 11).

Augusto and theatre company members discussed how they should proceed. They “sought to reach a segment of the population traditionally excluded from art discourse by tapping familiar frames of reference or by including members of this population in the process” (Britton as cited in Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006, p. 11):

Our discussions turned more on the political than the aesthetic. The most urgent question that exercised us was: To whom should our theatre be addressed? Our audience was middle class. Workers and peasants were our characters (in itself an advance!) but not our spectators. We did theatre from the perspective which we believed to be “of the people”—but we did not perform *for* the people! What was the point of representing working class characters and serving them up, as a pre-dinner treat, to the middle class and the rich?

We longed for a popular audience, without ever seeing it in flesh and blood. “The people” was a chimera. The dream was to engage in dialogue with “the people” . . . to whom we had never been introduced. The people: we did not define what this was, where it worked, what it ate, how it loved, what it did. We knew what it was not: middle class, our audience. We wanted to be at the service of this mysterious and much loved “people,” but . . . we were not the people. (Boal, 2001, p. 175)

Realizing that he was a young somewhat inexperienced theatre director from a big city, in 1961 Augusto and Arena Company members decided to take the theatre to the people. “I talked about agrarian reform in theory, without knowing the countryside or the country people. I read about violence, I did not see it” (Boal, 2001, p. 196).

During a tour in the Northeast section of Brazil, the Arena Theatre did a show for a local group of peasant farmers affiliated with the *Ligas Camponesas* (Peasant Leagues).

First established in the 1950s, the Leagues were loosely structured unions that demanded basic rights for workers. By 1964, “there were approximately 2,181 Leagues scattered over 20 states and the federal district that included Brasília” (Dassin, 1998, p. 108).

“Brazil had a heavily concentrated system of land tenure, a legacy from the Portuguese empire” (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 4). Augusto saw the struggle for agrarian reform as an abolitionist movement against slavery.

The peasants were not allowed to leave the lands on which they worked; they did not get wages, merely “credits” to buy goods in the stores of the feudal *senhor*—they were always in debt. Hired guns punished and killed any recalcitrants. The Northeast lived this terror. (Boal, 2001, p. 193)

The Northeast show was a turning point. The experience forever changed Augusto’s thinking and theatrical practice.

I heard Augusto recount the story at every Theatre of the Oppressed workshop I attended. More than 40 years after the incident, the vivid details and emotion remained as this great artist imparted the knowledge to new generations of scholars, activists, and artists. The story is also documented in Boal’s (2001) autobiography, *Hamlet and the Baker’s Son*:

We had done a show just for the League’s local peasant farmers, which ended with the actors singing frenetic revolutionary salutations, left arm raised, fist clenched: “The land belongs to the people! We must give our blood to reclaim it from the landowners!” Things that everyone thought, which we thought needed reiteration. The art of the time.

A peasant farmer, Virgílio, moved to tears and enthused by our “message,” asked me to come with the cast and our guns and set off with his *compahheiros* to fight against the hired thugs of a “colonel” who had invaded their lands. Taken by surprise we replied that they had misunderstood us: the guns were make-believe, stage props, which couldn’t be fired, and that only we, the artists, were the genuine article. Without hesitation, Virgílio told us that if we really were genuine we needn’t worry—they had guns enough for us all. We should just come and fight at their side. We were ashamed at having to decline this new invitation—an invitation to really fight rather than just talk about fighting. We told him we were genuine *artists* and not genuine *peasant farmers*.

It was then that Virgilio pondered that fact that when we, the genuine artists, talked of giving our blood for a cause, in fact we were talking about *their* blood, the peasant farmers', rather than our artists' blood, because we would go back to our comfortable homes.

The episode made me comprehend the falsity of the "messenger" form of political theatre. We have no right to incite anyone to do something we are not prepared to do ourselves. Before that encounter we were preaching revolution for abstract audiences. Now we met the "people." Virgilio was the "people." We had finally found the "people!" *Viva the people!* How should we speak to this real people? How could we teach them what they knew better than us?

"To be in solidarity is to run the same risks," Che used to say; we were running no risk chanting revolutionary hymns. (p. 193)

### **The 1964 Coup**

The 1961 resignation of Brazilian President Jânio Quadros opened the door for his left-of-center successor, João Goulart. Goulart was an:

Economic nationalist committed to land redistribution, higher salaries and a daring plan to force foreign multinationals to reinvest a percentage of their profits back into the Brazilian economy rather than spiriting them out of the country and distributing them to shareholders in New York and London. (Klein, 2007, p. 76)

By 1962, the international political climate was beginning to change due to the Cuban revolution. In the wake of Fidel Castro's rise to power "the Brazilian military and the United States became frightened by the spectra of a communist take-over of Latin America" (Branford & Rocha, 2002, p. 5). "Even modest initiatives by the poor loomed large and threatening in the eyes of conservative Brazilian landowners, businessmen and military officers" (Wright & Wolford, 2003, p. 4) within this Cold War environment. President João Goulart's speech on March 13, 1964 exacerbated the situation, when besides advocating for agrarian reform, he pushed for the legalization of the Communist Party and a variety of economic measures. He also "argued in favor of extending the vote to the illiterate half of the population—the first time a president of Brazil had ever done so" (Bethell, 1993, pp. 11-12).

João Goulart was overthrown on April 1, 1964 by the Brazilian military in collusion with the United States. Any hopes of implementation of the moderate land-reform program already introduced by his administration in the Brazilian Congress were dashed. He went into exile.

Boal (2001) remembered those terrifying moments after the coup:

In the dark street, on my way home, for the first time in my life I listened to the silence. And heard it. How full of sounds silence is! It can be heard from kilometers away. The further away, the more frightening. A police siren . . . or was it an ambulance? My shoes on the street . . . a strange noise. I kicked a stone in the road. Would they be arresting people before dawn? It was prohibited by law. . . . What law? Or were they taking wounded mutineers to the hospital?

Silence.

Alone. No one was passing in the street. Silence. A door closed. I heard a key turning. I heard my breath. I heard the shadow of a woman gliding past a silent window. I heard the soft murmur of my hands skimming the air, cutting the wind. I heard the wind, the breeze. I heard the silence.

After the silence another siren, and then another. . . . Then

silence . . . silence . . . silence . . . silence . . . s . . . s . . . s . . . Alone.

(pp. 229-230)

Reaction was swift against the opposition. “The new military rulers of Brazil began to attack and dismantle peasant groups, trade unions and student organizations, imprisoning many of the organizations’ leaders and exiling, torturing, or executing many others” (Wright & Wolford, 2003, p. 4). According to *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (Never Again), the truth commission report released in 1986, people were apprehended “for the simple reason that they were inspired by a political philosophy opposed by the authorities” (Klein, 2007, p. 131). Anyone who said anything, which might appear similar to left-wing thinking, was taken to specially adapted prison-ships, barracks, common jails, or neighborhood police stations (Boal, 2001).

Paulo Freire was amongst those early detainees. In 1963, he had been invited to work with the National Literacy Project by the Minister of Education and President João



Goulart. His association with the ousted administration made him an enemy of the state. He spent 70 days in prison. “The Brazilian military considered him to be ‘an international subversive,’ ‘a traitor to Christ and the Brazilian people,’ and accused him of developing a teaching method ‘similar to that of Stalin, Hitler, Perón, and Mussolini’” (McLaren, 2000, p. 144). Furthermore, his accusers ridiculed him for attempting to turn Brazil into a “Bolshevik country” (McLaren, 2000, p. 144). Paulo left Brazil in October of that year.

Arts groups were also targeted. The Popular Center for Culture was at the top of the list. The Center was launched by the National Student Union (UNE) around 1960. It consisted of roving groups of artists, students, activists, trade unionists, and intellectuals who sought to transcend class boundaries, push for reformist political ideas, and spread messages promoting social justice themes through the use of artistic mediums. Augusto collaborated with one of the UNE groups, the Center of the Metallurgical Union, on playwriting and directing. “The workers wrote plays about strikes, about themselves. Sometimes it was fantastic. They wrote about what really happened to them” (Schutzman & Cohen-Cruz, 1994, p. 20).

Conservative factions denounced the UNE, calling it one of the “seven heads of the communist dragon in Brazil” (Dassin, 1998, p. 112). On April 1, 1964, the day of the coup, the Command for the Detection of Communists occupied UNE headquarters in Rio de Janeiro and burned it to the ground (Dassin, 1998).

In this atmosphere of extreme repression, Augusto and Arena Company members took many precautions. They limited their use of telephones. They whispered conversations. They discarded or burned letters, books, diaries, addresses; anything

perceived as contraband. Literature written by Mao Zedong, Che Guavara, Fidel Castro, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and Jean-Paul Sartre were among the selected group (Boal, 2001).

Augusto and Arena Company members decided to abandon the theatre temporarily. Augusto spent weeks alone in the mountains, in the house of some friends:

There I read from sunrise to after sunset. Three times a week, I went to the town cinema. A single projector showed one reel at a time: three intervals—popcorn and guaraná. I tried to stop smoking—three packets a day was excessive. I cut down to seven cigarettes . . . and spent every minute thinking of the next puff. (Boal, 2001, p. 232)

### **Censorship After the Coup**

Under the new regime, with General Humberto Castelo Branco at the helm, restrictive measures were introduced and implemented. This included the abolition of free speech. Government censors scrutinized all forms of cultural expression:

When the censor was “good,” he might even let himself be convinced. If he was “bad,” the following day he would send the script back to us, scrawled all over with authoritarian comments: the light cannot be so bright; the scenery must be repainted to hide the pornographic figure. . . . The dialogue you like cut completely. (Boal, 2001, p. 256)

This was problematic for performing arts groups like Arena whose politics were integral to the work. Realistic dramatization of military activities were out of the question because it would attract attention from the wrong people. As a result, Augusto and Arena Company members had to find an alternative inconspicuous theatrical language. Under the tutelage of Augusto, the company developed a new kind of musical “combining Brazilian history, Brechtian distancing and realism. In taking this direction, the company drew on the success they had already achieved with musical shows, the most important of which had been *Opiniiao* in 1964” (Babbage, 2004, p. 12). *Opiniiao*,

which was written by Oduvaldo Viaanna Filho and directed by Augusto, expressed the concerns of the working class through Brazilian popular music (Babbage, 2004).

Augusto Boal (2001) described opening night of *Opinio* in his autobiography:

The audience was on our side, which was an essential part of the performance, they shouted out our songs, they sang along to our shouts. *Opinio* was us and our audience! *Opinio* was the first coherent and collective protest theatre against the inhumane dictatorship which assassinated and tortured so many, which so impoverished the people, which so badly destroyed what before we used to call Pátria (Fatherland). (p. 238)

*Arena Conta Zumbi* was the next bold theatrical experiment. The play was co-written by Augusto and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, directed by Augusto, with music by Edu Lobo. *Zumbi* is based on an episode in 17th-century history when a colony of escaped slaves at Palmares was attacked by federal troops. The ex-slaves, who fiercely resisted, were slaughtered (Babbage, 2004).

Through historical allegory, *Zumbi* drew vivid parallels between the attacks on the colony and the Brazilian military tactics used by the coup's generals. The playwrights even managed to incorporate a speech copied verbatim from President Castela Branco's address to the Brazilian Third Army disguised as one authored by the commander of the Palmares' destroyer (Boal, 2001).

*Zumbi* celebrated rebellion and dissent in the past, while seeking to stimulate resistance against the current dictatorial government in the present. Aesthetically, the play also "attempted to destroy all the stylistic conventions which were inhibiting theatre's development as an art form and clear a space for a new system to emerge" (Babbage, 2004, p. 13). Due to the play's patriotic and historic content, it was able to avoid the censor's pen.

## 1968

The climax of the struggle for freedom of expression came in 1968. In Brazil, it was the year of the students. Massive protests were taking place in the Southern Cone and at universities across the globe. At this critical juncture, Augusto and Arena Company members had to make political, ideological, and aesthetic choices. Lacking a compass, the company “spun round and round in search of true North” (Boal, 2001, p. 264). They looked back before trudging ahead:

We had delivered a repertoire which bore our own face and our own voice; after the realist mirror, we saw ourselves in the metaphor of the Classics; in Santo André, the spectators wrote plays and, to crown that liberation, invaded the stage, actors and characters mixing together. Along came the *coup*; we drew back; singers sang about their lives, each one representing many; *Zumbi* enabled us to make a synthesis, singing our history. (Boal, 2001, p. 264)

After much soul searching, the theatre company settled on *Feira Paulista de Opinião* (São Paulo’s Fair of Opinions). It was a multimedia extravaganza involving visual artists, playwrights, and composers from across São Paulo. A series of questions formed the foundation of the show: What do we think of the art of the Left? Why do we exist? Do gentle artists such as ourselves serve any purpose in these tough times? (Boal, 2001). “We questioned our art, our function in society, our identity, our lives” (Boal, 2001, p. 264).

The script was diverse in contradictory thought and opinions. Themes about imprisonment, inadequate healthcare, censorship, and class-consciousness contributed to the aesthetic whole. Composers wrote songs and visual artists scattered their work throughout the city. One artist made a sculpture called *O milagre brasileiro* (The Brazilian Miracle). It was patterned on the dictatorship’s propaganda:

The spectator entered a green and yellow tunnel and sat in a wheelchair, which slid around, in the dark, until he or she reached the end of the tunnel, where the wheels triggered a switch, which illuminated a tasteless image of the Virgin Mary. The spectator stood up and walked away: that was the miracle at the end of the tunnel! (Boal, 2001, p. 285)

As director, it was Augusto's responsibility to close the event with a collage of banned texts written by political notables such as Che Guevara and Pablo Neruda (Boal, 2001). *Feira Paulista de Opinião* was a colossal effort on the part of the entire artistic community.

Augusto sent the 80-page script to the censor. It came back "with 65 pages cut and "AUTHORISED" stamped on the remaining 15" (Boal, 2001, p. 264). The stakes were high. Caving to the censors put every Brazilian artist at risk:

As creators, how can an artist work under a dictatorship if the artist is the body who, when free, creates the new, and the dictatorship is the body which, by shutting people up, preserves the old? Art and dictatorship are incompatible. The two words loathe each other! (Boal, 2001, p. 266)

The show would go on. Artists in the city's theatres in São Paulo decreed a general strike on the day of the banned opening. "Never before had there been such a concentration of artists per square centimeter: no one was missing. Even the most timid turned up" (Boal, 2001, p. 266). "The Feira was presented without permission, disrespecting censorship, which would not be recognized by any artist from that day forward" (Boal, 2001, p. 266).

Augusto told this story at one of the many workshops I attended. He captured the four-day standoff between the artists and the police in his autobiography:

We arrived at the theatre early the next day, the police arrived earlier still—the theatre was surrounded. We made a pact not to give way—civil disobedience! It was our duty to disobey: we were obeying our desire! We whispered to the spectators that the show would take place at another theatre where Fernanda Montenegro was on. With her support, we marched into her show, revealed what

was happening and, as proof of our disobedience, sang songs, which had been prohibited. The public, happy at our courage, offered us friendly applause. On day three, all the theatres of São Paulo were surrounded by soldiers and marines. Accompanied by those spectators who had vehicles, we went on to a theatre in Santo André: there we presented the complete script! Newspapers published our courage on their front pages: The Theatre's Guerrilla War! On the legal front, we entered a plea of habeas corpus.

On the fourth day, the theatres of Santo André were surrounded. At our theatre, an hour before curtain, our lawyer turned up, euphorically shouting that the play had been provisionally authorized by the Judge! Victory.

Months later this judge was imprisoned: he was part of a guerrilla organization . . . and no one knew.

From that day on, we did the complete script and added whatever we felt like—censorship having been routed and humiliated. This was when the physical aggression began, kidnappings and raids. (Boal, 2001, pp. 266-267)

### **State of Siege**

Following the 1968 uprising against government repression, the dictatorship used all its power to squelch the opposition. The police would raid people's houses and confiscate books as proof of subversion. Works by the usual suspects like Karl Marx were impounded:

They also confiscated Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (The Scarlet and the Black), because the police thought that it had to do with the colors of communism and anarchism; the art book *The History of Cubism*, with its clear insinuation of support for the Cuban revolution; an engineering book entitled *Resistance of Materials*, an obvious study of the explosive power of Molotov cocktails. (Boal, 2001, p. 263)

During this time, Institutional Act No. 5 was passed. The law suspended the few remaining civil liberties enjoyed by Brazilian citizens. This included the banning of all opposition and criticism against the dictatorship. Public assemblies, which required special permission, were sparingly granted. All demonstrations and rallies were forbidden. Apprehension of perceived dissidents reached a feverish pitch. Exile, imprisonment, torture, and disappearances carried out by the police and military were part of the daily routine. "Brazilians learned to speak with caution. For more than a

decade, a kind of collective hush ruled the public life of Brazilian cities” (Wright & Welford, 2003, p. 5).

Given Arena São Paulo’s victory against censorship, legally there was not anything the government could do to stop the company’s performances. The police and military turned to violent clandestine tactics.

During one performance of the *Feira*, the police threw sulfur gas bombs into the theatre. The audience panicked. There was a stampede. People rushed towards the narrow door, many of them were hurt. Following the incident, students volunteered for security guard duty. “Every day, 50 students or more searched the spectators on their way in. They offered security . . . in exchange for seeing the show for free” (Boal, 2001, p. 267).

While on tour with the *Feira* in Rio de Janeiro, a grenade was thrown on stage causing the show to come to a complete halt. “Fortunately, being *Made in Brazil*, it did not explode . . . but imagine if it had been of Czechoslovak construction?” (Boal, 2001, p. 268). A photograph of the grenade was published in the newspaper exposing its origins to the Brazilian National Navy (Boal, 2001).

Actors were harassed, beaten, and abducted. *Feire* cast members had to protect themselves. In addition to their usual warm-up routine consisting of vocal exercises and movement for actors, Augusto and Arena Company members would retreat to the basement of the theatre for target practice:

On stage, actors worked with their finger on the trigger. At the end of a show, we prepared ourselves nervously for invasion: there were two students on either side of the stage, watching the audience, one arm inside the curtain, with us lined up behind, revolvers and rifle pointing at the auditorium. The students had orders to make a signal with their arm if armed spectators were to advance on the stage.

That would be the moment to raise the curtain, take aim . . . and may God's will be done. Thank God, he did *not* will.

Madness! How could we play characters with so much danger and fear around us? (Boal, 2001, p. 268)

Throughout this period, Augusto and Antônio Pedro held court. Pedro was affiliated with *Roda Viva*, another show targeted by repression. Every night, the theatre class would meet to discuss subjects pertaining to repertoire in a volatile and unstable political climate:

How could we avoid being raided or kidnapped? How could we protect ourselves from tear-gas bombs? What kind of bicarbonate should we use on our handkerchiefs? What should we do with spies infiltrating our martial midst? How could we avoid attacks by enemy cavalry—would it be ethical (to the horses) to scatter marbles to trip them over, with the resultant risk of their being sacrificed? (Boal, 2001, pp. 270-271)

The meetings were theatrical support groups. Always euphoric in nature, they provided a platform for artists to air their concerns and strategize for uncertain times.

### **Destination: Cuba**

The noose tightened under Marshal Costa e Silva. He ruled with an iron fist. By the time he put on the presidential sash on March 15, 1967, Brazil had experienced quite a bit of turmoil. It had begun with Jânio Quadros' election in 1960, followed by his surprise resignation in 1961. João Goulart, Quadros' successor, was overthrown in 1964. A military dictatorship followed with the installation of Castelo Branco and then Costa e Silva (Skidmore, 1989).

Augusto's opinion of the president was not flattering:

Who was Costa e Silva? Popular anecdote claimed that he was such a donkey that he had to wear sunglasses to stop him eating his green uniform—irresistible temptation. Traveling by airplane one time, he heard the airhostess explain that they were flying at 10,000 meters. He revealed his surprise: "I knew that Brazil was large, but I did not imagine it was so high . . ." (Boal, 2001, p. 274)



Augusto's view of Costa e Silva prevailed throughout Brazil. Many people thought the president was just another dense, unintelligent, Latin American military officer. A more accurate representation of the man shows him graduating at the top of his class at junior officers school, serving as a military aide in the Brazilian embassy in Buenos Aires, and commanding the fourth army in the Northeast. "The new president was a more talented and more complex figure than his popular image suggested" (Skidmore, 1989, p. 67). Costa e Silva was the worst kind of dictator. Under his reign, the institutionalization of torture began.

During this period, Augusto was invited to Cuba, a life long dream. His departure date was December 14, 1968. Travel to Cuba was illegal risky business in those days, so precautionary measures were taken:

I traveled to Havana the night after the proclamation of the Fifth Act. Once again I heard the silence, amidst the din of the airport. Tumultuous silence—it surrounded me, amidst the shouts. I asked myself: "Does anyone suspect me? Is 'destination Cuba' written all over my face?" I thought it was. Within this noisy confusion, the shoving and pushing, I did not want to hear the voice of prison. Were the military eavesdropping on my thoughts? I was sure that my loathing of despotism shouted itself from the rooftops, even when my mouth was shut. (Boal, 2001, p. 274)

Augusto took a circuitous route to the banned country—a plane to Paris, another to Rome, then to Prague. In Prague, Augusto changed his name, identity, address, and passport (Boal, 2001). More countries—30 additional hours of stop and start travel. He arrived.

During his month long pilgrimage, Augusto became acquainted with the nation. He saw theatre, took walks, and conversed with the Cuban people. He even heard Fidel Castro speak in Revolution Square. The Cuban leader gave a seven-hour monologue to Augusto's delight. The topic was the economy:

Fidel explained things using simple words, and when things became more difficult he would explain the words, which made it simple. In Fidel's voice and gesture, I saw his love for words: Fidel loves his interlocutors, the Cuban people. The word was the love, which united the two. His speech was an act of love. Which was reciprocated. (Boal, 2001, p. 276)

Following his solo secret excursion to Cuba, Augusto and Arena São Paulo received an invitation to tour New York, Mexico, and Peru. Brazil was in flux again. President Costa e Silva suffered a stroke on August 29, 1969. Unable to resume his duties, the military instated another dictator—General Emilio Garrastazú Médici (Skidmore, 1989). When it was time to return home, Augusto felt anguish:

I did not want to live abroad, and it was impossible to live in Brazil. We could not speak about what we really wanted and, under dictatorship, who could think about metaphysics? Some threw themselves into the armed struggle and disappeared. We tried to resist. It is difficult to confront tanks with stage sets, guns with music. We lost. (Boal, 2001, p. 281)

### **Newspaper Theatre: The First Leaf on the Tree**

During the State of Siege, which lasted until the mid-1970s, the police, military, and rightwing reactionaries, otherwise known as the Comando de Caca los Comunistas (Communist Chasing Command) (Britton as cited in Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006), infiltrated and raided community meetings, newspaper publishing establishments, and theatres. Armed soldiers encircled performance spaces preventing actors and audiences from entering, and forcing the cancellation of shows. Subversive suspects were pummeled and apprehended. These were the darkest days for the opposition and Brazilian citizenry with General Emilio Garrastazú Médici at the helm.

In this period, the censorship board under the watchful eye of Juvêncio Facanha, the Director of the Federal Police, “effectively mutilated 500 films, 450 plays, 200 books, and more than 500 musical lyrics” (Britton as cited in Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006,

p. 18). Facanha, who declared, “the theatre is rotten!” (Britton as cited in Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006, p. 18) acted accordingly by trying to bring art and culture to its knees.

In 1970, Augusto and members of the theatre body politic tried to reinvent themselves in order to operate in an impossible climate. Augusto was determined to carry on. Survival meant outsmarting the dictatorship. Augusto had the perfect solution—Newspaper Theatre. At the time, he was working with his wife, Cecilia Thumim, and Heleny Guariba, who had organized an acting course. Every morning, Augusto and the pupils would select topical accounts from the daily headlines. They would transform them into a theatrical production, rehearsing in the afternoon; performing in the evening. A different show was unveiled each night:

We opened our new experiment in September, in a minuscule theatre with a capacity of 70, which we christened *Areninha!* Sábato Magaldi wrote that our show was an exercise in freedom—in the middle of dictatorship, imprisonment, torture, and death. (Boal, 2001, p. 281)

Besides staging their own events, *Teatro Jornal: Primeira Edição* (Newspaper Theatre: First Edition), as they were called, they took their theatre experiment to the streets. They taught slum-dwellers, students, organized groups, and parishioners how to do theatre for themselves using the techniques they had developed. In all, 30 Newspaper Theatre groups were assembled:

We performed anywhere, away from the police: behind the church, in the anatomy room of the Faculty of Medicine—the unbearable smell of formaldehyde kept the military away—in the houses of factory workers, priests, teachers. . . . We would write our shows and, two hours later, they were ready for the audience. Instantaneous Theatre, lightning-quick. Then we helped them to do their own show. (Boal, 2001, p. 282)

This was the beginning of Theatre of the Oppressed—theatre created by the people and for the people. Audiences were offered the means of production. In return,

audiences offered *Teatro Jornal: Primeira Edição* their knowledge. It was an equal exchange. The actors and audiences had become one. Augusto Boal (2001) lamented, “we had lost plays, theatre, grants, costumes, everything. Except our dreams” (p. 282).

### **Arrest and Detention**

By 1971, assaults against the perceived political opposition had reached its peak. Detention by abduction became standard practice. Augusto was plucked off the street as he walked home from work:

It was dark and raining—three armed men got out of a VW Beetle. I recognized two of them: “actors from the interior” who had never heard of Euripides. Twisting my arm behind me, they asked if it was going to be necessary to handcuff me or if I would come quietly.

I had no choice: I was kidnapped. I was imprisoned. (Boal, 2001, p. 284)

Augusto fit the profile of subversive detainees. Social stratification no longer protected the middle and upper epsilon of the Brazilian population against harsh conditions under the Médici dictatorship. Artists, intellectuals, students, and the professional class did not receive the once enjoyed preferential treatment, which included better-equipped jail cells. Prisoners, like Augusto, “soon learned that their politically important friends or relatives counted for nothing in the interrogators’ world. Now middle- and upper-class dissenters were being intimidated by the violence long used to control low-status prisoners” (Skidmore, 1989, p. 127).

The “Brazil: Never Again Project,” which was an unprecedented examination of political repression, based on military records from 1964 to 1979, compiled startling demographic data regarding subversive profiles:

There were 7,367 defendants charged in 695 trials. Of the 4,476 whose educational level was recorded in the military court proceeding, 2,491 had a university degree, and only 91 declared themselves illiterate. This is striking in a country where little more than 1% of the population is university-educated, and

where more than 20 million people over 18 years of age are classified as illiterate. This educational level indicates that most of the defendants were of middle-class origins.

The geographical origins of the defendants indicate that resistance to the regime was a predominantly urban phenomenon. Although the greater part of the defendants were born in rural areas, most lived in state capitals at the beginning of their trials: 1,872 were concentrated in Rio de Janeiro, and 1,517 in São Paulo. (Dassin, 1998, pp. 77-78)

Accusation against defendants included militancy in banned political party organizations, participation in armed or violent actions, association with or holding office in the deposed Goulart administration, expressing ideas considered objectionable by the dictatorship through artistic means, the press, in classrooms or sermons (Dassin, 1998).

Augusto was thrown in a maximum-security cell. The cramped space, which contained a rat infested basin and latrine was small. The thick heavy iron doors creaked. The night was long and the fear intense:

For the third time in my life, I heard silence, bellowing: in there you yelled without sound, a silent movie. I wanted actual sound, real noise, and the silent din I listened to without hearing shocked me: I threw my shoe on the floor, and heard it. I threw my shoe at the ceiling, kicked the camp bed, in my silenced rage. Through the thick walls I imagined tortured groans. Tortured for real, they did groan: but far away, I did not hear them. I listened to my imagination imagining cries—cries that existed, on the third floor. Cries made, and cries yet to be made. There would be more. And they would be mine too. (Boal, 2001, p. 285)

After a sleepless night, Augusto was reunited with Heleny Guariba, his friend and fellow actor. Heleny and Augusto's wife, Cecilia Thumim, had organized the 1970 acting class culminating in the development of Newspaper Theatre. Coincidentally, Heleny's cell was next to Augusto's. She had been in the military prison for months. She recognized Augusto's voice and felt his presence. "Augusto?" "Heleny?" (Boal, 2001, p. 287).

Heleny coached Augusto for one of his most important roles, how to survive military incarceration. Heleny relied on theatre to drive her points home. Augusto's life depended on it:

Firstly: never confess, anything. Not even the slightest confession of a petty inconsequential detail. The torturer has seen nothing, he knows nothing: he merely suspects. If he interrogates, it is because another tortured person, not able to hold out, has denounced you. History was full of false denunciations . . . and new, true, torments.

Deny it; say no: lying is a civic duty!

The second piece of advice was Brechtian: Heleny said that the tortured used to exaggerate the effects of torture in order to save themselves from greater ills. Staislavskians, they simulated to perfection and magnified the small pains they felt. It reminded me of Pessoa:

*O poeta e um fingidor,/ finge tao completamente,  
Que chega a fingir que e dor,/ a dor que deveras sente.*

(The poet is a make-believer, he makes believe so completely, that he even makes believe that the pain he truly feels is pain.) (Boal, 2001, p. 287)

Augusto heeded Heleny's advice. Unfortunately she did not heed his. Instead of leaving Brazil upon her release, she returned to the struggle. Heleny was assassinated days later (Boal, 2001).

### **Prison Solidarity**

Once Augusto was discharged to the general population, he joined approximately 15 others in a collective cell. The jailed dissidents welcomed him. "The Arena bed is empty; Isaias has been transferred. You inherit a bed, a cup, and flip-flops. . . . He took the toothbrush. Selfish man" (Boal, 2001, p. 293). Augusto's cell housed a member of Teatro de Arena since the crackdown in 1969. Other actors from the company warmed the bed prior to his arrival (Boal, 2001).

Augusto and his prison companions learned how to work with the denigrating barbaric conditions. As political captives, they were bound together by a common cause and dreams—the eradication of the dictatorship. They supported each other.

Days were organized in accordance with rules and regulations. From seven to nine in the morning, the inmates could talk out loud and fraternize. From nine to one, only whispers. After lunch, the cell was transformed into a classroom. Every person taught his/her craft:

Guitar, French (I learned the rudiments!), the history of the parties (pupils disagreed with the masters . . . ), theatre (with me as teacher!), philosophy, and cooking. (I learned how to make *feijoada*). People knew *capoeira*, but we didn't have enough space . . . martial arts: memories. (Boal, 2001, p. 293)

Everyone was required to work. Augusto had an illustrious career. He swept the floors, washed pots, and was eventually elevated to cook (Boal, 2001).

Augusto's mother visited every week from Rio de Janeiro. One of Augusto's nieces or nephews always accompanied her. Augusto took advantage of those sessions, slyly transferring drawings to the outside world for safe keeping until his release. His mother told the watchmen that the pictures were for Augusto's son Fabian. The illustrations' true purpose was to serve as a record of his experiences for a future novel, *Milagre No Brasil* (Miracle in Brazil), and play, *Torquemada* (Boal, 2001).

When Augusto's hearing date arrived, he was fetched from his cell and escorted to the tribunal in a vehicle without windows. Young soldiers with machine guns lined the sidewalk waiting "as if we were Guevaras" (Boal, 2001, p. 294).

After the evidence was presented against Augusto, the judge withheld final sentencing. Instead, he granted Augusto permission to join the cast at the Nancy Festival in France. During this period when U.S. and world critics were denouncing human rights violations and repression against Brazilian citizens, "this would give the impression of magnanimity: the dictatorship needed to show a less sordid face" (Boal, 2001, p. 294).

Augusto signed a document pledging to return after the festival to receive his punishment from the judge:

The official who made me sign the promise advised me: “We do not arrest the same element twice: we kill them! Never return. But sign on this line—promising to return.”

That was the only piece of advice from the dictatorship I followed closely: I returned only in December 1979, a few months after the Amnesty. (Boal, 2001, p. 294).

## **Torture**

The traumatic psychological and physical repercussions of torture are never far away from the victim, no matter how many years have passed since the executioners performed their sadistic deeds. This was certainly the case with Augusto Boal. I witnessed him cringe during Theatre of the Oppressed workshops where depictions of human cruelty are acted out by participants, not to mention the pain and bodily damage that he endured since his time in the military prison. “The body and the soul remember. The images do not fade! The voices keep shouting: they never shut up” (Boal, 2001, p. 291).

In Brazil, torture was systematized and endemic for 21 years of dictatorial rule. The worst years were during Médici’s reign from 1969-1974, when Augusto was in prison. Denunciations against extreme repression came first from Amnesty International followed by *Civiltà Cattolica*, a Jesuit publication and the International Commission of Jurists (Skidmore, 1989). It was the shocking report of the *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (Brazil: Never Again) released in 1985, however, that showed the world the intimate details of the suffering experienced by Brazilian citizens.

The study, based on actual accounts from military tribunals, revealed approximately 100 different ways of torturing “by means of physical assault,



psychological pressure, and the use of the most varied instruments on Brazilian political prisoners” (Dassin, 1998, p. 16). Details from the military court proceedings from 1964 to 1979 are fully disclosed in the report, which document the criminal acts carried out under the auspices of the state. The apparatuses and methods of torture, described by victims in excruciating detail, were proof of Brazilian authorities’ unwillingness to abide by Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (Dassin, 1998, p. 16). Brazil is a signatory on the declaration.

Augusto chronicled the vivid horrific details of his torture in his autobiography,

*Hamlet and the Baker’s Son:*

Three mastodons came along. Handcuffed, I ascended the stairs, familiar with the route. On the third floor there were two corridors—I headed for the usual one.

They asked me if, this time, I was prepared to confess. I answered that I did not know anything. A gorilla ordered me to change paths. He opened the door: four orangutans were waiting. Last chance: will you confess? “No!”

They terrified me by describing various tortures. Electric cables are attached to fingers and ankles; the electricity runs through the body assisted by the salt-water in which the prisoner is bathed at the beginning of the session: later on, salty sweat takes over the job. The electric current varies in accordance with the rheostat and the anger or haste of the operators. The body is hung by the knees on an iron pole running under handcuffed hands, which in turn are crossed under the knees, taking the weight of the tortured person who is effectively tied in a knot. In the beginning the pain is bearable. Then it is not. The fingers become violet balls of blood not circulating. Cries resound in the solid silence, death wishes.

The stabbing pain was too much. To buy time, I asked them what they were accusing me of. They did not know: the teams which did the torturing were not those which did the arresting—each to his own deathly specialty; the bearded man alone belonging to both. He looked at the list of serious accusations. The first said that I had defamed Brazil while abroad. I asked how. Reading on, he said that I had defamed the Fatherland by stating that there was torture in Brazil. (Impossible not to laugh, even hanging there. . . .)

The rheostat increased the charge. My weak smile dried up. I argued that if I was denouncing torture, I was telling the truth: I was living proof, hanging there. The chimpanzee agreed. Tempering the violence, he explained: as I was a famous artist, they were torturing me, yes, but . . . “with all respect.” What would

torture *without respect* be like? He replied: the electric cables could have been placed in the anus or the penis, or on a tooth, in an exposed cavity. Cigarettes could be put out on living flesh, instead of in the ashtray.

Sweat ran into my eyes, clouding my vision. I could hardly see the Cro-Magnons conversing with the Neanderthals, while the impatient Homo Habilis carried out orders. The whole tribe of prehistoric humanity was waiting for confessions to justify their day's work. After centuries hanging there, I was let down, my knees out of joint, my breathing explosive. "More to come tomorrow. Here everyone confesses: sooner or . . . too late, in a shallow grave." (Boal, 2001, pp. 289-291)

Augusto mentioned his dance with death in many Theatre of the Oppressed workshops. It was usually a passing comment to illustrate some point that had arisen. All recollections were too painful to discuss in detail in such an intimate setting with strangers.

As a member of the Legislative Chamber in Rio de Janeiro from 1993 to 1996, however, Augusto relied on his memory and his theatrical skills to present a riveting description of his personal painful experiences in a military prison in order to save and preserve the Tijuca police headquarters. Tijuca was one of the notorious torture and death centers during the days of dictatorial leadership. The building was slated for demolition only to be resurrected by some fast food restaurant, sweeping Brazil's totalitarian past under the rug. Augusto's speech was an opportunity to make legislatures come face to face with Brazil's unflattering history. After a blow-by-blow narrative, Augusto implored his colleagues to do the right thing:

I appeal to my colleagues who are, like me, involved in the business of making laws, just as I used to make bread. I appeal to them to allow me to continue existing, so that a part of my self survives my death. The Vila Isabel House holds the memories of hundreds of men and women. It holds many stories. It holds History. Living History. Many of the men and women who were imprisoned there are today in these galleries watching us, just as I am on this platform looking at you. Those who are here today, they and I, we remember, and the past lives in our memory, which is part of our being.

Do not destroy the Tijuca house. I beg you. I appeal to you.

I appeal especially to those who think the opposite of what I think, I appeal to you, I beg you: let me exist.

Sometimes we do not share the same ideas, we do not think the same thoughts, for that very reason, I beg for my sake, for our sake, and I beg also for your sake. For you to continue being who you are it is necessary that we be who we are. For you to be you, I need to be me.

Allow me to exist. And for me to exist, that portion of our past, which is made of stone, must remain standing. Do not destroy the Tijuca house. Do not destroy our past. Do not destroy me. Vote no to the mayor's veto.

Allow that part of me, of each of us, to survive, allow me to live. And I will say thank you for that. Many thanks. (Boal, 2005a, p. 152)

Augusto's performance swayed his colleagues. The mayor's veto was thrown out and the Tijuca torture chamber was saved. This was Augusto's first victory as a Vereador.

### **International Solidarity**

The news of Augusto's arrest spread far and wide. In the United States, Arthur Miller drafted a letter, which was published in the *New York Times*, demanding his freedom. Hundreds of notable members of the theatre community signed it. Among them were Richard Schechner, Michael Miller, Harold Prince, Joseph Papp, Joanne Pottlitzer, Robert Anderson, actors from the Theatre of Latin America, and professors at various Manhattan-based universities:

To the Editor:

Several weeks ago we learned that Brazil's leading theater director, Augusto Boal, had disappeared in São Paulo on his way home from a rehearsal at his theater, The Arena Theater of São Paulo. It was only on March 9 that further word reached us outlining some of the details of his disappearance.

Reports state that Boal was arrested on February 10 by the Department of Political and Social order, the nonmilitary federal agency in Brazil in charge of political investigations. He is still being held.

For 10 days after his arrest, neither his colleagues nor his family could obtain any information from the Brazilian authorities regarding his whereabouts and the circumstances of his arrest. On February 20 he was allowed a visit from a member of his immediate family who learned that Boal has been in solitary confinement since his arrest and has been "at the hands of his interrogators."

He has been denied access to a lawyer. The charges against him are allegedly related to his recent visits to New York and Argentina, where his company presented plays critical of the present regime in Brazil. Boal had planned to return to New York this spring to direct a Latin American Fair of Opinion.

As members of New York's artistic community and as United States citizens, we are deeply concerned about suppression of distinguished artists in Brazil, or in any country. Boal's arrest has its repercussions on the right of artistic expression throughout the world. His is not an isolated case.

The general climate of cultural repression in Brazil has been reported by *The Times* and other responsible news agencies.

Brazil is a member of the United Nations and the organization of American States whose charters clearly state that the human rights of citizens of member countries be honored and upheld. Yet Brazil has denied organizations such as the International Red Cross and Amnesty International permission to carry out impartial investigations of the reported torture of political prisoners in that country's jails and prisons.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this situation in Brazil is the minimal coverage it receives in this country from our press. The public must be informed. And we urge it to stand with us in our concern for Augusto Boal and for the reinstatement of human rights in Brazil. (Miller, 1971)

In England and France, hundreds of people corresponded with their embassies.

Among the letter writing campaign participants were celebrities like Emile Copfermann, Bernard Dort, Peter Brook, Jean Louis Barrault, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, John Arden, Arianne Mnouchkine, Antoine Vitez, Gabriel Garran, Simone Signoret, and Yves Montand (Boal, 2001).

Jack Lang, the founder and producer of the Festival du Monde in Nancy, France asked participants to protest. Lang was the Director of the Nancy University Theatre from 1963 to 1972. He was also a professor of international law. The Festival de Monde was a global celebration. Augusto was an invited guest. Letters from Lang and theatre colleagues demanded Augusto's participation. The outpouring of concern was noted by Brazilian authorities.

Telegrams also poured in from Japan. This solidarity on such a massive scale impressed the dictators. “If artists were concerned about me even in Japan . . . I must be extremely important!” (Boal, 2001, p. 292)

The crusade to release Augusto from prison was successful. His case was heard after a month of his incarceration. This was unprecedented in Brazil during military rule. Detainees were accustomed to languishing in their cells, sometimes for years without accusation or trial.

Augusto attended the Festival de Monde and did not permanently return to Brazil until 1986. Following the Amnesty in 1979, he visited periodically. Augusto remained in exile for 15 years. He spent five years in Argentina, two years in Portugal, and eight years in France. Augusto worked in the United States and Peru during this time.

### **New York City**

While Augusto was in prison, Richard Schechner, a professor in the Performance Studies Department at New York University, invited him to the United States. Augusto took him up on his offer. He packed up his family and traveled to the Northeast corridor. In some respects, Augusto was going home to familiar territory. The circumstances, however, were different from his pilgrimage in the 1950s.

High on Augusto’s agenda was a visit to Arthur Miller. Miller’s *New York Times* editorial may have saved Augusto’s life. He thanked the prominent playwright and through him the other signatories on the public letter (Boal, 2001).

Arthur Miller was blacklisted because he refused to testify during the House of Un-American Activities Committee hearings in the 1950s, so he was no stranger to repression during the Cold War era. One of Miller’s most famous plays, *Crucible*, based

on the 1692 Salem witch trials, was heavily influenced by the Joseph McCarthy spectacle. McCarthy's red baiting dogmatism was able to spread just like the fanaticism leading to the persecutions of women during the Salem witch-hunt two centuries before. In the play, Miller demonstrated an analogous guilt "of holding illicit, suppressed feelings of alienation and hostility toward standard, daylight society as defined by its most orthodox opponents" (Saunders, 2000, p. 382). Decades later, perceived subversives like Augusto were still being followed to safe guard the general public against communist propaganda and indoctrination. The connection was not lost on Arthur Miller. This time, however, it was the Brazilian authorities, dispatched from the Latin American consulate that scrutinized Augusto's every move. "Brazilian secret service agents were everywhere. The Embassy stayed on the lookout! At NYU, *Torquemada*—spies in the audience; at Saint Clement's, the *Feira Latino-Americana* (Latin-American Fair), with diplomats lurking; spies all around me" (Boal, 2001, p. 299).

The surveillance did not hinder Augusto's creativity or silence him. He wrote a compelling novel *Milagre no Brasil* (Miracle in Brazil), during his stint in Manhattan, and produced and directed several plays. Themes highlighted aspects of Brazilian life under totalitarianism and the role the United States played during the coup.

*Feira Latino-Americana* (Latin-American Fair) was performed at Saint Clement's Episcopal Church. Founded in 1830, the Church is New York's oldest Off-Broadway Theatre that also caters to causes for social justice (St. Clement's Episcopal Church, n.d.). Augusto's show "bewildered its audiences" (Boal, 2001, p. 299):

Simultaneous scenes, songs, poems. Spectators chose their own paths through it: the show would go back to the beginning, over and over.

In the show, after an hour and a half, TV screens on stage showed the interrogation of a "kidnapped" spectator. Our questions were based on a report by

the North American Senate on criminal relationships between Latin American dictators and the CIA. We altered nothing: our conclusions were those of the US Senators. After each frightful affirmation, we would ask: “Did you know?” the invariable reply being: “I did not even suspect!” last question: “Did you know that in Nuremberg the reply the tribunal heard most from the accused was: “I did not know?” performed. (Boal, 2001, p. 300)

The report, referenced in *Feira Latino-Americana* (Latin-American Fair) was based on the May, 1971 hearings conducted by Senator Frank Church from Idaho. Church was a leading opponent of U.S. policy toward Brazil. The senatorial public forum revealed that “U.S. tax dollars had gone into training and equipping possible torturers. There were charges that U.S. police advisors had participated in interrogation and even torture of prisoners” (Skidmore, 1989, p. 155). The *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (Brazil: Never Again) report unveiled the same information long after Augusto’s performance at Saint Clement’s Episcopal Church.

There were artists in the audience during *Feira Latino-Americana* (Latin-American Fair) who had first hand knowledge of Brazil’s treatment of dissident artists. Julian Beck, who co-founded the Living Theatre with his wife, Judith Malina, traveled to Brazil with a few company members in 1971. They were imprisoned for two months on political charges. Julian wept as he watched Augusto’s show. “He knew what we were talking about” (Boal, 2001, p. 301).

### **Invisible Theatre in Argentina: The Second Leaf on the Tree**

During the spring of 2006, I participated in an Invisible Theatre Workshop at the Brecht Forum in New York City. Invisible Theatre is a spectacle performed in a public space: a restaurant, subway station, shopping mall; any place except a venue for the dramatic arts. The skit, which is well rehearsed with detailed precision, erupts in a previously selected location to draw attention to an issue brought to bear by the actors.

Witnesses observing and participating in the action are unaware that they are part of a scene. The identity of the actors is never revealed.

Julian Boal, Augusto's son, facilitated the three-day gathering. After sufficient preparation where we discussed the Argentine origins and context of this Theatre of the Oppressed technique, chose and practiced our scenes, and argued over the ethical implications of the respective themes, we hit the streets of Manhattan.

Four short plays were executed with varying degrees of success. All workshop attendees participated either directly or indirectly as we moved to venues around the city to carry out our deeds. Our festive mood on that warm sunny afternoon was infectious. We jubilantly danced in the streets as we proceeded to each stop. The clear and present danger hovering over Argentina when Augusto developed Invisible Theatre was not part of our New York experience.

Augusto traveled extensively, but Argentina was his base of operation during the first five years of his exile. "In 1966, I had gone to Buenos Aires for five weeks, and stayed for five months. This time, I imagined five months, and stayed five years" (Boal, 2001, p. 299).

Augusto's in-laws owned a furnished flat in Buenos Aires. The apartment became his family home. Besides some teaching assignments, Augusto was not gainfully employed, so he continued to travel extensively, attending festivals, conducting workshops, and lecturing. He also earned income on an apartment that he inherited from his father in Penha, Portugal. The rent brought in \$300 U.S. dollars every month. With this additional cash flow, Augusto and his family were able to live well in Argentina (Boal, 2001).



Practicing his craft in his adopted country was a different matter, however. Augusto's Brazilian friends warned him to proceed with caution. By 1971, Operation Condor was already in the pipeline. Operation Condor, sanctioned by the United States within the context of the cold war, was a Southern Cone campaign to wipe out left-wing ideas, influences, and opposition movements. Although described casually in secret Central Intelligence Agency reports as "a cooperative effort by the intelligence/security services of several South American countries to combat terrorism and subversion" (Kornbluh, 2004, p. 332), Operation Condor targeted civilians, family members, union representatives, and artists—any one and everyone who was against totalitarian rule. Associates in this elite clandestine group were from Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Paraguay. Operation Condor affiliates collaborated in sinister ways: cross-border searches, surveillance, torture, kidnappings, disappearances, and the elimination of political opponents (Kornbluh, 2004).

Dissidents like Augusto, who took refuge in neighboring Latin American countries were not out of harm's way. The various juntas were able to track and share information on exiles through cutting edge computer technology provided by Washington, D.C.'s secret service agency. Once a marked victim was discovered, agents were provided safe passage into a representative country from their member counter-parts to carry out a mission (Klein, 2007).

Augusto took the Operation Condor threat seriously. Drawing attention from Argentine authorities would be catastrophic. "If arrested, I would be sent back to Brazil. I should not even entertain the idea of watching the premiere of this piece. I remembered

the policeman who said goodbye to me: ‘We do not arrest the same element twice’” (Boal, 2001, p. 303).

Within this milieu Augusto pioneered Invisible Theatre. While preparing street scenes with some of his students from Buenos Aires, he weighed the risks of participating directly in the action. One of the young actors suggested a compromise, which allowed Augusto to be present without placing himself in harm’s way—Invisible Theatre—theatre indiscernible to the general public. In other words, the drama would unfold as if it were a real situation.

Augusto’s immediate reaction to the proposal was “Consternation: the reason we do theatre is to be seen, isn’t it?” (Boal, 2001, p. 304) After some contemplation and explanation, the idea grew on Augusto as he observed the unveiling of this new theatrical experiment.

A local restaurant was the backdrop for the play. Stage sets were not necessary and at mid-day the house was full so there was no need for publicity. “No one would know of the clandestine premiere, the police would not turn up, and it would not be known who was an actor and who wasn’t. Spectators would see the show, without seeing it *as a show*” (Boal, 2001, p. 304).

Augusto’s intention was to educate the public about an Argentine law that permitted impoverished, hungry people to enter any restaurant, regardless of its extravagance, select a meal and drink of their choice and leave without paying. Dessert and wine were not part of the bargain. The only stipulation was to show an identity card (Boal, 2001).

The plan unraveled without a hitch. Augusto sat on the far side of the restaurant peacefully eating his lunch. The actors strategically placed themselves at tables some distance apart in order to draw in the maximum number of unsuspecting customers. The opportune moment presented itself and the action commenced. Arguing loudly and passionately, the actors created a ruckus luring the waiter, manager, and customers into the scene. Who was going to pay the bill? Food was consumed at an eatery so some financial transaction was in order. The altercation evolved from one of local significance to a more global concern: “if there is food, why are people dying of hunger? The country is rich: why are the people poor?” (Boal, 2001, p. 304). The debate was intense. A company member portraying an attorney intervened to explain the humanitarian law. When all was said and done, the bill was settled and the end result was amicable.

Augusto observed the action from his table:

It happened almost word for word, what we had scripted. They even threatened to call the police: which also figured in our script.

From my table on the other side of the room, I was able to observe this extraordinary thing: the interpenetration of fiction and reality. The superimposition of two levels of the real: the reality of the quotidian and the reality of the rehearsed fiction.

Reality took on the characteristics of fiction, fiction appeared like reality. (Boal, 2001, p. 304)

With the Invisible Theatre trial run, Augusto had joined a long list of artists who had challenged Argentine authority in the 20th century. Dissent was risky business in this unstable environment. Since 1930, when the military first interceded in government, the balance between democracy and military dictatorship was tenuous. By the time the generals seized power again on March 23, 1976, “there had been six coups and 21 years of military dictatorship. In that 36-year period, only one civilian administration lasted for a full term” (Woodyard as cited in Boon & Plastow, 1998, p. 177).

By 1974, having been in Argentina for approximately three years, Augusto witnessed the heightened danger and experienced increasing constraints on his activities. It was the prologue to the “dirty war.” He wanted out. “The destination did not matter. Not being able to work is terrifying. To have every day free—is tragic!” (Boal, 2001, p. 311).

Carlos Porto, a respected Portuguese theatre critic invited Augusto and his family to Lisbon. Augusto’s passport had expired, so he went to the Brazilian Consulate in Buenos Aires to get it renewed. He anxiously waited for his documents. Authorization would not be granted until 1976 (Boal, 2001).

In the meantime, the bodies were piling up in Argentina:

In 1974, 200 murders, mostly of left-wing sympathizers, were reported in the Argentine press; during 1975, there were 850. By mid-March of 1976, the newspaper *La Opinión* estimated that there was a political killing every five hours and a bomb attack every three. (Simpson & Bennett, 1985, p. 65)

Artists and intellectuals were physically targeted during this period. The Triple A, which was a powerful death squad, with the aim of annihilating the left wing was implemented. For the first time, attacks on cultural workers went beyond the usual censorship and blacklists:

In April 1975, the Triple A threw out flyers downtown with a list of playwrights, directors, and actors who were warned to leave the country within 48 hours, accused of presumed “Judeo-Marxist conspiracy.” If not, they would be assassinated. The event had enormous repercussions. (Woodyard as cited in Boon & Plastow, 1998, p. 180)

Augusto may or may not have been on that list, but he was frightened nevertheless.

“When the doorbell rang, I used to tremble until I saw a friendly face” (Boal, 2001, p. 312).

In 1976, Augusto consented to a risky proposition. Idibal Piveta, one of his close friends, offered to intervene on Augusto's behalf and confront the court with his passport predicament:

For months, I got letters from Idibal relating the legal proceedings. Argentinean newspapers published the news in a distorted way, as if I were the one being proceeded against, and not the Ministry.

But at last my passport was granted. *Viva Idibal Piveta!*

The Consul explained that he was only obeying orders when he refused to grant passports. I had already heard that argument from a torturer: it was his duty. I booked a seat on the first plane and went to Lisbon. (Boal, 2001, p. 313)

Augusto and his family escaped the "dirty war." Without the renewal of his passport, he would have surely joined the ranks of the disappeared. The generals who seized Argentina were intent on wiping out the opposition. In May of 1976, General Ierico Saint Jean, the Governor of Buenos Aires, publicly declared war against the left. "First, we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then . . . their sympathizers, then . . . those who remain indifferent; and finally, we will kill the timid" (Simpson & Bennett, 1985, p. 66). They did.

The official report released by the National Commission on Disappeared Persons (CODEP) concluded "that an established minimum of 8,960 people—and probably a third more disappeared" between March, 1976 and December, 1983 (Simpson & Bennett, 1985, p. 399). The report consisted of "more than 50,000 pages of interviews and eye-witness accounts" (Simpson & Bennett, 1985, p. 66). "Argentina lost one citizen for every 2,647 of her population, while Brazil's loss was one for every 279,279" (Skidmore, 1989, p. 269).

### **Peru: The Development of Image and Forum Theatre (The Tree's Limbs)**

In 1973, Augusto traveled to Peru to work in an ambitious Freire-based project sponsored by President Juan Velasco Alvarado's revolutionary government. It was a short-term assignment. The primary objective of the program, known as ALFIN (Operacion Alfabetizacion Integral) was to eliminate illiteracy, which at that time, plagued 35% of the Peruvian population (Babbage, 2004).

ALFIN presented difficult challenges for Augusto and members of the organization's staff. Beside the usual obstacles associated with teaching adults how to read and write, in the cities of Lima and Chiclayo, where Augusto was stationed, people spoke 45 different languages (Boal, 1985). Within this context, Augusto invented Image Theatre:

Spanish was a stepmother to them, as it was to me. To understand them, I asked them to make an image. One image of the real and one of their desire. Another image of how you can move from the real to the ideal. I asked them to do it . . . and, as they made images, the techniques were born, from the simplest, the image of word, into the complex introspective techniques. (Boal, 2001, p. 318)

During this period, Augusto also added Forum Theatre to his repertoire. The birth of the method was accidental. It was a Theatre of the Oppressed turning point:

In Peru, I began to use a new form of theatre, which I named *simultaneous dramaturgy*. We would present a play that chronicled a problem to which we wanted to find a solution. The play would run its course up to the moment of crisis—the crucial point at which the protagonist had to make a decision. At this point, we would stop performing and ask the audience what the protagonist should do. Everyone would make his/her own suggestions. On stage, the performers would improvise each of these suggestions, till all had been exhausted. (Boal, 2005b, p. 3)

One day, a woman approached Augusto about her husband's infidelity. She proposed using her story as the focus of the evening performance:

Come the moment of crisis—the husband rings the doorbell—what to do? I myself had no idea, I appealed to the audience for ideas. Solutions came pouring in. None were to the satisfaction of the woman. After much huffing and puffing, the woman came up on stage, grabbed the poor defenseless actor-husband (who was a real actor, but not a real husband and moreover was skinny and weak), and laid into him with a broom handle with all her strength, simultaneously delivering a lecture to him on her complete views on the relations between husband and wife. We attempted to rescue our endangered comrade, but the big woman was much stronger than us. Finally, she stopped of her own accord and satisfied, planted her victim on a seat at the table and said:

*Now that we have had this very clear and very sincere conversation, you can go to the kitchen and fetch my dinner because after all this I am tired out.*

The truth dawned on me: when the spectator herself comes on stage and carries out the action she has in mind, she does it in a manner which is personal, unique and nontransferable, as she alone can do it, and as no artist can do it in her place. This is how Forum Theatre was born. (Boal, 2005b, pp. 3-7)

While Augusto was in Peru, he finished his book *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which paid homage to his friend Paulo Freire. The year 1973 was a creative period in Augusto's life.

### **Exile in Portugal: 1976-1978**

In 1976, Augusto went to Portugal, the birthplace of his ancestors. His parents, José Augusto Boal and Albertina Pinto Boal were Portuguese. José was exiled in 1914 for refusing to support Portugal's involvement in World War I. He returned in 1925 to marry Albertina before settling in Brazil (Babbage, 2004).

A half-century after his parent's emigration, Augusto made Portugal his home. The political climate in which he found himself was in stark contrast to his recent experience in Argentina. "In 1975, the military government had moved to the left and 1976 saw the first free elections in the country in 50 years" (Babbage, 2004, p. 22).

Augusto had high hopes of contributing to his new surroundings, but his exaltation was short lived:

I was not aware that the Portuguese revolution was called the revolution of carnations. Carnations are flowers; flowers wither. When we arrived, the revolutionary carnations were desiccated, their perfumes sad. Faded, they exhaled memories. (Boal, 2001, p. 317)

On the job front, Augusto experienced disappointments and setbacks. The Portuguese government delayed signing his contract. “They had promised me I would train local actors” (Boal, 2001, p. 317).

Another situation presented itself. Ceu Guerra and Helder Costa, executive overseers of an esteemed Portuguese theatre group, *A Barraca* (The Hut), proposed Augusto become its artistic director. The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation agreed to pay his salary. There was a glitch. The Ministry of Culture altered the terms of the agreement, limiting Augusto’s position to six months.:

By the end of two months, artists were up in arms against measures taken by the Ministry of Culture. I had no hesitation in standing alongside the artists in public demonstrations. The Ministry rescinded my contract. I lost a third of my salary, the rent. (Boal, 2001, p. 317)

Following the employment debacle with Portugal’s Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, invited Augusto, theatre critic Carlos Porto, and several teachers to devise a plan for the reformulation of the Conservatory. Within six months, the design was complete. The committee presented the program to the Minister:

He received us with great ceremony and fine biscuits. He listened to our plans enthusiastically. He almost decorated us with heavy patriotic medals. At the door, bidding us farewell, he remembered an important detail: in the morning, he had signed a decree relieving us of our duties. We were out on the street, all of us. If we wanted to come back, we would have to submit ourselves to an examination by a panel made up of the most reactionary teachers in the country. I lost the second third of my salary.

The carnations met the tragic destiny of all flowers: the dustbin. (Boal, 2001, p. 318)



During his two-year stint in Portugal, Augusto met up with Paulo Freire. Paulo, Paulo's first wife Elza, some of Paulo's assistants, and Darcy Ribeiro, a renowned Brazilian educator, joined Augusto at his residence for lunch (Boal, 2001). Paulo left Brazil in 1964 following his release from prison. He wanted to go home:

Exile is a difficult experience. Waiting for the letter that never comes because it has been lost, waiting for notice of a final decision that never arrives. Expecting sometimes that certain people will come, even going to the airport simply to "expect," as if the verb were intransitive.

It is far more difficult to experience exile when we make no effort to adopt its space—time critically—accept it as an opportunity with which we have been presented. It is this critical ability to plunge into a new daily reality, without preconceptions, that brings the man or woman in exile to a more historical understanding of his or her own situation. It is one thing, then, to experience the everyday in the context of one's origin, immersed in the habitual fabrics from which we can easily emerge to make our investigations, and something else again to experience the everyday in the loan context that calls on us not only to become able to grow attached to this new context, but also to take it as an object of our critical reflection, much more than we do our own from a point of departure in our own. (Freire, 2004, p. 25)

Augusto's mother was also at the gathering. She had recently arrived from Brazil. She brought a letter from Chico Buarque, the legendary guitarist, composer, singer, dramatist, and writer. Augusto had written to Chico two or three times, but received no reply:

I asked to read it, and she gave me a cassette: *Meu car amigo* (My dear friend), in his voice with Francis Hime on the piano. We listened in silence to the recollections they sent us.

Collective catharsis. Chico sang: do not come back, it is not time yet. I will not tell you the tremendous emotion, for all of us, to hear his sung advice. You will have to guess the importance, for the exiled and the banished, of the solidarity of those who stayed in the country. A letter from a friend, even scrawled in pencil, was consolation and stimulus. Those who have never been exiled have no idea how much good it did us when people wrote, even telling of the everyday and the banal: it was enough. In pencil . . . Imagine a sung letter. (Boal, 2001, pp. 319-320)

For the most part, Augusto's two years in Portugal were disheartening:

I did nothing new in relation to the Theatre of the Oppressed. Only one Forum show, in Porto, in the street where a secret service torturer had been captured and, after popular discussion, set free. At liberty, he killed a revolutionary the next day. A group mounted a staging of the capture and the Forum took place, in the same street as the actual event. The fact of its being done years later, in the place where it happened, intensified the debate; a diachrony which, rather than having the effect of melancholy, elevated the event. The past revisited. (Boal, 2001, pp. 318-319)

### **Exile in Paris: Rainbow of Desire (Another Leaf on the Tree)**

“Come closer. Come closer.” We dutifully gathered around the grand storyteller. Some enthusiasts grabbed their notebooks, furiously writing to capture every word. Other admirers gazed at the erudite man in the chair clinging to every utterance. On this notable afternoon in 2007 during a Rainbow of Desire Workshop at the Brecht Forum in Manhattan, I asked Augusto about internalized oppression and the group’s responsibility and capacity to deal with it effectively during limited experiential laboratories. Theatre of the Oppressed techniques in general, Rainbow of Desire and Cop in the Head in particular, force individuals to confront their inner demons. Already two attendees came unwrapped during the process. It is an issue I pondered for quite some time. I did not expect Augusto’s 20-minute response:

This is theatre not therapy. Theatre is risky business. Crying is good. It is a human emotion. No one has gone to the hospital. The solidarity of the group helps the affected person get through. We are all practitioners here and when someone volunteers to tell a story, they know what they are getting into. I have only experienced something quite unusual once, and it happened here at The Brecht Forum many years ago. (personal communication, June 3, 2007)

Augusto glanced at Marie-Claire Picher for confirmation prior to recounting the memorable workshop episode. Claire is one of the founding members of the Theatre of the Oppressed Laboratory (TOPLAB). TOPLAB served as Augusto’s sponsor at the

Brecht Forum for approximately 20 years. Claire confirmed that the incident Augusto was about to tell did indeed occur at the Brecht Forum:

Some time ago there was a white-haired woman around 75 years old attending one of the workshops. She behaved in a strange manner. She stared at the walls of the room rather than at me—I am much more interesting than the walls. She didn't participate in any of the games or exercises. When I asked her name, she said "*I call myself lady.*" During the second day of the workshop she disappeared. Where could she have gone? She was here. Has anyone seen her? She vanished.

That evening we telephoned her sister's house where she was staying in the city. The person who answered the phone said she had injured her foot.

On the last day of the workshop during a forum theatre piece, the older woman walked through the door and shouted "*stop. I came back to demand an explanation. Who was it who assaulted me—who threw me against the wall?*"

Everyone was stunned. Of course no one did any such thing. The woman continued to interrupt the process and demanded to know who did this awful thing to her.

Augusto said he was paralyzed.

Finally, a young man stood up: *Forgive me. I pushed you against the wall with all of my strength.* The woman asked why he had done it. The young man replied that he was angry. Later, Augusto insisted that the young man tell him why he would pick on such a fragile woman. (Boal, 2006, p. 92)

I was mesmerized by Augusto's story. I stopped scribbling notes. All of my attention was focused on Augusto. For this reason, I extracted the young man's reply from *Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. I wanted to accurately portray Augusto's version of the scene:

Augusto, I didn't do a thing to her! You didn't know what to do with this woman in the middle of the stage. You asked us to take your place, didn't you? So, I listened to your request, and we did a real Forum. I could see that she was not quite right in the head, that she was a little unbalanced and on edge-but it seemed like she needed someone to take the blame somehow for pushing her—which I am sure did not happen by the way, because I was watching her from day one, she fascinated me, and I saw nothing. I killed two birds with one stone: I attended to the director's request; and I attended to her request—and she really wanted to find a culprit. All she wanted was to forgive someone. It was such a small thing. . . . A sorry never does any harm. (Boal, 2006, p. 92)

We laughed until our sides hurt.

The techniques I learned during the 2007 workshop, Rainbow of Desire and Cop-In-The-Head, were developed during Augusto's last years of exile in Paris. He emigrated to the country in 1978 after being offered a lectureship at the prestigious University in Sorbonne. Augusto was revered at the institution and Theatre of the Oppressed became a popular phenomenon. This led to the formation of the *Centre d' Étude et Diffusion des Techniques Actives d'Expression* (CÉDITADE), the first center committed to the development and propagation of Theatre of the Oppressed methods:

In January 1979, 300 people signed up, way beyond all expectation. We did four workshops of 40 trainees each, and formed four teams of five aspiring Jokers—each team led one workshop through the week. On Saturdays and Sundays, the groups met for a marathon of Forum Theatre.

The following month we repeated the process, with another 140 apprentices, and in March we founded the *Centre d' Étude et Diffusion des Techniques Actives d'Expression* (CÉDITADE), an unnecessarily complicated name—those French. (Boal, 2001, p. 321)

As Augusto disseminated Theatre of the Oppressed techniques throughout Europe, he was befuddled by personal concerns the predominately middle class participants brought to the sessions: alienation, loneliness, isolation, and heartache:

For someone like me, fleeing explicit dictatorships of a cruel and brutal nature, it was natural these themes should at first seem superficial and scarcely worthy of attention. It was if I was always asking, mechanically: “But where are the cops?” I was used to working with concrete, visible oppressions. (Boal, 2005b, p. 8)

Slowly, Augusto's opinion changed. He realized that deep-rooted oppressions leading to emotional torment, physical afflictions, and suicide could acutely affect individual emancipation. In 1980, with the assistance of his wife Cecília, who is a psychoanalyst, he developed Cop-In-The-Head:

The introspective techniques take an individual account as their starting point and seek to pluralize—we want to discover the police and their headquarters or barracks. If this thing is in one person's head, it could be in others': where had it

come from? Which crack had it crept in through? How could it be expelled? How could its path of entry be closed off? (Boal, 2001, p. 324)

During this period as Augusto fine-tuned Cop-In-The-Head techniques, he invented Rainbow of Desire. Rainbow of Desire resembles Cop-In-The-Head. Where Cop uses games and exercises to recognize and confront internalized forms of oppression, Rainbow of Desire addresses conflicting needs, desires, and wants within individuals and explores power relations and collective solutions to concrete problems. This is a method and set of techniques that are especially useful for teachers, educators, social workers, psychologists, mental health professionals, community activists, and organizers who are involved with marginalized constituencies and constituencies, which have traditionally been the victims of bias and discrimination.

### **Amnesty: Going Home**

In 1979, President João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo, Brazil's last military ruler, decreed amnesty for political expatriates. Included in the legislation "were all those imprisoned or exiled for political crimes since September 2, 1961. Excluded were those guilty of 'acts of terrorism' and armed resistance" (Skidmore, 1989, pp. 217-218).

Augusto went home. His first visit was in 1979, shortly after the amnesty law was enacted. He traveled alone. His family stayed behind in Paris. A crowd anxiously awaited his arrival:

The customs inspector was taken aback, wanting to know "Who on earth are you, that you get so many famous people turning out at the airport for you?" The crowd included Chico Buarque, Paulo José, Dina Sfat, Rui Guerra, Beth Mendes, Fernando Peixoto, Tessy Calado, Ian Michalski, as well as my family and other friends who were at the door of the airplane awaiting my embrace.

I wanted to explain that I was just me. Leave it at that. But no one can be only who they are, they have to be others. For me, my friends were my friends. They came to greet me: so the customs man wanted to know what kind of celebrity I was—I *had* to be one. (Boal, 2001, pp. 329-330)

Augusto's permanent homecoming took place in 1986.

Paulo Freire also returned to Brazil after amnesty was declared. His entry back into the country was a bit more complicated than Augusto's:

It was June of 1979, if my memory serves correctly. I was home in the morning when the phone rang. A Brazilian journalist, from Paris, asked if I had already heard that my name was on a list publicized by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the 10 Brazilian exiles who were barred from returning. Ten minutes later, from Bern, Swiss National Radio put the same question, asking me to comment on my reaction.

Taken by indistinguishable emotion, I said that I first had to obtain confirmation. I was concerned about the consequences of commenting on a case that I was not sure I was a part of.

I felt as if I had been walking along a plain when, all of a sudden, I found myself on the edge of a cliff, or as if, after having fought with the waves all night, I had died on the beach at dawn. Never, had I felt the fragility of my uprooting so strongly.

A few days later, I received two newspaper clippings from Brazil. One of them listed my name alongside those of nine other "nonamnestiables," such as Luiz Carlos Prestes, Miguel Arraes, Leonel Brizola, and Márcio Moreira Alves. In the other news piece, the spokesperson for the Planalto Palace contradicted the information. I recovered strength. In the first few days of August 1979, we landed at Viracopos—Elza, my first wife, myself, and our children, Joaquim and Lutgardes. The permanent return took place in June of the following year.

"Has the gentleman had problems with the Brazilian government?" the officer asked tactfully, with my passport in his hand. "I do," I answered gently, without arrogance. With a friendly smile, another officer approached, holding one of my books. I understood his gesture and autographed it. We walked across the passport check. It was finally over, both factually and legally, the exile I had gone into at 43 and was now leaving at 58. (Freire, 2007, pp. 71-72)

The Brazil Augusto and Paulo returned to was far different from the one they left.

Free elections took place in 1985 for the first time since the military coup ousted

President João Goulart 21 years earlier. During that same period, constitutional

amendments were passed. Among them was the enfranchisement of illiterates. At the

time there were over 30 million of them, between 20 and 25% of the population. A large

proportion of them were Black (Bethell, 1993). The new administration under José

Sarney also legalized parties of the left, including the Communist Party (Bethell, 1993).

The voting age was even lowered in 1988, from 18 to 16. The implementation of universal suffrage altered the fabric of Brazil.

By 1987, 26 women had been elected to Congress. This number was astounding considering fewer women won the ballot from 1932 to 1986. Nineteen Blacks also served (Bethell, 1993).

The 1989 presidential election was the first direct presidential election to take place in 30 years. It was also the first presidential election based upon universal suffrage in the history of Brazil:

It was held symbolically on the centenary of the Republic (15 November 1989). The electorate now numbered 82 million (in a population of almost 150 million) and the turn out was high (88%, 70.2 million voters). 70% of this huge electorate voted for the first time in a presidential election. 22 parties from across the political spectrum contested the first round. In the second round, Brazilians were offered a straight choice between Right (Fernando Collor de Mello, Partido da Renovacão Nacional, PRN) and Left (Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, PT). The election was won (with 53% of the votes cast) for Collor de Mello, a relatively unknown politician from the poor Northeastern state of Alagoas. (Bethell, 1993, pp. 14-15)

Lula, the Worker's Party candidate, was ushered into power 14 years later, in 2003. At the time of this writing, he is serving his second term in office as President of Brazil.

Augusto, also a member of the Worker's Party, entered Brazilian politics in 1993, seven years after his return from exile. He served one term as Vereador (Member of the Legislative Chamber) for Rio de Janeiro. During that period, Augusto pioneered another weapon in his Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal, Legislative Theatre.

## Legislative Theatre: The Last Leaf on the Tree

In the spring of 2008, I enrolled in a Legislative Theatre of the Oppressed workshop in Omaha, Nebraska. Augusto never offered this technique at the Brecht Forum, so I jumped at the opportunity to study with him at another venue. Augusto shared stories about his remarkable experiences as Vereador in Rio de Janeiro. One extraordinary episode was recounted at several gatherings I attended over the years. Augusto documented the account in *Legislative Theatre*. For the sake of accuracy, I have reproduced the text here opposed to relying on my transcription of the narrative:

Some friends of mine suggested that I should try and compose a law all on my own, from my own head, rather than just passing laws that came from the people's desires. If I didn't do it, they said, people might think that my democratic method of legislating was due to my own incapacity to think up good laws, rather than my genuine desire to help the people enact the laws they wanted.

So I went home, and remembered that, in Sweden, the green lights at pedestrian crossings are accompanied by a particular noise when they are illuminated, and the red lights are accompanied by a different noise. By these means, blind people know when to cross the road. I wanted to oblige the City of Rio to do the same to protect our own blind citizens! I was very pleased that this memory had come to me and I wrote out the text of the law myself, refusing the offer of help from my assistants (who included my lawyers and a legislative specialist!), in order to show that I myself was a very capable lawmaker. When I had finished, I went in person to deliver it to the Justice Commission.

Later when the blind people in one of our theatre groups heard about "my" law, they came running to my office.

"Boal—do you want to get us killed?" They said, furious with me. "Why? It's a marvelous law; in Sweden it has saved many lives. Blind people like yourselves hear these noises and cross the roads in perfect safety! It works wonderfully!"

I was flabbergasted with their unexpected reaction!

"In Sweden, they are Swedish!" they told me.

"So what?" I asked in amazement.

They answered furiously:

"Swedish drivers stop at red lights! Here, they don't!"

I tore down the three flights of steps from my office and arrived breathless at the Justice Commission, just in time to withdraw my only law.

I am a lawmaker who has never made a law!!! (Boal, 2005a, pp. 104-105)



Augusto took his parliamentary seat on January 1, 1993. He was one of six Vereadores elected from the Worker's Party. It was the beginning of his Legislative Theatre experiment and the attainment of a dream.

Legislative Theatre combines methods from the Theatre of the Oppressed toolbox with conventional practices of conceptualizing and passing laws. The goal is democratization of a process not usually accessible to the general population. Within this statute-making context, Theatre of the Oppressed has utilitarian and discernible implications beyond those contained in a Forum Theatre show. The oppressed does not solely rehearse for the future; they begin to actualize it (Boal, 2005a).

Augusto went directly to the people with this new form of lawmaking. He was accompanied by his staff, all former members of his beloved Center in Rio. Together they created Theatre of the Oppressed working groups with landless peasant farmers, homeless children, the elderly, Black students, *favela*-dwellers, unionized factory workers, and battered women (Boal, 2005a). Ideas were transformed into bills. Thirteen of those bills became law.

In spite of the successes, Augusto's fresh approach to legislating was not easy. He faced problems along the way. There was always an element of danger. In Morro da Saudad, a blighted area in Rio, a women's theatre group warned Augusto not to return. In Vigario Geral, props and scenery were stolen out of the Theatre of the Oppressed vehicle. Armed men hovered on rooftops in Morro do Borel, a drug infested hangout for rival gangs where Augusto and his staff worked with parishioners of the Catholic Church. Sister Lucia told him, "It's very quiet here, except every now and then when you hear the

odd burst of machine gun fire . . . Happens very rarely . . . every other week” (Boal, 2005a, p. 34).

Augusto never entered into unsafe situations in a haphazard way and he was not into heroics. “If the situation becomes permanently dangerous and risky, we prefer not to persist, not to run pointless risks, and we go and work in other areas, with other groups and other themes” (Boal, 2005a, p. 36).

Sadly, Augusto only served one term. He lost the 1996 election. In a letter to his old friend Richard Schechner, he reflected on the previous four years. A portion of that correspondence is copied below:

October 1, 1997

Dear Richard,

You asked me to update our experience on Legislative Theatre for TDR, and I am happy to say that we are, slowly but steadily, advancing towards another stage.

At first, it was very hard to take it, very painful. No one loves to lose! We were absolutely conscious that we had done a beautiful and important work, during the four years of our mandate, at the Chamber of Vereadores, both in the legislative and in the theatrical fields.

We had formed 19 permanent theatre groups of “organized oppressed” all over the city; we had promulgated 13 laws that came directly from those groups, from their dialogue with their own communities and with the population in the streets; we had made, in 13 cases, desire became law!; we had intensely fought against all sorts of injustices, economical, social, political, sexual, etc. We had made good theatre! We were happy and proud with ourselves and with our work, and . . . and we failed.

In 1992, when I was elected vereador, no one believed it could happen. Including myself. All we wanted was to help the Workers’ Party and their campaign. We had a project—to do theatre as politics and not merely political theatre—but no one understood very well what that might be or mean. Surprise: even so, I was elected!

In 1996, everyone was sure I would win again. Many people even asked me for whom they should vote, since it was certain that I would easily be re-elected. Inside the party, I was considered to be one out of 3 or 4 vereadores that would obviously be re-elected. In the public opinion, now everyone knew what we meant by theatre as politics: they had seen it in action! Surprise: even so I was out!

At first, we were very sad, discouraged, disappointed, melancholic. Ungrateful population!!! Unattentive voters!!! Alienated citizens!!! We had offered our work, our sacrifice, our talent, and we were rejected! Better stop. They don't deserve us . . .

But we are not used to giving up. We decided to go on, to go further! (Boal, 2005a, pp. 113-114)

**Paulo Freire (September 19, 1921—May 2, 1997) and Augusto Boal (March 16, 1931—May 2, 2009)**

In 1996, Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal attended the second Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed Conference at the University of Nebraska in Omaha. The Conference is an annual meeting place for activists, artists, community organizers, and popular educators to network and engage in dialog and critical thinking. On this historic occasion, the two men closed the event with a much anticipated round table discussion. Over 800 attendees assembled to listen to the Brazilian scholars. It was the only time Paulo and Augusto worked together in this way.

A ceremony to recognize the global achievements of the men was held following the conference. Paulo and Augusto received honorary doctorate degrees from the University of Nebraska in Omaha. As the men prepared for the celebration, Augusto reflected on his long-time relationship with Paulo:

We were backstage, waiting to be called for the ceremony, dressed up in the black regalia designated for this solemn occasion. My hat insisted on sliding forwards—when the organizers asked me the size of my head, I supplied the right amount of centimeters, but instead of “circumference” I had written “diameter,” a measurement which would have made my head bigger than my waist. They did not have a new hat made for me. The only one they could find was a little larger than my head, and was held in place with several uncomfortable hairpins. . . . Holding my hat, I asked Paulo if he remembered when we had first met. Neither of us did. We had been friends for so long, it seemed like forever . . .

But our friendship must have dated from 1960 when, for the first time, I and my Teatro de Arena de São Paulo went to Recife, in the state of Pernambuco, where he was trying out his method. There we met. Paulo was 10 years older than me.

On this occasion, I asked him if he would accept the Medal of the City of Rio de Janeiro, which I was empowered to award him, as I was a member of Rio's Legislative Chamber. He accepted. (Boal, 2005a, pp. 126-127)

Paulo Freire died on May 2, 1997. Prior to his death, Augusto presented him with the Medal of the City of Rio de Janeiro. The observance was held at the Legislative Chamber. Musicians from northeastern Brazil serenaded Paulo and told stories about his incredible life and work. Friends and colleagues applauded his accomplishments. Paulo's frailty was evident so the pomp and circumstance was kept short. It was a beautiful poignant tribute. Augusto delivered a heartfelt speech. The text is below. He added additional words after Paulo passed away and printed them in *Legislative Theatre*. They are reproduced here in their entirety:

Paulo Freire invented a method, his method, our method, the method which teaches the illiterate that they are perfectly literate in the languages of life, of work, of suffering, of struggle, and that all they need to learn is how to translate into marks on paper that which they already know, from their daily lives. In Socratic fashion, Paulo Freire helps the citizenry to discover by themselves that which they carry within them.

And in this process, teacher and pupil learn: "I taught a peasant how to write the word 'plough;' and he taught me how to use it," as a rural teacher put it. It is only possible to teach something to someone who teaches us something back.

Teaching is a transitive process, says our master, a dialogue, just as all human relations should be dialogues: men and women, Blacks and Whites, one class and another, between countries. But we know that these dialogues, if not carefully nurtured or energetically demanded, can very rapidly turn into monologues, in which only one of the "interlocutors" has the right to speak: one sex, one class, one race, one group of countries. And the other parties are reduced to silence, to obedience; they are the oppressed. And this is the Paulo-Freirian concept of the oppressed: dialogue, which turns into monologue.

King Alfonso VI of Spain once said: "If God had asked my opinion before creating the world, I would have recommended something much simpler." Paulo Freire, in a way, "de-complicated" teaching. Though, according to the official histories, God made no such request of him (but inside I am convinced that he did ask him!) Freire created something simpler, more human than the complicated authoritarian forms of teaching, which placed obstacles in the way of the learner. With Paulo Freire, we learned to learn.

In his method, over and above learning to read and write, one learns more: one learns to know and to respect otherness and the other, difference and the

different. My fellow creator resembles me, but he is not me; he is similar to me, I resemble him. By engaging in dialogue we learn, the two of us gain, teacher and pupil, since we are all pupils, and all teachers. I exist because they exist. To write on a white sheet of paper one needs a black pen; to write on a blackboard the chalk must be a different color. For me to be, they must be.

For me to exist Paulo Freire must exist.

If I had to repeat these thoughts, I'd say the same words. In sadness, I would add only this: Paulo Freire has died. But he will always exist, like my other fathers, all now deceased. Like Jose Augusto, who taught me to live and work, and to live working; like John Gassner, who taught me dramaturgy; like Nelson Rodrigues, who gave me a hand into theatre.

With Paulo Freire's death, I lost my last father. Now I have only brothers and sisters. (Boal, 2005a, pp.128-129)

Twelve years after Augusto composed his final farewell to Paulo, he passed away. Coincidentally he died on the same day. I received the devastating news on the eve of his death, approximately two weeks prior to my annual spring Theatre of the Oppressed ritual. Knowing Augusto was ill with a rare form of leukemia, I took advantage of the precious moments when he would defy doctor's orders and travel to the United States to impart pearls of wisdom to eager workshop participants like myself. This year, I signed up for 11 consecutive days: first, Legislative Theatre in Minneapolis and then, Forum Theatre and Rainbow of Desire at the Brecht Forum in New York City. It was not to be. Julian Boal sorrowfully carried out his father's commitments. Julian was literally born into Theatre of the Oppressed and was frequently by his father's side. Full of grief, he fulfilled Augusto's wishes not to cancel any events. Augusto expressed his desires before losing his long battle with cancer. They were communicated in an email distributed through cyberspace on May 4, 2009. The statement was written by Bárbara Santos (personal communication, May 4, 2009) on behalf of the Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro:

Brothers and sisters in arms, companions in the struggle,  
Our beloved comrade Augusto Boal, that tireless sower of seeds, who

traveled the four corners of the earth scattering the seed of the Theatre of the Oppressed, is on yet another journey. He set off in the early hours of the second of May. He spent the First of May, May Day, in a vigil of solidarity with the workers fighting for a fairer and happier world, a world of solidarity.

He set off on this special journey, for which reason he was not able to be physically present at any event. But, as was his habit, he lived, loved, and worked to the last drop of his energy, leaving ready (for publication) the new version of his book, *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*. He also left express instructions that no event should be cancelled because of his absence. "Isn't that the very point of Multiplication?"

Yesterday, on the third of May, we held a farewell ceremony. The cremation of his body marked the start of a new phase of the Theatre of the Oppressed, in the physical absence of the Master himself. We wept, we talked, we sang. Celse Frateschi recited, beautifully, a passage from "Arena Conta Zumbi." We sang a song written by Nuno Arcanjo. And Cecilia Boal, with all her strength and vitality, told the world that her husband should be remembered as the warrior that he always was. We dried our tears and affirmed Boal's leaving.

His body has gone, but not his presence! This Saturday, the 9th of May, from 5 pm to 8 pm (Brazilian time), we will pay homage to him and his presence at the Centre of the Theatre of the Oppressed with music, poems, performances and videos. At 7 pm, we stop for a moment of tribute in Boal's honor. We will celebrate the life, the struggle, the productivity, the work of Augusto Boal, and the continuity of that work. We ask that everybody do the same as us, and pay homage to him this Saturday.

It will not be easy to follow our Master, Partner, Friend, and Comrade in the Struggle. But what has ever been easy in the trajectory of the Theatre of the Oppressed?

Ethics and Solidarity will be our foundations and our guides. Multiplication will be our strategy. And our goal will remain the same: to create concrete social actions to transform oppressive situations into realities of peace and justice.

Viva Augusto Boal.

Augusto's death had a profound global impact. Augusto and his work touched and transformed people throughout the world on a personal and societal level. Theatre of the Oppressed techniques are practiced in: Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, England, Estonia, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Kosova, Macedonia, Moldova, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Senegal, Serbia and

Montenegro, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, U.S.A., Uganda, Wales, and West Indies (Theatre of the Oppressed, n.d.).

Condolences were bestowed upon Augusto's family from across the planet.

Julian recited some of the more memorable ones during the workshops. The outpouring of grief should not surprise any one. After all, Augusto was a giant. His shoes cannot be filled. Adrian Jackson, who translated several of Augusto's books into English summed up what many of us are experiencing. His note was posted on the International Theatre of the Oppressed (n.d.) website:

Come closer he would say. Come closer.

Now he is further away than ever—and yet we may feel closer to him than ever. The greatest Joker has left the stage.

Augusto Boal, our good friend, teacher and inspiration has died. Many of us loved him. It has been my privilege to put his words in print—but for this moment he prepared no text for me to use. The world is a poorer place without him. He touched the life of thousands, possibly millions of people. He gave us an invention, a discovery, the Theatre of the Oppressed, which helps us make sense of the world, but even that wonderful invention cannot entirely soften the blow of his loss. The consolation of course is that his work will live and continue to grow—the Theatre of the Oppressed is already the richest legacy anyone could hope for.

Augusto taught us that the tenses of TO are present and future, not past. So while we grieve in the present, and celebrate the life of our great mentor, we must look to the future and work out how to respond as a community, how we can “come closer” and what form of memorial we can create in his name. Our thoughts are with Cecelia, Julian, and Fabian.

Augusto is gone, but his presence is everywhere. In the spirit of this dissertation, I will close Augusto's portrait with him speaking in his own words. In 2001, while writing his autobiography he reflected on his life:

Looking at my life up to now, I can see: there has been coherence! I sought a Brazilian style in the laboratories and playwriting seminars I led: I wanted us to speak in our own voice, with our own face. I did not like theatre that was imported, gift-wrapped for us—I believed in *patria* (fatherland). In the Classics, I found metaphor. Not in order to vulgarize universal culture, but as an attempt to find, in distant works, our face of today. In the musicals, I sought relations

between a supposed heroic past and the pusillanimous present. My theatre has always been moral!

I dreamed of the spectator protagonist. In the Newspaper Theatre we abstained from giving the public the finished product and offered instead the means of production—everyone needed to discover the theatre they carried within. In Peru, I saw vibrant life invading the immobilized stage. It was the transgression any form of liberation requires. With forum, the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) acquired structure.

The TO allowed me to return to writing about myself, as witness. I used to say that everyone can do theatre. As I am part of the “everyone” I can also do theatre, not only teach it. I wrote *Murro*, and a novel, *Suicida com Medo da Morte* (Suicide with Fear of Death). In Europe, *The Rainbow of Desire*—the police patrolled the streets and hid in our heads.

When later I returned to Brazil, I saw it was necessary to articulate *O Teatro Legislativo* (The Legislative Theatre). I wanted to see our desire transformed into law.

The TO did political events, it was politics; it withdrew into the intimacy of internalized oppressions, it was psychotherapy; in schools, it was pedagogy; in the cities, it legislated. The TO superimposed itself onto other social activities, invaded other fields and allowed itself to be invaded. Where was the theatre? It was the exercise of liberty. This is the major coherence informing my work: I have exercised and defended the freedom we must have to be ourselves, and to allow others to be themselves. All my life I have been in search of peace—never passivity! (Boal, 2001, pp. 315-316)

## Lessons Learned

What does it mean to create dangerously? For Augusto, it entailed face-to-face confrontations with the Brazilian government following the 1964 coup and the 1968 state of siege. In spite of his imprisonment, torture, and exile, Augusto remained steadfast, defying the dictators at every turn. Theatre was his weapon. His *modus operandi* shifted from public to clandestine depending upon the circumstances. When all was said and done, Augusto developed a system of transformational techniques that sparked an international movement for radical social change. I was one of the beneficiaries of Augusto’s ingenuity. The workshops I attended were fun and informative. There was no physical risk involved. When it came to Augusto’s work with the oppressed, however,



his dedication was unwavering and more often than not, it was bold. He relentlessly campaigned for global justice until his dying breath regardless of the consequences.

In the succeeding paragraphs, I offer my reflections on the seven create dangerously questions spotlighted in chapter 2 of this dissertation. My observations apply specifically to Augusto's portrait.

First, Augusto created dangerously when he threatened the social, economic, and political status quo. Augusto was always a revolutionary thinker. His activist oriented stagecraft initially emerged during his time at the University of Brazil where he forged relationships with the theatre community including a friendship with playwright Abdias Nascimento—founder of the group Teatro Experimental do Negro (Black Experimental Theatre) (Babbage, 2004). Later, Augusto honed his dramatic skills during his Columbia University pilgrimage in the early 1950s, and solidified some of his political beliefs. His involvement with the New York Writer's Group and artists, like Langston Hughes, influenced the young playwright. It was his 1960 encounter with members of the Brazilian *Ligas Camponesas* (Peasant Leagues), however, that caused the metamorphous shift. From that point forward, Augusto ascertained:

That all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilize them. The theater is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it. (Boal, 1985, p. 122)

Augusto and the Arena São Paulo thespians initially deployed their theatrical weapons against Brazil's heavy-handed administration following the 1964 coup. Despite the violent, unstable climate, Augusto and his colleagues persevered. They managed to stay afloat by outmaneuvering government censors. Following the edict of Institution Act Number 5, however, Augusto's luck ran out. He was imprisoned, tortured, and

forced into exile. While abroad, Augusto carried on, systematizing Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. His ideas and practices caused him trouble wherever he traveled.

Secondly, Augusto created dangerously when he mobilized for systemic change. After the Brazilian coup, Augusto and members of Arena São Paulo grappled with insurmountable repression. Censorship decrees stymied productivity. In 1968, when 65 pages of one of Augusto's 80-page scripts was banned, his patience ran out:

If anything was “over the top” it was our very existence, as creators: how can an artist work under a dictatorship if the artist is the body who, when free, creates the new, and the dictatorship is the body which, by shutting people up, preserves the old? Art and dictatorship are incompatible. The two words loathe each other! (Boal, 2001, p. 266)

In defiance of official restrictions, the show went on with the original script intact. Artists throughout the region demonstrated their solidarity by declaring a general strike. It was a grand act of civil disobedience. Shortly thereafter, physical assaults, abductions, and sweeps intensified. Augusto was unstoppable. After a period of strategic planning, Augusto and local actors rallied against the heightened tyrannical measures adopted by the government. They fought back with Newspaper Theatre.

In Newspaper Theatre, people own the means of production. The traditional barriers that separate the artist and spectator are eliminated. The technique's primary objective is to transfer the entire theatrical process to the masses:

The secondary objective is to attempt to demystify the pretended “objectivity” of most journalism, to show that all news published in the paper is a work of fiction at the service of the dominant class. Even accurate news, where the facts are not misrepresented (a very rare thing), becomes fiction when published in a newspaper at the service of this class. (Boal, 2005a, p. 235)

The third objective of the Newspaper Theatre is to demonstrate that theatre can be practiced by anyone (even though they may not be an “artist”). (Boal, 2005a, p. 236)

Under the watchful eyes of the dictator, the invention of Newspaper Theatre was a necessity. It was Augusto's way of staying one step ahead of the ruler's wrath.

In 1971, Augusto's world came crashing down. He was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured. After his release he went into a self-imposed exile in Argentina, Peru, the United States, Portugal, and Paris. In every country, Augusto mobilized the troupes, concocting and dispersing Theatre of the Oppressed methods. It was risky business. After his 1986 return to Brazil, and the political campaign that catapulted him to the Legislative Chamber, he developed Legislative Theatre of the Oppressed and went directly to the people with his lawmaking. Augusto continued to spread the seeds of his techniques until his death. In his classic book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto eloquently laid out his theories, categorized as the *poetics of the oppressed*:

The *poetics of the oppressed* is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action! Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself: but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution! (Boal, 1985, p. 155).

Additionally, Augusto created dangerously when he introduced new practices and tactics into various communities throughout the globe. He had developed an integrated system of revolutionary theatre. Augusto taught that system of revolutionary theatre to educators, practitioners and marginalized populations for more than five decades. It sparked a worldwide campaign for justice and societal transformation.

Presenting new artistic models to a particular populace, however, is not always risky. Mainstream theatre professionals have exposed underserved communities to various crafts for centuries without suffering the brutal consequences from government officials. The difference between their methods and Augusto's is intent:

Conventional theatre is governed by an intransitive relationship, in that everything travels from stage to auditorium, everything is transported, transferred in that direction—emotions, ideas, morality!—and nothing goes the other way. The tiniest noise, the smallest exclamation, the least sign of life the spectator displays, is the equivalent of driving the wrong way down a one-way street: danger! Lest the magic of the stage be shattered, silence is required. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, by contrast, dialogue is created, transitivity is not merely tolerated, it is actively sought—this theatre asks its audience questions and expects answers. Sincerely. (Boal, 2005a, pp. 19-20)

Theatre of the Oppressed wrestles with problems of exploitation and domination from a people's viewpoint. It is a bottom-up model. The production is collectively owned.

Spectators become spect-actors. A spect-actor physically and mentally engages in the drama. At any moment, the spect-actor can stop the action, invade the stage and attempt to spawn archetypal images of a desired reality. No longer passively watching from his/her seat, the spect-actor is transformed, by sharing in the theatrical process. The radical shift from conformity to civic participation can translate to the community at-large. This is what makes Theatre of the Oppressed a threatening phenomenon for the ruling class, so it is essential to introduce the popular techniques to neophytes in an ethical and responsible way.

The method is complicated. It has taken me years to understand the intricacies of the Theatre of the Oppressed Tree. It is impossible for a novice to adequately learn the pedagogy over a three-day period. Even so, during the workshops with Augusto and Julian, I conversed with Theatre of the Oppressed rookies who were eager to transfer their knowledge to exploited communities. This behavior concerned me from the outset. I publicly challenged Augusto on numerous occasions about his students haphazardly

spreading the radical genre. I also conveyed my apprehension to Julian and Claire during breaks.

Augusto had no control over the techniques once they were released into the universe. Opposed to liberating the oppressed, if taught in a reckless manner, the method has the potential to exacerbate harsh conditions in a community. Organizers have been grappling with this dilemma for years. Si Kahn (2010), the founder of Grassroots Leadership, and a topical singer-songwriter, relegated an entire chapter to the problem in his new book *Creative Community Organizing: A Guide for Rabble Rousers, Activists and Quiet Lovers of Justice*:

No matter how well we do our work, however conscientiously and carefully, even the best organizers occasionally make people's lives worse—sometimes for a while, sometimes forever.

Those we challenge—those who hold power over other people's lives—didn't get where they are by accident. They're not interested in losing the wealth and ease of life they enjoy. When they fight, they fight hard, and they fight to win. (p. 61)

The consequences for confronting the established power elite can be dire; not only for organizers and cultural activists, like Augusto; but, for entire communities incited into action because of the art. People can get hurt: physically and mentally. In Brazil, following the coup, dissidents were beaten, incarcerated, raped, tortured, and executed. Augusto was among them. People lost their jobs, were harassed, blacklisted, and forced into exile. As organizers and Theatre of the Oppressed practitioners:

We bear at least some responsibility for what happens to the people we've encouraged to take these risks. It's easy to say, "It's the fault of those in power." But it is the organizer who says, "You don't need to take this any more. You need to stand up and speak out. You need to challenge injustice, for your own and your children's sake."

If people don't listen and don't do what organizers ask them to do, the conditions they want to challenge and change might continue for the rest of their

lives—but they might not suffer the loss and pain they now have to live with. (Kahn, 2010, p. 62)

Now that Augusto has died, it is up to Theatre of the Oppressed devotees, like myself, to carry on and spread the seeds of the practice in an ethical and conscientious way. The method is grounded in theory, praxis, and action. Sometimes, Augusto was so anxious and excited to pass on his knowledge that the foundation of the system was lost on workshop participants. The task at hand is to place Theatre of the Oppressed back into its historic context so that the techniques continue to be an effective tool for transformational change—personal and societal.

Furthermore, Augusto created dangerously when he openly expressed the hidden transcripts of opposing views. In the midst of the virulent Cold War political climate, where opponents of iron-fisted administrations were hunted down and stamped out, Augusto unveiled Theatre of the Oppressed. It took tenacity and courage to be a subversive in those days.

Following the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the United States and South American officials were alarmed by Fidel Castro's victorious dethroning of Fulgencio Batista the country's dictator. Foes of regime change in Cuba, feared prospects of a domino effect. If Che Guevara and a small contingent of rebel forces could destabilize Cuba, there was the possibility of the toppling of oppressive governments throughout the Southern Cone. This logic triggered the Brazilian coup of 1964 and fomented the internal crackdown that followed (Skidmore, 1989). Dissidents, like Augusto, who insisted on fighting the good fight (with stage props), were targeted and persecuted.

By the time Augusto was arrested in 1971, Che Guevara was dead. Che's failed attempts to duplicate Cuba's revolutionary fervor expedited his demise and martyrdom.

Nevertheless, the war waged against “agitators” accelerated. Augusto never missed a beat:

Since 1970, when I systematized the Techniques of *Newspaper Theatre*, the *Theatre of the Oppressed* method has not stopped growing, in Brazil and in the five continents, always adding new Techniques, which respond to new necessities, and never abandoning any of the old ones.

The enormous diversity of Techniques and of their possible applications—in social and political struggle, in psychotherapy, in pedagogy, in town as in country, in the treatment of immediate problems in one area of the city or in the great economic problems of the whole country—has never deflected them, not by one millimeter even, from their original informing proposition, which is the unwavering support of the theatre in the struggles of the oppressed. (Boal, 2006, p. 4)

Augusto was not naïve. He was cognizant of his vulnerability. He never idealized the Cuban Revolution, in spite of his 1968 visit to the country. In fact, Augusto’s pedagogy includes potential Theatre of the Oppressed pitfalls, which he endearingly named the Che Guevara Syndrome:

We must steer clear of the thought that all situations, however desperate, have solutions. Che believed, romantically, that it would be enough to create a focus of rebellion against the Bolivian dictatorship for the peasants to rebel and create hundreds of other foci, as had been done in Cuba; in Cuba, however, the people were already in a state of revolt and ready for the struggle when the spark was lit. When we are doing a Forum, we have to be honest and cautious: romantic, but realistic. We have to analyze the possibilities, but avoid the illusion of magic solutions! (Boal, 2006, p. 126)

There is no incertitude concerning the perilous consequences associated with publicly exposing the harsh realities of despotic governments. Reports, such as “Torture in Brazil” (Dassin, 1998) and “Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans: 1976 U.S. Senate Report on Illegal Wiretaps and Domestic Spying by the FBI, CIA, and NSA” (Church Committee, 2007), help substantiate stories like Augusto’s.

Moreover, Augusto created dangerously when he kept the stories of repressive power alive. Augusto emphatically underscored the fundamental reason for remembering

the past in each workshop I attended. “To fight for our cultural life, we have to study our past, in this fantastic present we are living through, in order to be able to invent our future” (Boal, 2006, p. 101). To do so can elicit extreme reactions from the opposition.

The war against left oriented ideology dates back before the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The magnitude and sophistication of that battle was unbeknownst to Augusto and the throngs of global dissenters who took their grievances to the streets. History has a way of uncovering the facts long after everyone has gone home.

One of the disclosed verifiable truths of the Cold War period pertains to the role played by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In 1950, Michael Josselson, one of the organization’s agents, instituted the Congress for Cultural Freedom (Saunders, 2000). The Congress for Cultural Freedom served as a propaganda machine against Marxist and Communist influences. At its pinnacle, the group maintained administrative centers in 35 countries, employed dozens of recruits, published more than 20 statuesque magazines, showcased art, owned a news and information service, organized prestigious international forums, and enticed musicians and artists with awards and public presentations (Saunders, 2000).

For readers unfamiliar with the sinister activities of the CIA, I highly recommend consulting Frances Stonor Saunders’s (2000) book, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, and the 1976 U.S. Senate Report on Illegal Wiretaps and Domestic Spying by the FBI, CIA, and NSA (as cited in Church Committee, 2007). The 1976 document is an exhaustive account of illicit activities conducted by the various clandestine government agencies.



Between the government despots, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and Operation Condor, the Southern Cone campaign to wipe out rabble-rousers, Augusto did not stand a chance. If it were not for the deluge of international support, he would have died in prison. Some of his colleagues were not as fortunate. They perished in the struggle for democratic freedom.

Most importantly, Augusto created dangerously when he assisted ordinary people usually locked out of the political process to write their own scripts. Theatre of the Oppressed is an artistic model based on Paulo Freire's pedagogy. The paradigm, coined popular education, is a two-stage process (Freire, 1992). First, the oppressed unveil the world of oppression (Freire, 1992). Secondly, through praxis, they commit themselves to its transformation (Freire, 1992).

This is easier said than done. There is no popular education blueprint or template because the method cannot be transplanted (Freire, 1978). It must be reinvented (Freire, 1978). The same dilemma applies to Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto's system, which was deliberately adopted from Paulo and customized for theatre.

In an ideal world, popular education is community specific, tailored to fit the needs of a homogeneous marginalized group. Participation in this democratically oriented approach can be liberating. It can also be deadly. Authoritarian governments will take every measure to safeguard their power base. Paulo Freire (1992) discussed the drawbacks of the method in his revolutionary book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

The oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. Moreover, their struggle for freedom threatens not only the oppressor, but also their own oppressed comrades who are fearful of still greater repression. When they discover within themselves the yearning to be free, they perceive that this

yearning can be transformed into reality only when the same yearning is aroused in their comrades.

But, while dominated by the fear of freedom they refuse to appeal to others, or to listen to the appeals of others, or even to the appeals of their own conscience. They prefer gregariousness to authentic comradeship; they prefer the security of conformity with their state of unfreedom to the creative communion produced by freedom and even the very pursuit of freedom. (p. 32)

In spite of pedagogical shortcomings, scholars and practitioners, such as myself, believe in the popular education doctrine and its transformative potential. The system, which is designed to challenge myths perpetuated by the dominant ideology, is empowering. Subjugated groups assembled in a safe space can confront an assortment of issues pertaining to who wields power and why. They see their reality, analyze the root causes of their problems, and develop strategies and tactics to change the situation.

Quite often, Augusto identified Theatre of the Oppressed imperfections during our sessions. He had no illusions about the inherent flaws and risks involved with his techniques. On the other hand, Theatre of the Oppressed has the potential to yield magnanimous benefits:

We must all do theatre, to discover who we are and find out who we could become. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, the people who come on stage to recount an episode of their lives are simultaneously narrator and narrated—for this reason, they are able to imagine themselves in the future.

People go on stage to do theatre, because theatre cannot be done alone and in order to all say “I,” before coming together in another beautiful word: “we!”

The theatre is a mirror in which we can see our vices and our virtues, according to Shakespeare. And it can also be transformed into a magic mirror, as in the Theatre of the Oppressed, a mirror we can enter if we do not like the image it shows us and, by penetrating it, rehearse modifications of this image, rendering it more to our liking. In this mirror we see the present, but can invent the future of our dreams: the act of transforming is in itself transformatory. In the act of changing our image, we are changing ourselves, and by changing ourselves in turn we change the world. (Boal, 2006, p. 62)

Lastly, Augusto created dangerously when he led without authority. One of Augusto’s heroes, Cuban poet, José Martí once said: “The best way of saying, is to do!

... To be is to do and to do is to be” (Boal, 2006, p. 85). The Cuban artist, who perished during the war of independence against Spain in 1895, inspired generations of culture carriers like Augusto. One of Cuba’s revolutionary leaders, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, said of the lyricist: “Martí was the guide of his time but also stands as the anticipator of ours” (Shnookal & Muniz, 2007, p. 1).

José Martí paid the ultimate price. He led without authority and it cost him. He created dangerously. Fifty years after his death, Augusto picked up his torch and continued the struggle for justice. Augusto survived his battles against authoritarianism. Instead of being murdered by the junta, leukemia snatched him prematurely. Nevertheless, he created dangerously. Ronald Heifetz (1998) addressed the implications of leading without authority in *Leadership Without Easy Answers*:

Leaders without authority—deviants, as they often are perceived—have to think hard about where they direct their challenge. Indeed, the better the quality of their argument, the more likely it will touch on an internal contradiction in the community and thus arouse or aggravate conflicts, which then call forth authoritative efforts to restore order. Hence, a leader who pushes the authority figure in an attempt to solve important problems should expect the authority figure to strike back, not necessarily from personal motivations but from the community’s pressure on him to maintain equilibrium. (pp. 227-228)

Augusto pushed boundaries. He was an agent of change. Theatre of the Oppressed was his artillery. His army was comprised of marginalized groups. Everyone was a leader in the battalion, but no one had authority. Without government-sanctioned authority, Augusto and the troupes were in constant conflict with the state. They had limited control over their environment. They could cast the dye, but they could not direct the response (Heifetz, 1998). They were susceptible to physical and mental assaults and they had to think quickly on their feet. There was never enough time to effectively prepare for future strikes. Quite often, Augusto and his colleagues lived moment to

moment. Errors were made. Augusto acknowledged his mistakes in his autobiography and in our workshops:

Thank goodness I was born! Otherwise, who would see the world as only I do? Who would tell the story that only I can tell? Who would be as unhappy as I am at my unhappiness, or as happy at my happiness? Who would be able to say: “Augusto, thank goodness we were born.” Only me!

In writing this book, I relived the life I have lived. I tried to make a clean copy of it, a final draft, but that is impossible—I can rewrite encyclopedias, but not my life. I read biographies of others: if they could, they would do it all again, the same way. For myself, if I was to start again, I would never do anything the same way: I know now what I did not know then. My life has been a draft, unfinished sentences, unexpected syntaxes. But I neither can, nor want to make a clean copy: I did what I could. If I could have done more, I would have. I do not regret even the mistakes. Each deed done was what it was possible to do. Today, it would be a different deed, not the same: time has passed. But, at that time, the time had not yet passed. May those who I offended forgive me.

I crossed continents, oceans, alleys and footpaths—I stumbled on rocks, so many were there on the way! I can say to myself, in the solitude of the written word: “Thank goodness you were born, Augusto. You made a difference.” (Boal, 2001, p. 341)

## Chapter V: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o Portrait

### Introduction

December 11, 2008, was a clear, crisp, sunny Southern California day. I arrived at the UCI campus two hours before my scheduled interview with the legendary Kenyan author and playwright, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. My mind raced as I wandered the grounds, first strolling through Aldrich Park, a beautiful 19-acre botanical garden surrounded by more than 11,000 trees and shrubs (University of California—Irvine, 2010), before heading over to the International Center For Writing And Translation, where Ngũgĩ serves as director. I waited 26 years for this moment.

I was originally introduced to Ngũgĩ through an article published in the September/October 1982 issue of *THEATERWORK Magazine*. The exposition, "Popular Theatre and Popular Struggle in Kenya" penned by Ross Kidd, was a detailed account of Ngũgĩ's close association with the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Educational and Cultural Centre. Kamĩĩĩthũ was formally an emergency village set up by the British colonial administration. Several of these villages were established as a way of severing links between the people and the armed wing of the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army (KLFA) during the 1950s struggle for African liberation and self-determination (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005). The British referred to the Freedom fighters as Mau Mau, terminology that has been perpetuated to this day.

After Kenya won her independence in 1963, Kamĩĩĩthũ remained a repository of cheap labor. By 1975, the community, whose population, had grown to 10,000 (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005), consisted of peasants and low-wage workers employed at "Bata, the multinational shoe-making factory, the Nile Investments Plastic Pipes and Goods factory,

the salt processing plants, the timber and maize mills, and the motor and bicycle repairing garages” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2005, pp. 34-35). There were domestic workers, and those who earned a living in retail, transportation, and agriculture. Carpenters, teachers, secretaries, and self-employed craftsmen also populated the landscape along with petty criminals, prostitutes, and the unemployed (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2005). It was the diverse inhabitants of this uniquely populated village who joined forces in 1976 to create a community education and cultural self-help organization totally controlled by the residents.

Ngũgĩ enlisted in the Kamĩrĩĩthũ effort while he was Chair, and an Associate Professor of the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi. He teamed up with Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, a university colleague who was a Freire educationist. Other academy associates included Kĩmani Gecaũ and Kabiru Kinyanjui (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2005). In partnership with the Kamĩrĩĩthũ residents, they pulled their skills together and developed a powerful pilot model program for personal and societal transformation.

The Kenyan government originally supported the idea of the Centre. Once it caught wind of its activities, however, Kamĩrĩĩthũ became the target of a harsh repressive campaign.

Two plays, which were the centerpiece of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ experiment, posed the greatest perceived danger to the Kenyan regime. The first, *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want!)* provided an unflattering look at Kenyan neocolonialism. It attracted the attention of President Jomo Kenyatta, who abruptly halted the 1977 production and hauled Ngũgĩ off to jail.

The 1982 musical theatre show, *Maitũ Njugĩra (Mother Sing For Me)*, was a historic depiction of the Mau Mau conflict. The play never made it to its intended audience at the Kenyan National Theatre. It was stopped during the popular, public rehearsal phase. Concurrently, the Centre's license was revoked, and the 2,000-seat, open-air theatre built by Kamĩĩĩthũ villagers was smashed to pieces by a truckload of army personnel. The episode captured the imagination of Ross Kidd, whose 15-page spread in *THEATERWORK Magazine* made an indelible impression on me.

My conversation with Ngũgĩ was scheduled for 10:00 a.m. By 9:00, I finished my campus tour and contemplated how I would occupy myself until Ngũgĩ turned up at his office. It was finals week, so the standard hustle bustle of student life was replaced by a quiet, serene ambiance. In stark contrast was the jovial chatter among departmental faculty and staff at the International Center For Writing And Translation and the slamming of an external door, which served as a thoroughway connecting the humanities building to the outside world. My visit was anticipated. One of Ngũgĩ's colleagues comfortably set me up in the lounge, which is where I anxiously waited for my host. My internal monologue was in full swing: How should I greet him: Hello Dr. Ngũgĩ? Hi Professor Ngũgĩ? Ngũgĩ I'm pleased to meet you? I usually do not concern myself with such matters. This get-together was secured under atypical circumstances. Philomena Essed, an associate of Ngũgĩ's and a member of my dissertation committee, intervened so I assumed that there was some appropriate academic etiquette to which I should subscribe. Protocol unbeknownst to me. I would have to wing it and hope for the best.

What questions should I ask? I had prepared for months, becoming reacquainted with Ross Kidd's article and familiarizing myself with many of Ngũgĩ's books. I prefer

an extemporaneous natural flow opposed to preset scripts, so I did not frame my agenda in advance. I would obviously inquire about his relationship with the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre. The Kamĩrĩthũ story is the focal point of Ngũgĩ's portrait.

I would probe into Freire pedagogy. Paulo's concepts were the heart and soul of the Kamĩrĩthũ literacy and cultural project. In fact, the Kamĩrĩthũ popular theatre undertaking was my first exposure to the Brazilian educator. Years later, I immersed myself in Paulo's theories, teaching, and practice, which eventually led me to Augusto. The global connections are an important part of my doctoral research.

I would not discuss Ngũgĩ's nightmarish return to Kenya after 22 years of self-enforced exile. He was on a literary tour with his wife, Njeeri, in August 2004. The excursion, underwritten by the East African Publishing House to promote the release of his latest novel *Muroogi wa Kigogo* was supposed to be his homecoming. When Ngũgĩ disembarked on his native soil, he was greeted by thousands of adoring applauding fans. "I have come back with an open mind, an open heart and open arms. I have come to touch base. I have come to learn" (BBC, 2004, para. 15). He professed that he owed his sojourn "to the collective struggle of the Kenyan people" (BBC, 2004, para. 15). Approximately two weeks into the journey, Ngũgĩ was brutally attacked and his wife was sexually assaulted. The visit came to an unceremonious halt. Ngũgĩ left Kenya, maybe for good.

I was in East Africa on Ford Foundation business one month before this tragic episode. Warned about Kenya's dangerous climate by Ford's Director of Human Rights,



I cancelled my side-trip to the Nairobi office and went straight to Zanzibar following a five-hour layover at the airport.

The Foundation's Eastern African office opened in Nairobi in 1962 to tackle problems in a politically evolving region. Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania were of primary concern, but funding for the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), had been a priority since the festival's inception in 1998. The Program Officer for the Media Production Fund at New York headquarters was unable to make the trek, so I was able to go in his place. It was the adventure of a lifetime.

For nine days, I immersed myself in this high-energy cultural event, the largest of its kind in the East African region. I watched numerous films, which celebrated the colorful heritage of the people of the Dhow Countries—Africa, the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent, and the Indian Ocean Islands (Zanzibar International Film Festival, 2004). Films were the rallying point for the event, but music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts played a major role. New to the festival was a three-day literary forum featuring writers, storytellers, publishers, and performers. They gathered to discuss issues related to the overall theme “Exploring the Currents, Feeling the Winds.” I attended the session on identity, race, and belonging. Ngũgĩ was not there, but one of his associates from Tanzania, Walter Bgoya, was the chief host of the symposium. Walter, a writer with a 32-year career in the African publishing business, was responsible for popularizing books by African radical scholars. He was a Ford Foundation grantee.

On Saturday June 26th, my second day in Zanzibar, I watched a feature film about Koigi wa Wamwere, a friend of Ngũgĩ's who served time with him in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. The 55-minute movie directed by Morton Conradi, a Norwegian

documentarian, was shown in the House of Wonders, a dark, dingy, mosquito-infested venue with limited seating capacity. The investigative footage highlighted the Kenyan activist's battle for human rights, and the repercussions associated with his outspoken views against the governments of Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi. It was my favorite ZIFF flick.

Noticing the time, my thoughts shifted from my Zanzibar expedition to my new audio recorder. As I was mentally reacquainting myself with operating instructions for the device, Ngũgĩ ambled down the hall. He welcomed me with a smile and a handshake. Unable to contain my enthusiasm I exclaimed, "I've wanted to meet you since 1982." Any semblance of collegiate formalities instantly flew out the window.

For the next four hours, Ngũgĩ and I discussed the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre, his political philosophy, his contributions as a playwright and literary writer, life in the United States, and the transformative power of art. It was an engaging, rich, and memorable conversation well worth the 26-year wait.

### **Getting Comfortable**

Ngũgĩ and I chitchatted for a spell and exchanged niceties. Then, I nervously activated the audio recorder and hoped for technological perfection.

Ngũgĩ officially opened our dialog with a tribute to his friend, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ. Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ perished in an automobile accident in Zimbabwe earlier that year. He was 57 years old:

First of all, let me begin by saying a few words about one of my co-workers, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ. Unfortunately he died earlier this year.

He was very involved in the work of Paulo Freire. So he was all about participatory education, the participatory relationship to the community. Later, I also became aware of the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal—I didn't know it very well at the time, but I was aware of the work because of Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ's

relationship to Freire. And also, ironically or more interesting, Augusto Boal and I were on the same board as contributing editors to TDR (The Drama Review)—the one that is based in New York University. I just wanted to mention that because of all of those connections. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008)

Ngũgĩ never met Augusto, but was familiar with his practice. Augusto is discussed at length in the previous portrait.

After paying homage to Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, Ngũgĩ recommended several publications. Most of the books, including *Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981), *Barrel of a Pen—Resistance to Repression in Neocolonial Kenya* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1983), and *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language In African Literature* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2005), are primary source material meant to fill in the informational gaps about the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre.

Ngũgĩ also suggested a few secondary sources. The first book, *Mother Sing For Me: People’s Theatre in Kenya* is written by Ingrid Björkman (1989). Ngũgĩ thought it was “one of the best so far on the community” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008):

Ingrid Björkman’s book is a very good one. Even though she was not there during the original production—she did very good research soon after the banning of the second play, *Mother Sing for Me*. And that play has never been published, so the only record of what went on is basically in Ingrid Björkman’s book. She interviewed Kamĩrĩĩthũ residents who attended the open rehearsals. Only community participants were involved in her study. I like it because the comments they made, they made to her directly. I was not in the scene. I was already abroad in exile. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008)

Ngũgĩ suggested one additional published document: *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Drama and the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Popular Theater Experiment*, authored by Gĩchingiri Ndĩgĩrĩrĩgĩ (2007). “I haven’t seen it so I don’t know how good or bad or whatever it is” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008). Ngũgĩ mentioned the primary and secondary sources at the

onset of our meeting so that our discussion was in accord with what he has said publicly. I had already purchased and perused all of the books endorsed by Ngũgĩ to prepare for our dialog. The aforementioned documents and many others assisted me in crafting Ngũgĩ's portrait.

Ngũgĩ and I sat comfortably in the lounge of the International Center For Writing And Translation. After our exchange of niceties, the recommendation of source materials, and a gift of civil rights songs and a book I presented to Ngũgĩ, he introduced me to Kamĩĩĩthũ, the political climate in Kenya, and the transformational role of culture to break the ice. His thoughts, which flowed easily, were a prelude of things to come:

First of all Kamĩĩĩthũ is a community, literally—A communal act. Both in terms of the actual participants, meaning the village, and also in terms of the intellectuals from the University of Nairobi, who went to work there.

One has to see Kamĩĩĩthũ in the context of the political climate of Kenya—Grassroots and political with underground assistance. One must also understand the neocolonial regimes of both Kenyatta and Moi. That is important.

So the intellectuals from the University of Nairobi, Ngũgĩ and I in particular, were informed by the political climate of the time. Progressive political organizations went underground during this period.

Now, in the context of Kamĩĩĩthũ itself, I've always been interested in the role of culture in political assistance and political development. I have been critical of most progressive organizations because they don't always see culture as an integral part of that struggle. They see it as something to use in advancing the cause. Some how they don't quite see it—the ideas of culture, the ideas of art as an integral part of what the progressive chain is trying to achieve. They see it as a means of achieving something else.

So art is some times seen as an appendage. Something that is interesting. Something that can be by passed at any given moment. Art has progressive views—we can use those progressive views for our movement.

Art needs to be an integral part of a movement and community—and progressive politics. Art has transformative power. Kamĩĩĩthũ transformed all of us. That is the background. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

### **History: Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre**

Kamĩĩĩthũ is situated about 30 kilometers northwest of Nairobi in the Limuru district (Björkman, 1989). The British literally formed the concentration village during



Kamĩrĩthũ was now no longer the name of a trough with a defiant pool of water surrounded by a few Swahili houses, but the name of a new ‘emergency village’ on one of the sloping ridges next to the path I used to follow on my way to Kamaandura. I walked through the new village asking people for my new home and passed through the present site of Kamĩrĩthũ Community Theatre. All around me, I saw women and children on rooftops with hammers and nails and poles and thatch, building the new homes because their men were in detention camps or away with the people’s guerrilla army. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, pp. 73-74)

A few years after the concentration villages in the Kamĩrĩthũ province were leveled, the British orchestrated the development of an indigenous middle class through land consolidation and the enclosure system. The villages were retained as “permanent reservoirs of cheap labor for both the ‘White’ highlands and the new African landlords” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 74). Four acres of land were reserved for a youth center. Eventually, a mud-walled barrack-type building was constructed on the site (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981). Decades later, this spot would become the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre.

Kamĩrĩthũ had not changed substantially from its emergency roots after Kenya won her independence in 1963. Geographically, it was land bound. “Poverty was still king” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 74). Its social composition was diverse. It was home to the small farmer, landless peasant, low-wage breadwinners employed at the Limuru Shoe Factory, industrial and plantation workers, and a multitude of others (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008).

After the transfer of power, the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre came under the purview of the Limuru Area Council. The Council was disbanded in 1974. A few carpentry classes were offered within that 11-year time frame, but for the

most part activity was infrequent. Once the Council was dissolved, the Centre was dormant:

It remained . . . a four class-roomed barrack with broken walls, occupying about a quarter of an acre with the other four and three-quarters making a grazing ground for a few solitary cows and goats. The village children also found a good common ground for their games of wrestling and dice-throwing. They also used it as a toilet and the stench was overpowering. There has never been any health program for this village of more than ten thousand souls. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 75)

Shortly after the demise of the Limuru Area Council, a local community development officer, Njeeri wa Aamoni, worked incessantly to revive the Centre. His objective was to turn it into a self-help organization. A committee was formed. Adolf Kamau, a peasant farmer was the chairperson. Later, Ngigi Mwaura, then a sales director with a motor vehicle company, would assume that role. Karaanja, a primary-school teacher from the village, was the secretary. Most of the committee members were peasants and workers from the village. Ngũgĩ would soon join the management team along with a few of his colleagues from the university. He was elected Chair of the Cultural Committee. Subcommittees chaired by Kamĩrĩĩthũ residents were also established to ensure input and participation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981).

One of the first actions taken by the citizens group was to change the name of the former youth structure to Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre. Concurrently, plans for an ambitious program were formulated. In order to ensure the success of the various stages of growth, the committee’s strategy was to gradually phase in each component, which included: “adult literacy; cultural development (music, dance, drama); material culture (furniture, basketry, leather-work, music crafts—all the material objects daily used by the community); and health” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 75).

The committee agreed that “human hands and brains” would build the operation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 75). The villagers did not rely on grants or charity donations to achieve their goals (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981). Decisions were made collectively and democratically, “all of us drawing on our different experiences in identifying and tackling problems” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 75).

### **The Trial of Dedan Kimathi**

Prior to joining the Kamĩĩĩĩthũ effort, in 1974, Ngũgĩ co-authored the acclaimed theatre piece, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, with his long-time friend and colleague, Micere Githae Mugo. He first met Micere during his days as an undergraduate at Makerere University in Uganda (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o & Mugo, 1977). Years later, the two playwrights were reunited at the University of Nairobi, where they served as members of the faculty (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o & Mugo, 1977). The collaboration was a prelude to Ngũgĩ’s work with the Kamĩĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre.

Dedan Kimathi was a hero to many of the peasants and workers in the Kamĩĩĩĩthũ village. He was one of the most influential leaders of the anti-colonial struggle in Kenya (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008). In December of 1952, Kimathi, a former school teacher, joined the liberation forces in Nyandarwa at the age of 32 (Maina wa Kinyatti, 2009). He quickly rose through the ranks and was elected Commander-in-Chief of the armed wing of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (Maina wa Kinyatti, 2009). On October 20, 1956, after betrayal by a former guerilla fighter, Dedan Kimathi was shot and captured by British forces (Maina wa Kinyatti, 2009). He was tried and hanged on February 18, 1957 (Anderson, 2005).



I asked Ngũgĩ about *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* during our get-together, vigilant of the script's relationship to future events. He told me the play was an intercession:

After independence there was an attempt to bury Dedan Kimathi out of the history of Kenya and out of the literature of Kenya. Micere and I reacted. It was an important intervention. The play was a successful attempt to recast Kimathi and place him in the anti-imperialist struggle. It was the beginning of our political awareness. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

In preparation to write the play, Ngũgĩ and Micere traveled to Karunaini, Dedan Kimathi's birthplace. During their visit, they elicited first-hand accounts from acquaintances of the Mau Mau loyalist. Among the group who stopped to chat were older men who knew Kimathi since childhood and a woman, who had been a student of the educator when he taught at Karunaini Independent School (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o & Mugo, 1977):

They talked of him as a dedicated teacher, the committed organizer of a theatre group he named Gichamu, as a man with a tremendous sense of humor who could keep a whole house roaring with laughter. They talked of his warm personality and his love of people. He was clearly their beloved son; their respected leader and they talked of him as still being alive. "Kimathi will never die." (p. iii)

In 1976, Ngũgĩ participated in the production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The drama was one of two Kenyan plays showcased during the second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria. *Betrayal of the City*, authored by Frances Imbuga was the other (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998). Both plays represented Ngũgĩ's country of birth, so a calculated decision was made to perform for Kenyan audiences prior to the Lagos festivities. October was strategically chosen because "it was the month in which Kenyans celebrated the heroes of anti-colonial struggles" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998, p. 43). It was also the month of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) gathering in Kenya. "There would be

many delegates from all over the world, and it would do Kenya's image a world of good were the delegates to see effective African theatre" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998, p. 43).

The Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi was the venue of choice. The Theatre was under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Services, whose management was still predominantly comprised of Europeans more than a decade after independence (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998).

A proposal was drafted and submitted to secure the date and facility. The two groups associated with the Kenyan productions, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* and *Betrayal of the City*, combined their efforts. They named themselves Kenya Festac 77 Drama Group. The document given to the National Theatre administration presented a strong case:

We drew their attention to the symbolism of the event: the dignity of Kenya before the world; the fact that Kenyans need to see the play before Lagos; and surely apart from anything else Kenyans needed to remind themselves that their independence was won through sweat and blood and the deaths of many. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998 p. 43)

The group's proposal was rejected. "There was no room in the inn!" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998, p. 43). The National Theatre had committed to a French Ballet (*Jeune Ballet de France*) and a British satire (*A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*) (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998).

Ngũgĩ was shocked. "Shouldn't the Kenya National Theatre and Cultural Centre be catering primarily to national interests? In planning for cultural activities over the year, did the management not take into account the Kenyan image inside and outside the country?" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998, p. 44)

The press cried foul. The National Theatre caved, Ngũgĩ suspected arbitration on the part of an embarrassed presidential ministry who could not face the humiliating smears on the global stage. Kenya Festac 77 Drama Group was granted eight days between October 20th and 30th to utilize the space, four days per production (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998).

African audiences went wild. Every performance was sold out. Spectators came on foot, in private cars and hired vehicles (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998).

Dedan Kimathi's wife and children were among the invited distinguished guests. After the show, they shared stories with the cast (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998). *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* was a huge success. One newspaper critiquing the theatre piece said: "Never before has Kenya's freedom struggle been told with such force and conviction" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998, p. 50).

Ngũgĩ was deeply affected by *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* experience. It was a political awakening for him. It influenced his future work with Kamĩĩĩthũ. We talked about it in December of 2008:

Our work on that theatre piece had an impact on our ideas and our relationship with Kamĩĩĩthũ. It was also connected with what was happening at that time in Kenya—the neocolonial moment or the beginning of that moment.

The leadership wanted us to forget about Mau Mau. They think it was a bad thing. It was an embarrassment.

We said—oh, they are burying ordinary people.

With nothing more than their faith, and their ideas, how could the people organize such a big scare? Fighting in the mountains, sacrificing all of these things. It is amazing how they could do this. How they said, we can challenge this. And at the time, they didn't have any contemporary history. No other movements to look towards because they came out later. They were surrounded by colonialism. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

### **Nairobi Traveling Theatre Group**

In 1976, the University of Nairobi Free Traveling Theatre staged excerpts from *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* in Kamĩrĩĩthũ. The drama troupe performed on the grass on the site of the former youth centre. It was the first time a major arts oriented event took place in the village. “Otherwise, the centre was dead to real culture” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 75).

The University of Nairobi Free Traveling Theatre was housed in the Department of Literature. Even though Ngũgĩ was a member of the faculty, and portions of Ngũgĩ’s and Micere’s script were incorporated into the group’s presentations, he was not directly involved. The arts ensemble was instrumental, however, in shaping Ngũgĩ’s thinking about his future role with the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre:

Some of us came to the conclusion that while the traveling troupe was important, theatre could never take root in Kenya unless it was based in the villages and towns with the people themselves writing their own scripts and performing them themselves. It is this kind of idea that was behind the setting up of Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre.

Members of the community had been present at some performances of the *University of Nairobi Free Traveling Theatre*. And they were the ones who asked for a play to perform. (Sander & Lindfors, 2006, pp. 145-146)

### **Ngũgĩ Joins Kamĩrĩĩthũ**

Early one Sunday morning in 1976, a woman from Kamĩrĩĩthũ showed up at Ngũgĩ’s door. Ngũgĩ was Chair of the Literature Department at the University of Nairobi at the time, so Sunday was the best day to catch him at home (Cohen-Cruz, 1998).

The woman persisted. “She came the second, the third, and the fourth consecutive Sundays with the same request couched in virtually the same words” (Cohen-Cruz, 1998, p. 238):

“We hear you have a lot of education and that you write books. Why don’t you and others of your kind give some of that education to the village? We don’t want the whole amount; just a little of it, and a little of your time.”

There was a youth centre in the village, she went on, and it was falling apart. It needed group effort to bring it back to life. Would I be willing to help? That was how I came to join others in what later was to be called Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre. (p. 238)

Ngũgĩ joined the Kamĩrĩthũ effort and was elected chairman of the cultural committee (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981). His associate from the college, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, presided over the education task force (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981). Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ was a Freire educationist. His specialty was adult literacy.

I questioned Ngũgĩ about his and Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ’s role in reconstructing the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Centre during our dialogue. Tragically, his dear friend died in an automobile accident on May 3, 2008 in Zimbabwe at the age of 57. When I visited with Ngũgĩ, less than a year had passed since the fatal crash. Ngũgĩ was still mourning the loss. He sadly recounted the responsibilities he shared with his confidant:

Initially, our role was to go there and create this centre, but when we got there, the centre created us. So our role was simply to be there.

Everyone brought their experiences to the table, including peasants, factory and farm workers, teachers and university professors. For instance, we had knowledge about the production of theatre and writing a script. Ngũgĩ was an educationist who was well versed in the teachings of Paulo Freire. The villagers had expertise about the factory and the farm. So the idea of Kamĩrĩthũ was to bring whatever experience you had. It was not about quantity. The quality was what mattered. Everyone was an authority on something. All of that knowledge was equal. Ngũgĩ and I said, whoever you are, you have important experience. Let’s bring this experience together. Let’s not rank it.

We relied on small group deliberations to accomplish our goals. When people were discussing this and that—there were disagreements and tensions. That was all part of it. In the end, what we achieved was a better sense of self-knowledge and an understanding of the process. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008)

### **Kamĩrĩthũ's Popular Education Program**

Once the Kamĩrĩthi management team was in place, a series of planning meetings were held to formalize the agenda and organizational structure. A subcommittee, consisting predominantly of peasants and workers, was assembled for each phase of the project. There was no hierarchy. Each unit worked together.

After a series of conversations, everyone agreed to commence with literacy education. It was a Freire-based program, with Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ at the helm.

Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ was proficient in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* theory and method of Paulo Freire. Paulo blazed a trail throughout Africa, Asia, Australia, and America, while consulting to the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches, beginning in 1970 (McLaren, 2000). It was not unusual for scholars and practitioners from all corners of the globe to initiate and implement enterprises based on his teachings.

Paulo spent significant time in Africa, assisting political territories like Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau, in the development of adult literacy programs. After winning their independence from colonial domination, Paulo helped “to systematize their plans in education” (McLaren, 2000, p. 146). His mission “focused on the re-Africanization of their countries” (McLaren, 2000, p. 145). Ngũgĩ and Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ envisioned a similar outcome for Kenya. Kamĩrĩthũ was the threshold.

Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ and the education sub-committee met weekly to hash out the particulars of the program. After numerous discussions, there was consensus on how to move forward. Literacy content would consist of the prevailing needs and problems of the community. The following issues were identified:

Lack of land, unemployment, low wages, and inhuman working conditions in factories, lack of water, lack of firewood, lack of sufficient food for the family,

lack of good housing, lack of hospitals and health facilities, poor transport and means of communication, problems of marketing agricultural produce, inflation, and lack of meaningful cultural alternatives. (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1979, p. 58)

Other questions, impacting the cultivation of curriculum composition arose during the convocations: “Why is there poverty? What are its causes? How do we eradicate it?” (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1979, p. 58). These and other community concerns were examined in respect to three historical phases in Kamĩrĩĩthũ: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1979, p. 58). This desire to democratize knowledge through adult literacy education was the beginning of a groundbreaking undertaking in Kenya.

Up to this moment, most traditional adult literacy proficiency projects in post independent Kenya were funded, designed, and executed by foreign professional outsiders:

The existing pattern was to invite “instant” experts from imperialist countries (usually the United States, West Germany, Britain, or UNESCO) to write the literacy primers. They cited their many years of experience in Third World countries: some claimed 10 years, others 30 years. What they did not tell us was the *nature* of their achievements in the countries of their sojourn. Often these experts had no understanding of the cultural background of the people for whom they were writing the primers: in most cases they did not even know the languages of the people. The argument was immaterial that we needed these consultants because funds came from foreign donor agencies. These agencies represented the interests of their respective member governments. (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1979, p. 55)

Kamĩrĩĩthũ, on the other hand, championed a course of study that was pertinent to the villagers. Community dwellers most affected by illiteracy engaged in the planning and administration of the experiment. “By doing so, the peasants and workers identified with the program and claimed responsibility for its development and expansion. Through

this participation they made their concerns, needs and aspirations the foundation stone” (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1979, p. 56) of literacy education.

The collaborative approach exercised in the development of instructional materials was transferred to the classroom. Through the exchange of ideas and collective engagement, literacy program participants learned by building upon their current knowledge and accumulated life experience. Kikuyu, the language most familiar to the Kamĩrĩĩthũ peasants and workers, was the nucleus of the curriculum design:

At Kamĩrĩĩthũ, we took the view that the language spoken by peasants and workers was primary and must be the basis of any successful literacy and community development program. To use a language other than the one spoken by the people is to exclude such a people from participation in their own development. (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1979, p. 59)

In July of 1976, the first cohort of literacy education participants enrolled in the program. More than 100 eager Kamĩrĩĩthũ peasants and workers originally signed up for the 55 available slots. Due to limited space and desks, everyone was not accommodated during the first round. In addition, there were literacy teacher recruitment complications. Most were novices in the popular education approach. “For the few that we eventually got, I had to hold a two-week workshop on the relevant approach to literacy” (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1979, p. 59). After all was said and done, one literacy class for men and three classes for women were organized during the initial stage of the project. The literacy success rate was astounding:

After six months of very enjoyable discussions, 45 participants were able to read and write. In fact, it was not really after six months, but after 224 hours spread over six months. Another 224 hours again spread over the next six months saw the participants brushing up their literacy skills. In the middle of July 1977, they were writing letters to me and posting them at Limuru post office to prove to themselves that they could now communicate in the written symbols. Others were writing stories or brief sketches of their lives. On the whole, we can say,



that with a relevant content adults can become literate within three months or less. (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1980, p. 59)

The enthusiasm for learning continued in spite of aforementioned difficulties and hardships associated with time and work constraints. With the exception of a shift in employment or a change of address, there were no deserters (Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, 1979). The next step was the implementation of the cultural wing of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ experiment. Ngũgĩ's committee swung into action.

### **The Kamĩrĩĩthũ Cultural Process**

Theatre was the centerpiece of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ cultural wing. It provided consequential resources and activities for the new literates from the adult reading and writing instructional program. Drama also created a forum for community participation and discourse on a range of social issues afflicting the villagers.

Even though the majority of Kamĩrĩĩthũ inhabitants had never partaken in the art of devising and actualizing theatre, it was not a new phenomenon. Some of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ natives attended the complete production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* at the Kenya National Theatre in October of 1976. Others witnessed plays performed by the University of Nairobi Free Traveling Theatre. A few of the locals joined forces or observed concerts and skits by a group of workers at St. Lwanga Catholic Church in Kamĩrĩĩthũ (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981). With the exposure to artistic events by members of the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre team, it was natural to want comparable opportunities for the neighborhood. Ngũgĩ, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, the workers, and peasants of Kamĩrĩĩthũ conjointly resolved to produce their own plays. These plays would satisfy three objectives:

They would serve as entertainment and collective self-education; they would form follow-up material for the new literates; and they would raise money to finance the other programs. The revenue would help meet the day-to-day expenses like chalk, writing materials, and electricity bills. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 76)

Ngũgĩ and I discussed the Kamĩrĩthũ theatre concept during our rendezvous at the University of California, Irvine. According to Ngũgĩ, literacy education and culture were designed to be unified components from the onset of the program:

The idea of Kamĩrĩthũ was this whole notion of integrated development—that one thing would lead to another. We thought literacy. How do you do this literacy? Through theatre and cultural activities.

A person could enter Kamĩrĩthũ for literacy. He/she could end up participating in cultural activities. Or, a person could enter theatre, and through theatre he/she could learn to read and write.

Each activity had two aspects. It was an enjoyable or useful activity in its own right. The activity also fused with another segment of the program. When someone came to Kamĩrĩthũ for literacy, he/she was exposed to literacy education and the theatre. The reverse was true for individuals interested in theatre.

The Kamĩrĩthũ villagers were also involved in the production of musical instruments and costume design. Each activity had its own particularity and rose organically based on need. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

### **Kamĩrĩthũ and the Theatre for Development Movement**

It is important to put the evolution of the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre in the context of the growing Theatre for Development crusade in Africa. Theatre for Development is a concept first conceived in Botswana in 1973. A group of adult educators from the local academy of higher learning launched an experiment that connected Freirian concepts to a personal and societal transformation project using theatre as the catalyst. Ross Kidd, who introduced me to Ngũgĩ through his article published in *Theatre Work Magazine*, was among the early pioneers of this work. At the time, he was employed as a professor at the University of Botswana. Martin Byram, one

of Ross Kidd's colleagues, and Jeppe Kelepile, a Botswana community counselor were project architects as well (Byam, 1999).

The Theatre for Development idea sprung from a village colloquium, held in partnership with the college. Drama was used to accentuate problems afflicting the Botswana community. Previous approaches to generate civic engagement had failed, so Ross Kidd and the others opted to merge Paulo Freire's methods with popular culture just as Augusto had done in Latin America. Even though Theatre of the Oppressed and the Theatre for Development Movement used Paulo Freire's (1992) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as the starting point, at the time there was no communication between the practitioners. The bold Botswana initiative was called Laedza Batanani.

Other universities throughout Africa introduced Theatre for Development projects with varying degrees of effectiveness in the early 1970s. Like Laedza Batanani, the programs' success was limited due to their failure to fully include community members in the decision-making process. These projects also attended to local issues without establishing links to a colonial past, leaving no real possibility for the development of critical thought (Byam, 1999).

Laedza Batanani and the other trail-blazing undertakings deserve credit, however, for setting the Theatre for Development Movement in Africa in motion and for being the first programs of their kind in the region to attempt to implement Freire-based participatory platforms for problem-solving. Another highlight was the integration of traditional indigenous art forms into educational practices.

Ross Kidd, one of the Laedza Batanani project engineers, acknowledged shortcomings in these early commissions and recommended that future Freire-based

popular theatre strategies “dispense with taking plays to the people. The leaders should work to create plays with the community” (as cited in Byam, 1999, p. 45). The Kenya Kamĩĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre did just that. The Kamĩĩĩĩthũ venture was the first program to break ground by producing plays from the ground up, which was a radical departure from the initial programs sponsored by government officials or institutions for higher education. Ross Kidd praised the Kamĩĩĩĩthũ Theatre for Development model in his 1982 exposé, nine years after he and his colleagues carried out the Laedza Batanani in Botswana:

Popular theatre in the Third World often claims to be a tool of protest and struggle and a means of social transformation but rarely does it challenge the status quo in a significant way. Too often it becomes as marginalized as the peasants and workers it represents, with little real impact on the society as a whole.

One significant exception has been the popular theatre work of the Kamĩĩĩĩthũ Community Educational and Cultural Centre, a peasant and worker-controlled organization in rural Kenya. (Kidd, 1982, pp. 47-48)

It’s a concrete example of what a people’s national theatre should be—accessible to and controlled by the masses, performed in their languages, adopting their forms of cultural expression and addressing their issues. (Kidd, 1982, p. 59)

I asked Ngũgĩ about his connection to Paulo Freire and the Theatre for

Development Movement during our December, 2008 conversation. He had not read

Paulo’s books before joining the Kamĩĩĩĩthũ Community Management Team:

Ngũgĩ wa Mĩĩĩĩ was very aware of the participatory methods and practices of Paulo Freire. I personally had not read Freire at the time. I became aware later. I was more interested in this whole notion that you start from where people are. An example: in Kamĩĩĩĩthũ we made certain practical rules like—every participant had to come from the village, or had to be connected to the village in some way. Ngũgĩ and I lived in Nairobi, but we came from that village. We would find a village connection or rationale for project participation. We had other people who came from other villages who were not physically connected to Kamĩĩĩĩthũ so we found a way for them to participate. We also had people who came from other villages to observe. We had them do something for as long as they were in Kamĩĩĩĩthũ.

The idea of doing that was to show people that what ever they had done, it was them who had done it. Not some external force imposing their will. The process was transparent. It was demystified. Usually this isn't the case.

Even auditions and rehearsals were open. The Kamĩrĩthũ peasants, workers and interested parties saw theatre unfold at every stage. It wasn't about a perfect finished product. The process was most important. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

### **Script Development: Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)**

Ngũgĩ and Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩ were delegated the task of preparing a script following several meetings with the literacy and cultural committees where content of the forthcoming play was deliberated. Once the preliminary version of the draft was complete, the co-authors shared it with the Kamĩrĩthũ Centre participants, who collectively finalized the process. The villagers scrutinized the content to ensure it accurately reflected their lives and history. They also expanded upon the theme and amended passages until it was performed.

The consensually agreed upon title of the play was *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)*. The finished text “reflected the people’s experiences, concerns, aspirations, grievances, problems, and contradictions in the village, using the words and expressions of the people” (Kidd, 1982, p. 52). It was written in Gikuyu, the vernacular of the Kamĩrĩthũ occupants. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* literally belonged to the community.

For Ngũgĩ, the question of language was “an epistemological break” (Cohen-Cruz, 1998, p. 241) from his past, notably in the field of theatre. Ngũgĩ spent ample time discussing this topic during our get-together:

Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩ and I were clear—you can only work in the language of the community where you are. English, which Kamĩrĩthũ villagers could not speak, was not used.

We conducted ourselves in Gikuyu, the indigenous language of Kamĩrĩthũ, because we couldn't function any other way. Using the language of the people meant the people owned their language. There was no language barrier.

It was a big eye opener for me. I realized that my entire education in English had not prepared me to put ideas in the language of the people, my mother tongue.

My Kamĩĩĩthũ journey was a turning point. It had a lasting effect. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008)

Another major accomplishment by the Kamĩĩĩthũ vanguard was the construction of a sizable open-air theatre. It was built on four acres of vacant land originally reserved for a Youth Centre. Prior to the erection of the theatre, there was a dilapidated mud-walled structure with four rooms that housed the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre adult literacy program. The rest of the space was occupied by grass.

The idea to build the theatre came from the Kamĩĩĩthũ residents. Opposed to raising funds from outside sources, the local populace conceptualized the design and forged ahead contributing labor and materials. “Under a production team led by Gatoonye wa Mugoiyo, an office messenger, they experimented with matchsticks on the ground before building a small working model on which they based the final complex” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 77). The end result was awe-inspiring:

The stage was a semi-circular platform backed by a semi-circular bamboo wall, behind which was a small three-roomed house which served as the store and changing room. The stage and the auditorium—fixed long wooden seats arranged like stairs—were almost an extension of each other. It had no roof. It was an open-air theatre with large empty spaces surrounding the stage and the auditorium. The flow of actors and people between the auditorium and the stage, and around the stage and the entire auditorium was uninhibited. Behind the auditorium were some tall eucalyptus trees. Birds could watch performances from these or from the top of the outer bamboo fence. (Cohen-Cruz, 1998, p. 240)

The finished 2000-seat facility was enthusiastically likened to the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi. It was celebrated for being the people’s theatre—a performance arena assembled by the people, available to the people, tackling issues relevant to the people, and communicating with the people in their native tongue. For Ngũgĩ, who was



away from that—but every verse was conferring to an external person. It became clear to Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ and I when the villagers sang about us. They treated Ngũgĩ and I as heroes. We said—don't sing about us. *We* did this.

So Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ and I sang along with the Kamĩrĩĩthũ residents about the heroes of the resistance. Then we said, okay, Dedan Kimathi is very important. Who is Kimathi-like in the community? Who reminds you of Kimathi? They said, oh. Yeah. This guy makes big guns. He works in a factory. These are just a few of my recollections regarding the open audition and rehearsal process at Kamĩrĩĩthũ. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

Rehearsals for *Ngaahika Ndeenda* were a popular community activity. It was not unusual for hundreds to gather at the designated performance practice spot to partake in the acting, singing, dancing, discussions, and the simple joy of watching the unfolding of the theatrical happening.

As time progressed, additional features were added to the play and more villagers joined the production team:

A women's choir was formed, led by the 50-year-old woman who had composed the opera sequence in the play. A group of young unemployed men and a few workers from the Bata Shoe Company, who had already shown an interest in instrumental music, were encouraged to form an orchestra-to provide songs for the play and music for the interval. Another group took on the job of preparing costumes and props. A further group was formed to make food for the participants. Each of these groups worked separately on their own aspect of the production and reported regularly to the Executive Committee. Sessions were also held in which the different parts of the performance were integrated. In the end about two hundred villagers took part in the production. (Kidd, 1982, p. 53)

Kamĩrĩĩthũ was transformed by the entire affair. Even the drunken ruckuses subsided after rules forbidding alcohol consumption at the Centre were instituted. This was a major victory for a village recognized for inebriated disorderly conduct. Not a single disruption or altercation connected to intoxication occurred during the six months of public rehearsals and performances (Kidd, 1982).

*Ngaahika Ndeenda* officially opened to a paying audience on October 2, 1977.

The weekend afternoon performances were an instantaneous hit. Some people journeyed



great distances to see the show. They chartered buses, hailed taxis, and traveled on foot to take part in the theatrical jubilee. At times, 2,000 audience members were in attendance during the seven-week run. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was part of the region's fabric:

The performances reflected an ever-increasing audience. The people who came to see the play were growing day in and day out. And anybody who had seen the play before would still come to see the play a second, third, fourth, or fifth time. I know some who were with the play right through all the rehearsals and right through all the performances. They knew the whole play by heart, and they knew what the actor was going to say. If an actor missed his lines, they would correct him. (Sander & Lindfors, 2006, p. 146)

On November 16, 1977, the Kenya government banned all future performances of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. The authorities simply revoked the license for public gatherings at the Centre:

Kamĩĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre was legally registered as a self-help project with the Department of Community Development of the Ministry of Housing and Social Services. In its official submissions to the UNESCO general assembly in Nairobi in 1976, the KANU government had made a very strong case for integrated rural development with culture, including rural village theatres as a central core, and this had been accepted. Indeed a senior cabinet minister in the KANU government was then the current president of UNESCO.

Now a popular people's play had been refused further performances by a government, which had hosted UNESCO and endorsed its cultural policies, and no satisfactory reason was forthcoming! (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 80)

Approximately six weeks after the ban, Ngũgĩ was arrested. He spent the next year in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison.

## **Arrest**

Shortly before midnight, on December 31, 1977, two Land Rovers drove into Ngũgĩ's yard. The vehicles were loaded with policemen equipped with machine guns, rifles, and revolvers. Another car with flashing red and blue lights waited at the main gate. Other transporters containing local officials and informers were also on hand.

“These latter remained lurking in the shadows for fear that, even at such a dark hour, the peasants around might recognize them and denounce them to the people” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 15).

Ngũgĩ answered the door fully clad. He had just returned from a sojourn with friends in Nairobi where he had a premonition. “I felt as if I had been expecting the scene all along!” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 17)

After saying a rather elaborate farewell to my lawyer friend, Ndeere wa Njugi—a strange thing this farewell since he was only going to Langata and I to Limuru: and, after firmly and repeatedly refusing a beer from another friend, Solomon Kagwe—again a strange thing because he worked in Morocco and I had not seen him for many years: I had driven from the Impala Hotel, Nairobi, to Limuru at a snail’s pace, literally not more than 50 kilometers an hour the whole way. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 17)

Ngũgĩ’s suspicions continued to haunt him at his residence. Instead of slipping into his nightwear and leaping into bed, he settled on top of the covers, his eyes fixated on the ceiling. His thoughts turned to the banning of *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. Then came the pounding at the door. When he saw the uniformed police officers, he slid into his shoes and greeted his early morning guests (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981).

The armed visitors barged into Ngũgĩ’s house. They silently rummaged through his study searching for evidence that would incriminate him:

Their grim determined faces would only light up a little whenever they pounced on any book or pamphlet bearing the names of Marx, Engels, or Lenin. I tried to lift the weight of silence in the room by remarking that if Lenin, Marx, or Engels were all they were after, I could save them much time and energy by showing them the shelves where these dangerous three were hiding. The leader of the book-raiding squad was not amused. He growled at me, and I quickly and promptly took his “advice” to keep quiet and let them do their work. But I kept on darting my eyes from one raider to the other in case they did something illegal. I soon realized the futility of my vigilance since I was alone and they were all over the study. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 15)

Besides confiscating books by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the investigative team seized publications by the Korean poet and playwright Kim Chi Ha, titles containing the words “scientific socialism,” and 26 copies of the subversive play *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981).

Ngũgĩ could not resist musing over the spectacle. Here was a “police squadron armed to the teeth with guns to abduct a writer whose only acts of violent resistance were safely between the hard and soft covers of literary imaginative reflections” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 16).

Following the raid, Ngũgĩ was transported to Kiambu police headquarters. Upon arrival he was thrust into a vacant room with exposed walls. A member of the surveillance team stood watch. He chatted with Ngũgĩ. “How come that as soon as we knocked at the door, you were already up and fully dressed?” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, pp. 17-19). Before Ngũgĩ had an opportunity to respond, the Superintendent of Kiambu Police Station rushed in to deliver the official proclamation. “I am under instructions to arrest you and place you in detention. Have you anything to say?” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 17). “Do your duty!” was Ngũgĩ’s response (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 17).

From the Kiambu precinct, Ngũgĩ was transferred to the Kilimani Police House in Nairobi where he was served with a detention decree. His final destination would be Kamiti Maximum Security Prison:

I was suddenly grabbed by some police and roughly put in chains. I was then pushed from behind into the back seat of a blue car with blinds between two hefty policemen armed with a machine-gun and a rifle while a third one, equally well equipped, sat in the front seat beside the driver. I was driven through the heavy traffic in Nairobi streets—to the gates of the infamous Kamiti Maximum Security Prison.

The driver almost smashed his way through the heavy closed outer doors of the giant prison. But realizing his mistake, he quickly backed into a small

bush, under a tree, car-blinds still drawn, so that none of the people walking about could see who or what was inside the black maria. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 18)

The penitentiary gates swung open. Ngũgĩ was ushered inside.

### **Detained**

Ngũgĩ was escorted to cell 16. Once inside, the warder locked the door and stuffed a piece of blanket into the opening to prevent Ngũgĩ from looking out and others from gazing in. A spine-chilling hush permeated the grounds. Ngũgĩ wondered if he was the solitary inhabitant in this dreadful place:

Then, unexpectedly irrepressible screams broke the stillness:

“It’s Ngũgĩ, it’s wa Thiong’o,” in Gikuyu and Kiswahili. “Wiyuumiririe! Jikaze! Gutiri wa Iregi utuire!” continue the shouts. It’s the other detainees. They had been locked in their cells to free the warders to impose a state-of-emergency type curfew in and around the prison. But the detainees had been peering through the iron-barred openings on the doors of their cells and some had witnessed my coming. It was Koigi wa Wamwere who, on recognizing me, started the shouts of regretful welcome. But this I don’t now know and the voices, suddenly coming from the erstwhile silent walls, sound eerie. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 117)

A bit later, the other inmates were permitted to roam the immediate area in groups. They congregated in front of Ngũgĩ’s cell, removing the scrap of material from the hole in the doorway. An inquiry was conducted regarding political activity outside the prison compound. A recurrent question about the Kamĩrĩĩthũ play kept emerging:

“Tell us about *Ngaahika Ndeenda*. Is it true that it was acted by peasants and workers?”

I am secretly thrilled by the knowledge that the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community effort had broken through the walls of Kamiti prison to give hope to political detainees, who before had never heard of Kamĩrĩĩthũ. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 118)

Ngũgĩ was deeply moved by the gracious reception he received from the other detainees. Long-time activist Wasonga Sijeyo donated a comb and sandals. Martin Shikuku, a champion in the struggle for Kenyan independence, contributed a handcrafted

calendar. Author and human rights advocate, Koigi wa Wamwere, supplied Ngũgĩ with a biro pen. Pencils and writing paper were also offered as gestures of kindness and solidarity. Everyone furnished Ngũgĩ with something (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981).

For the next year, Ngũgĩ's address was cell 16 in the Kamiti Maximum Security Prison. The penitentiary was one of the biggest incarceration facilities in post-colonial Africa. It was adjacent to Kenyatta University College and in close proximity to three municipalities: Nairobi, Ruiru, and Kiambu (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981).

Eighteen political detainees shared the detention block with Ngũgĩ. They were isolated from the rest of the jailed residents. Only a select group of trained guards and commanding officers had access to Ngũgĩ and the others, perceived by the authorities as an incendiary element of society (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981).

Loneliness and despair was pervasive. In spite of the camaraderie amongst his fellow inmates, Ngũgĩ wrestled with hopelessness throughout his stay in the institution:

In the silence of one's cell, one had to fight, all alone, against a thousand demons struggling for the mastery of one's soul. Their dominant method was to show continually that there was only one way of looking at things, that there was only one history and culture, which moved in circles, so that the beginning and the end were the same. You moved only to find yourself on the same spot. What was the point of making the effort? We were all the children of Sisyphus fated forever to roll the heavy stone of tyranny up the steep hill of struggle, only to see it roll back to the bottom. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 63-64)

There was an inordinate amount of time for introspection. Kamĩrĩĩthũ was a common theme. Ngũgĩ was convinced President Jomo Kenyatta and his henchmen were driven by fear:

They were mortally scared of peasants and workers who showed no fear in their eyes; workers and peasants who showed no submissiveness in their bearing; workers and peasants who proclaimed their history with unashamed pride and who denounced its betrayal with courage. Yes, like their colonial counterparts, they had become mortally afraid of the slightest manifestation of a people's

culture of patriotic heroism and outspoken indomitable courage. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 71)

During my interview with Ngũgĩ at the University of California, Irvine, I asked him about the government's provocation for his apprehension and incarceration. Prior to his association with Kamĩrĩĩthũ, Ngũgĩ's (1978) controversial novel, *Petals of Blood*, stocked bookstore shelves around the world. I wondered whether he was targeted because of the book or the play:

I think the theatre was a turning point. The play stopped. Three months later, in December, I'm arrested and put in prison. So I connect them all with the play, rather than with the novel, *Petals of Blood*. Although I think that may have created a climate for being sought out. Being the one they were going to use to set an example. They use one person to strike terror into everybody else. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

### **Amnesty International's Prisoner of Conscience**

Following his arrest, Ngũgĩ was designated a *prisoner of conscience* by Amnesty International. The organization first coined the term after Peter Benenson, a London attorney, published an article titled "The Forgotten Prisoner" in the *Observer* on May 28, 1961. In the exposé, Benenson expressed outrage over the detention of two Portuguese students who lifted their wine glasses in a toast to freedom. Benenson's indignation was echoed around the world after his editorial was reprinted in other newspapers. A campaign appealing for the release of political prisoners was launched and Amnesty International was born.

By the time Ngũgĩ was adopted as one of Amnesty's prisoners of conscience, the organization had garnered global acclaim. In 1977, it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and, in 1978, it won the United Nations Human Rights Prize for "outstanding

contributions in the field” (Amnesty International, n.d., p. history). When the group rallies around individual detainees, government officials pay attention.

Amnesty’s first intervention on Ngũgĩ’s behalf took place on January 4, 1978. A cable was transmitted to Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta calling for Ngũgĩ to “be tried in open court or freed, if there was no charge against him” (Amnesty International, 1978a).

Nine days later, after learning of Ngũgĩ’s detention, the human rights group wired President Kenyatta again along with Attorney General Charles Njonjo, objecting to this use of administrative incarceration. Amnesty also commenced a universal crusade for Ngũgĩ’s discharge. A statement highlighting Ngũgĩ’s status was dispatched on January 30, 1978, coupled with contact information for a letter-writing campaign. It reads in part:

The internationally known novelist and professor of literature, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, was arrested at his home in Limuru on 31 December 1977. His house was searched and books were seized. After he had been held incommunicado for nearly two weeks, it was officially announced by the Kenya government on 12 January 1978 that he had been detained six days earlier under Kenya’s Preservation of Public Security Act. Under this act, detained persons may be held indefinitely without trial, and they have no opportunity to make a legal defense in court against any charge made against them. Detainees have no right of habeas corpus and no court may challenge a detention order. As far as is known, detainees rarely receive family visits, they are denied correspondence and writing materials, and they have access to only a few books. Detainees’ whereabouts are not made public. Those detained since independence have been held for periods ranging between two and nine years. Other detainees include parliamentarians, but Professor Ngũgĩ is the first writer or academic to be detained in Kenya.

Professor Ngũgĩ was presumably detained because of the opinions expressed in fictional form in his latest writing *Petals of Blood*, a novel published in 1977 (and launched by the Kenyan Minister of Economic Affairs), and some Kikuyu-language plays, one of which had its performance license suddenly withdrawn recently. While he is not a Marxist, his strongly critical comments on inequality and corruption in Kenya may have led to his arrest, even though these opinions are shared by many others in Kenya. (Amnesty International, 1978a)

Ngũgĩ was not Amnesty's first prisoner of conscience from Kenya. Prior to his confinement, former Vice President Oginga Odinga and four parliamentarians were recipients of the group's effort. Attorney General Njonjo, who was not a fan of the human rights organization, viciously attacked Amnesty International (AI) in the press, claiming it was "meddling in Kenya's internal affairs" (Amnesty International, 1978a). He defined AI as a bunch of "frustrated old women and young people" (Amnesty International, 1978a).

### **Jomo Kenyatta is Dead**

Jomo Kenyatta, the first Prime Minister and President of Kenya, died on August 22, 1978. News of his passing circulated inside Kamiti Prison. Freedom was in the air. Ngũgĩ and the other detainees were "gripped with feverish excitement and expectations" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 163-165). With Kenyatta out of the way, exculpation was no longer a dream. It was a possibility.

Somehow, whispers of a Friday, September 22nd discharge caught hold and the political prisoners' prepared to vacate the nightmarish maximum-security compound. They traded addresses and heartfelt assurances for better days. Pledges for future meetings were discussed. Some inmates even arranged for new sandals, which they would ferry home as a recollection of the past (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981). Rumor had become absolute:

Every reasonable argument pointed to our release on that day. Some detainees sat down, made a list of all cabinet members and tried to determine their voting pattern in terms of *yes* or *no*, and naturally the ministers in favor of our release outnumbered those against us. A detainee who cautioned realism in our expectations was shouted down and denounced as an enemy of the people. It was a kind of collective madness, I remember, and when at about 10 o' clock there was a vigorous banging on the outer door and a prison officer dashed in



waving his staff of office, I said to myself at long last: God, freedom. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 163-165)

Ngũgĩ's optimism was quickly replaced by despair. Koigi wa Wamwere hastily pulled him aside and muttered "Go and clean your room at once! There is going to be a search!" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 163-165). In an instant, Ngũgĩ and the others were ushered back to their cells:

My cell was the first to be raided: it was difficult to know what they were looking for. Razorblades, nails, weapons of violence? Letters, diaries, secret communications with the outside world? Suddenly the sergeant saw piles of toilet paper and pounced on them. Then, as if delirious with joy and triumph, he turned to the presiding officer and announced: "Here is the book, sir, on toilet-paper." "Seize it!" the officer said, turning to me.

My novel written with blood, sweat, and toil on toilet-paper had been seized! Only two chapters hidden in between the empty back pages of a Bible Koigi had lent me remained. The Bible lay there on the desk as if mocking me: "If you had trusted all the Wariinga novel to me, you would have saved it all." (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 163-165)

The manuscript Ngũgĩ was composing in prison provided a sense of purpose. Hope for a better tomorrow. Toilet paper was his medium, a customary tool for incarcerated artists who choose to invent some semblance of normalcy while subjected to the slammer. Toilet paper is also a secret weapon used to defy prison authorities aiming to punish and break the artist's spirit. Ngũgĩ was not the first jailed novelist to persevere in this way and he would not be the last. The trick is not to be discovered. The search caught Ngũgĩ off-guard. The apprehension of his forthcoming book was devastating:

It is only a writer who can possibly understand the pain of losing a manuscript, any manuscript. With this novel I had struggled with language, with images, with prison, with bitter memories, with moments of despair, with all the mentally and emotionally adverse circumstances in which one is forced to operate while in custody—and now it had gone. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 163-165)

Three weeks after the shakedown, Ngũgĩ's original text was returned intact. A new penitentiary official, that scrutinized the draft, paid Ngũgĩ a visit.

I see nothing wrong with it. . . . You write in very difficult Kikuyu! . . . But you should never have written it on toilet-paper. . . . I'll ask the chief warder to supply you with scrap paper—there is plenty of it in my office—so you can transfer the whole thing from toilet-paper. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 163-165)

September 22nd came and went. Jomo Kenyatta's death did not bring about immediate emancipation. Ngũgĩ and the others had to wait a bit longer.

During my interview with Ngũgĩ, I asked him how he felt about the former president. Ngũgĩ met Jomo Kenyatta in 1964 at an event he covered for the *Daily Nation*. He was working as a journalist at the time. It was May Day. A group of peasants attending the gathering donated relief money to victims of recent flooding. Odinga Odinga, Kenya's first vice president after independence was also on hand to witness the occasion. Ngũgĩ still retains a photograph of himself, Kenyatta, and Odinga taken by a photographer on assignment with Ngũgĩ. "I am standing, with a notebook and pen in hand, probably putting a question to the big two, the peasants crowding around. It was a brief, a very brief first and last encounter" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 159). A lot had changed since that chance meeting in 1964 and Kenyatta was responsible for Ngũgĩ's detention.

I wanted to comprehend how a resistance fighter who spent the emergency years during the Mau Mau War in British custody could become a neocolonialist and jail his countrymen. Ngũgĩ reflected out loud:

You can't leave leading to one person. Change comes from the people. In terms of Kenyatta—he played a very important role. In Kenya, between 1895 and 1963 racial apartheid was so strong. It was hard for Kenyan Blacks to imagine themselves as anything more than occupying a lower class position. People like Kenyatta and others opened those horizons—saying we can be something else. They helped open the imagination of the people. Yes, we can get our independence. Yes, we can rule ourselves. That's important. So the way I see it—Kenyatta worked for independence. Independence was a very important historical phase of the struggle. The fact that there are no fundamental changes

economically and politically in the country doesn't minimize the struggle for independence. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

Upon learning of Kenyatta's death, Ngũgĩ was overcome with sadness. There was jubilation over the prospect of walking out of the Kamiti penal institution, but in spite of being wrongly detained, Ngũgĩ's reflections turned inward:

Here was a Black Moses who had been called by history to lead his people to the promised land of no exploitation, no oppression, but who failed to rise to the occasion, who ended up surrounding himself with colonial home guards and traitors; who ended up being described by the British bourgeoisie as their best friend in Africa, to the extent of his body being carried to the grave, not on the arms of the Kenyan people, but on a carriage provided by the Queen of England, the symbolic head of the British exploiting classes. Kenyatta was a 20th-century tragic figure.

For me, his death, even though he had wrongly jailed me, was not an occasion for rejoicing but one that called for a serious re-evaluation of our history; to see the balance of losses and gains, and work out the options open to us for the future of our children and country. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, pp. 162-163)

### **Ngũgĩ's Release From Prison**

On December 12, 1978, Ngũgĩ heard the usual jingling of keys. It was the 15th anniversary of Kenya's independence from British colonial rule. Ngũgĩ certainly was not celebrating from his prison cell.

Since the September 22nd fiasco, when the inmates' hopes for freedom were dashed, a bit of gloom and doom had permeated the detention environment. On this particular day, Ngũgĩ abandoned his usual ritual of sneaking to the door and peering through the opening when he detected noise. Instead he just sat at his desk:

To hell with the ritual! I don't care if the prison officer or anybody catches me writing the novel on toilet paper. It is not my fault. I could not get enough scrap paper. The novel is virtually complete and I am possessed . . . imagination, once let loose, keeps on racing ahead, and the hand cannot keep pace with it. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 167)

Ngũgĩ's concentration was steadfast as he tackled the task at hand. Even though his novel would never be printed under his current conditions, he forged ahead to meet a self-imposed deadline. As he furiously jotted his thoughts on toilet paper, he was conscious of the guard peering through the portal to his cell. Observing the lingering presence of watchful eyes, Ngũgĩ walked to the door:

“Ngũgĩ, you are now free . . . ”

I am the first detainee to hear these words. I shout the news across the walls . . . “Free . . . We are now free . . . “

I have regained my name. I am no longer K6,77.

When the door to cell 16 is finally open, the first thing I do is rush to the compound to hug darkness (which I have not seen for a year) and to look at the stars.

We are free . . . We are free. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 167)

News of Ngũgĩ's release reached Amnesty International. Five of the 26 captives had been adopted by the human rights organization as prisoners of conscience. Two other cases were under investigation (Amnesty International, 1979). Kenya was among the few states in Africa with no political prisoners at the time of the commuted sentences (Amnesty International, 1979).

Amnesty cabled President Daniel Arap Moi “welcoming this as a ‘timely gesture’ for the 30th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” and called it “an outstanding example for all other governments throughout the world” (Amnesty International, 1979). Never a fan of Amnesty International, at the time of his presidential induction in October 1978 and on the day of Ngũgĩ's release from the Kamiti Maximum Security facility, President Moi called upon the group to “leave Kenya alone and concentrate on human rights in southern Africa” (Amnesty International, 1979).

Ngũgĩ's ordeal was not over in spite of his being freed. He had been dismissed from the University of Nairobi where he served as an Associate Professor of Literature.

After an eight-month inquiry regarding his status, the college finally notified Ngũgĩ to tell him he had been discharged the day he was detained through an Act of State. Ngũgĩ was unemployed:

Our release from detention was unconditional. We were not told that we would not get jobs on release and we were not told that there were certain things we were supposed to do before we could get jobs. This is why it is very surprising to see that, although some of us have been able to get back our liberties, freedoms and rights, some of us are still suffering from the denial of these rights. A job should be considered a right and never a privilege in a democratic country. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 200)

President Daniel Arap Moi's position on this matter startled Kenyans. While addressing a church gathering in his hometown, the President told the crowd that ex-detainees, who were apprehended after independence, would be the last ones considered for available assignments:

Moi said he could not be expected to give such people priority in jobs since they had been "undermining" the government of the late President Jomo Kenyatta. "Was President Kenyatta's government a colonial one to deserve such agitators? Is my government a colonial one?" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1981, p. 228)

### **Maitũ Njugĩra (Mother Sing For Me)**

Following Ngũgĩ's release from incarceration, he rejoined the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre working group. He was barred from teaching at the University of Nairobi and was unable to secure employment elsewhere. Ngũgĩ wa Mĩĩĩ also lost his job. In spite of the risks, Ngũgĩ and the Kamĩĩĩthũ residents collectively resolved to produce another play. The title of the new performance piece was *Maitũ Njugĩra (Mother Sing For Me)*.

During my interview with Ngũgĩ, he referred to the conceptualization and production of *Maitũ Njugĩra*, as phase two of the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre challenge. Ngũgĩ categorized the 1977 inception and creation of

*Ngaahika Ndeenda* as phase one. There were similarities and differences associated with the various periods of the Kamĩrĩthũ project.

First, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was staged without prior knowledge of impending risks. *Maitũ Njugĩra*, on the other hand, was unveiled with a heightened awareness of the potential dire consequences, which could be thrust upon Kamĩrĩthũ by an iron-fisted neocolonial government at any given moment.

There were contrasts with the shaping of the scripts as well:

The first text, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, was scripted by Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩ and myself, and later added on to by the peasants who were the participants. This time, I scripted *Maitũ Njugĩra*. But I'd rather say it was not a question of scripting, more now a question of collecting—collecting old tunes from different people—and in the scripting of these, I worked with different people. So I was really more of an editor of a collective scripting. To show you what I mean, for instance, in a script: There are a number of work songs from different Kenyan nationalities, different cultures—Luyia, Akamba, Luo—and there is no way I could have possibly known these work songs except for the active help from various individuals and this meant not only their collecting the tunes but changing the words here and there to fit into the theme of the musical. (Bardolph & Durix as cited in Sander & Lindfors, 2006, p. 158)

The content and context of the scripts also varied. The backdrop for *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was present-day. Kenyan history was only incorporated to accentuate the root causes of the current troublesome state of affairs. *Maitũ Njugĩra* was placed in the past.

Another difference between *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Maitũ Njugĩra* were the performance venues. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was presented at the open-air theater built by the Kamĩrĩthũ peasants and workers. The audience flocked to the village to see a real Kenyan production put on by native East Africans.

With *Maitũ Njugĩra*, there was an attitude shift. Everyone agreed that the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi was the perfect space for the play:

It was not theatre going to the village. Now it was theatre going to the town. To say here we are. It was a reversal—the village was coming to take over. That was the underlying notion—the village was coming to the heart of high culture to perform their play. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008)

*Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Maitũ Njugĩra* had noteworthy similarities. The men and women committed to the Kamĩrĩthũ Centre fully participated in both productions. In spite of the risks, more than 400 people turned out for auditions, wanting to contribute in some way (Bardolph & Durix as cited in Sander & Lindfors, 2006). Since auditions were held in Nairobi and the Kamĩrĩthũ village, the turnout was equally split between the two sites.

Both theatrical productions utilized the indigenous language of the community. *Maitũ Njugĩra*, however, expanded upon the native language theme by incorporating the colloquial speech from the surrounding African region. By taking this additional step, more participants and audience members were included in the entire effort.

Ngũgĩ discussed the Kamĩrĩthũ collective theatre process with Jan Cohen-Cruz, formerly a professor at New York University. I first met Jan at a Theatre of the Oppressed Workshop at the Brecht Forum many years ago:

A collective theatre was produced by a range of factors: a content with which people could identify carried in a form which they could recognize and identify; their participation in its evolution through the research stages, that is by the collection of raw material like details of work conditions in farms and firms; the collection of old songs and dances like *Muthirigu*, *Mucung’wa*, and *Mwomboko* and opera forms like *Gitiiro* etc; their participation, through discussion on the scripts and therefore on the content and form; through the public auditions and rehearsals; and of course through the performances. The real language of African theatre is to be found in the struggles of the oppressed, for it is out of those struggles that a new Africa is being born. The peasants and workers of Africa are making a tomorrow out of the present of toil and turmoil. The authentic language of African theatre should reflect this even as it is given birth by that very toil and turmoil. Such a theatre will find response in the hearts and lives of the participants; and even in the hearts of those living outside the immediate environment of its physical being and operation. (Cohen-Cruz, 1998, p. 244)

## Government Crackdown

In 1981, the Kamĩĩĩĩthũ community group applied for a license to perform *Maitũ Njugĩra* at the Kenya National Theatre in Nairobi. The government ignored the group's formal request. In February of 1982, before the actors arrived at the playhouse for open rehearsals, "oral instructions were given by the Provincial Commissioner, Nairobi, to the theatre management to keep them out" (Ndĩgĩĩĩĩĩgĩ, 2007, p. 180). The doors were locked and everyone associated with the play was refused entrance to the building.

Ngũgĩ recounted the moment during our visit:

In 1982 the play was stopped. Something was performed. It was performed, but not licensed. And once more, we were not even allowed into the National Theatre. We were locked out. We rented the theatre, paid for it, but when we went there we were physically locked out.

We held sit-ins at the theatre until the opening hours because we were never formally told that we were not licensed. So our own rationale was to sit there and wait for the license to perform.

At the opening hour, Kamĩĩĩĩthũ would go to Nairobi and continue the rehearsals. The rehearsals were open so anyone could come.

So really what happened was the crowd would come to see our play. We actually had audience. They were not paying audience. We would not charge a thing because they were rehearsals. We continued to do that.

We did perform, but in the end we were banned. It was very interesting, because now instead of just banning one play, the authorities came to the Centre of Kamĩĩĩĩthũ and razed the theatre to the ground. They formally banned the Kamĩĩĩĩthũ community itself as a legal entity. We no longer existed. We had to perform in a banned theatre. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

Initially, the authorities did not stop the play. Beginning February 15, 1982, *Maitũ Njugĩra's* open rehearsals were moved to the University of Nairobi, Ngũgĩ's former employer. For 10 nights, the actors carried out the practice runs to an enthusiastic standing room only audience:

Students from the university, lecturers, office workers from Nairobi, people from as far as Murang'a, some 60 miles away, came to watch the play. Rehearsals were supposed to begin at six o'clock every day but by three o'clock, the theatre



would be full. Later arrivals sat in the aisles, in the lights room, on the steps leading to the stage, in the pit between the first row of seats and the stage, and in the wings to the left of the stage, the only entrance direct into the stage from outside. When curtain call came, the cast, which would be singing the same defiant songs at the National Theatre up to six o'clock, had little room to pass. But once on stage, the action began with a rousing opening song performed by most of the cast. (Ndīgĩrĩgĩ, 2007, pp. 180-181)

Amongst the attendees were undercover agents. Government officials dispatched them to scrutinize the rehearsal process. What they encountered was alarming—the performance spectacle had attracted full houses every night (Ndīgĩrĩgĩ, 2007). A full house according to several estimates was 1,000. Approximately 10,000 people experienced *Maitũ Njugĩra* before the cultural group was prohibited additional use of university grounds on February 25, 1982 (Ndīgĩrĩgĩ, 2007).

On March 10, 1982, Ngũgĩ addressed the local and international press on behalf of the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre group. The public comments registered the group's outrage over the handling of *Maitũ Njugĩra*. Ngũgĩ's concluding remarks to the media are below:

The manner in which the refusal of permission to stage the play was carried out reveals a very serious element in Kenya today. The fact that the government conducted their instructions verbally or by telephone without ever writing to us directly so that no written record exists reinforces a dangerous trend. Thus acts are carried out without any officials being held accountable. Under such an atmosphere, anything can be done to any Kenyan, or group of Kenyans by officials without written documentation or accountability.

This is not just simple irresponsibility and heavy-handed use of authority. The government seems mortally terrified of peasants organizing themselves on their terms and their own initiative.

We wish to denounce in the strongest possible terms the government's increasing intolerance and repression of the Kenyan people's cultural initiatives.

Secondly, we now question fundamentally the seriousness of the government's commitment to Kenyan culture. If, as we are told, the economy has slowed down for "external factors" of recession, inflation and petroleum prices, we ask is Kenyan culture to slow down or stagnate for the same reasons? If we had chosen to do often mindless and always irrelevant pieces as the foreign groups we probably might not have met with such official hostility. Foreign

theatre can freely thrive on Kenyan soil. But there is no room for Kenyan theatre on Kenyan soil. During the Emergency, the British colonial regime introduced severe censorship of Kenyan theatre particularly in detention camps like Athi River and employed African rehabilitation officers to do their dirty work. The similar tactics are being used in Kenya today! We now call for an end of censorship of Kenyan people's cultural expression. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1983, pp. 46-47)

The day after the press conference, *Maitũ Njugĩra* was banned. David Musila, the Provincial Commissioner of Central Province, held a public meeting in the Kamĩrĩthũ village after driving 120 miles from Nyeri, to seal the play's fate (Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, 2007). The Commissioner said, "that women were being misled into cultural activities that had nothing to do with development" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1983, p. 47). Therefore, he was banning all theatre activities in the area (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1983). He also expunged the Centre's management team and deregistered the self-help group with the Ministry of Culture and Social Services (Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, 2007).

The final blow by government officials occurred on Friday, March 12, 1982. The District Officer for the Limuru Province led a convoy to Kamĩrĩthũ. Three truckloads of heavily armed police smashed the open-air theatre built by workers and peasants, and razed it to the ground. It was the end of the Kamĩrĩthũ Theatre for Development experiment.

## **Exile**

Ngũgĩ left Kenya on June 7, 1982. London was his destination. It was a business trip. Translated accounts of Ngũgĩ's books authored from prison and several of his plays were slated for release (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008). He was meeting with his European publisher. Little did he know that he would not step foot on Kenyan soil again until 2004.

Following Ngũgĩ's London rendezvous with his publisher, he received numerous communiqués warning him not to return to Kenya. "Orders were out for my arrest and detention without trial on arrival at the Jomo Kenyatta Airport in Nairobi" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005, p. 62). Ngũgĩ went into a self-imposed exile. He used the opportunity to tell the Kamĩrĩĩthũ story wherever and whenever he had a chance (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005). My get-together with Ngũgĩ was another occasion for him to recount the Kamĩrĩĩthũ narrative. On a personal level, Kamĩrĩĩthũ transformed his life:

It has led me to prison, yes; it got me banned from teaching at the University of Nairobi, yes; and it has now led me into exile. But, as a writer, it has also made me confront the whole question of the language of African theatre—which then led me to confront the language of African fiction. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005, p. 62)

While Ngũgĩ was in London, he also learned the fate of his Kamĩrĩĩthũ colleagues:

Dr. Kĩmani Gecaũ, chairman of the Literature department and director of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* in 1977 and co-director with Waigwa Wachiira, of *Maitũ Njugĩra* in 1981-82, had fled to Zimbabwe. Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, a most dedicated and indefatigable worker for a people's cause, and the coordinating director of Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre also had to flee a few hours ahead of those with a warrant for his arrest and possible detention. They have been helping to set up rural-based cultural centres and in 1983 produced *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* in the Shona language. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005, pp. 61-62)

I asked Ngũgĩ whether he was able to replicate the Kamĩrĩĩthũ popular education experience elsewhere. After fleeing Kenya, Ngũgĩ's university associates, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ and Kĩmani Gecaũ, initiated Theatre for Development projects in Zimbabwe "grounded in African struggle" (Byam, 1999, p. 114). Ngũgĩ, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, Kĩmani Gecaũ, and the Kamĩrĩĩthũ peasants and workers were invited to perform in Zimbabwe following a September 1981 paper delivered by Ngũgĩ at a conference sponsored by the country's Ministry of Education and Culture and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

(Byam, 1999). Having heard complimentary reports about the Kamĩĩĩthũ project, the Zimbabwean government was anxious to interact with the players. Ngũgĩ promised to bring the others with him on his next visit. It never came to pass. The Kenyan government blocked the trip prior to smashing the Kamĩĩĩthũ effort. Ngũgĩ's colleagues tried to pick up where they left off in their new home. I wondered whether Ngũgĩ was able to do the same:

No. In 1984, we tried to use the Kamĩĩĩthũ method in London—that same type of approach—open rehearsals, starting from where people are—and so on. But, there were limitations.

So what we did from the African Center was a production of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. The cast was made up of Nepalese, Africans, Caribbeans, Tanzanians, Indonesians, and so on and so on. We chose various locations throughout London—Caribbean and African communities—where people were. We would go there. Of course we had to do it by regiments. We would go to houses and people would be invited to come. We would publicize—anybody could come to the house. And at the house there would be discussions about the issues and rehearsals. We did that all over London. Then, when we were finished with that part, we would perform in Leeds and other places throughout London.

So we tried that in London. And it worked very well in terms of the generation of ideas and discussions. And the involvement—people would come and watch the rehearsals. They commented and became part of that involvement. They became interested in the fate of the production. And so we did try in London. Not quite the same way as Kamĩĩĩthũ, but Kamĩĩĩthũ ideas played a role in how we organized the theatre production in London in 1984.

Then I was working in Oxford and met a man there that took some of those ideas and approaches to Manchester. Then he went to Derby and worked the same ideas and the same approaches. Eventually he went to Brazil and is still working there. Now he is part of the idea behind international development— theatre, international drama, in education. He is still working and organizing huge conferences, building from the grassroots.

So, there are educationists that have built upon the idea of Kamĩĩĩthũ and London, Manchester, Derby, Brazil. So, we go back to Brazil with Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008)

Ngũgĩ never met Augusto, even though they both served on the editorial board of *The Drama Review*. He was introduced to Theatre of the Oppressed after he went into exile.



When Ngũgĩ paused to mentally organize his thoughts, I interjected. “Paulo Freire said we are all unfinished.” Ngũgĩ acknowledged my statement. “Yeah, so we continue doing our work. Adding to our story” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008).

My final query dealt with the position and function of art in liberation struggles. With this subject we completed the audio portion of our journey:

Art is very important. Art embodies ideals. Art has the capacity to transform the human heart, mind and soul. Art can transform our world. So I don’t think of art as something that is secondary to our existence. Art is an integral part of our existence. It isn’t a sideshow. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008)

I shut down my audio recorder and thanked Ngũgĩ for generously sharing his time, his wisdom, and his heart. We continued our conversation at lunch. We chatted over salad at an outdoor university café and then I joined him in his office.

Approximately four hours after the initial handshake, I hugged Ngũgĩ goodbye. I had a three o’clock appointment with Philomena Essed, Ngũgĩ’s friend and a member of my dissertation committee. Philomena and I traipsed along a beautiful stretch of the California coastline as I excitedly recounted the glorious, memorable day I spent with Ngũgĩ. Without Philomena, my encounter with Ngũgĩ may never have happened.

The next morning, I boarded a plane bound for New York City. I replayed the digital recording and fondly reflected on an incredible visit with an inspiring human being.

### **Lessons Learned**

The following synopsis is rooted in the guiding questions presented in chapter 2 of this dissertation. It is consistent with the “Lessons Learned” sections I devised for the other portraits.

What does it mean to create dangerously? For Ngũgĩ, creating dangerously meant threatening the social, economic, and political status quo. Ngũgĩ addressed this issue in his book *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (1998). In the publication, he characterized the antagonisms that arise when cultural activists “fan the flames of discontent.”

In every absolutist state the holder of the *pen*, which forces words on paper, is seen as the enemy of the holder of the *gun*, which enforces words of the law. Penpoints and gunpoints thus stand in confrontation. And yet the most easily noticed fact in looking at the artist and the ruler is the disparity in their powers: one has only a feather in his hand; the other, the entire killing machine behind him. One has the capacity to spill ink only, the other the capacity to draw blood. Why is the writer, or more broadly the artist, then, with his feather, with his bottle of ink, and a white piece of parchment, often seen as a threat to the absolutist state of whatever ideological color, guise, or credo? Why do its rulers fear the open word? (p. 9)

Ngũgĩ’s questions in the aforementioned paragraph are rhetorical. After years of reflection, Ngũgĩ constructed a theory, which illuminated the tension between art and the state. The premise for his supposition is thoughtfully presented in numerous texts. At the core of Ngũgĩ’s hypothesis is the role of the power elite, which “is to ensure that the various forces in society keep their place in the social fabric by policing rules that are often codified into laws” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1998, p. 8). When artists, like Ngũgĩ, disturb the ostensibly tranquil landscape, the government pummels them with an iron fist.

Ngũgĩ, his colleagues, and the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community residents did not realize they were undermining the post independence administration’s efforts to continue colonial rule at the outset of the venture. In some respects, teaching literacy through theatre, resembled charity rather than justice. They collectively underestimated the risks. In fact, during my interview, Ngũgĩ confessed that he kept officials apprised of the project’s progress. He mistakenly felt he had their support. It was not until Ngũgĩ’s





institutionalization of multi-party politics, and the relaxation of laws, which previously prohibited freedom of speech and association, two separate theatre companies comprised of original cast members made an attempt to revive performances of *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (*I Will Marry When I Want*) (Ndĩgĩrĩrĩgĩ, 2007). It was not the same. The context was transposed and the play lost its original popular appeal (Ndĩgĩrĩrĩgĩ, 2007). The government managed to truncate further mobilization efforts.

Critics may argue that creating dangerously is not worth the trouble. History disproves their hypothesis. In South Africa, artists' contributions to the anti-apartheid movement helped lead to the abolishment of the caste system and Nelson Mandela was elected president; in Brazil, after Augusto and other cultural activists battled the dictators for 21 years at home and abroad, Luis Inacio de Silva (Lula), the former head of the Metalworkers Union of São Bernardo, became the country's highest leading representative; in the Czech Republic, Václav Havel, a playwright and dissident, was voted to officiate for all of the people in that nation; and in the United States, following the hard fought freedom struggle by on the ground troubadour warriors and their supporters, Barack Obama rose to power, serving as the populace's first African American commander in chief. With struggle, subjugated people throughout the world have been liberated. Even in places like Kenya, where neocolonialism replaced British rule, projects like Kamĩrĩthũ, which bring communities together and play important roles.

Following his 1957 sojourn to Ghana, Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed his congregation. Ghana was the first African country to win her independence against colonialism. Dr. King had attended the celebration. "The oppressor never voluntarily

gives freedom to the oppressed. . . . Freedom only comes through persistent revolt”

(Minter, Hovey, & Cobb, 2008, p. 19).

In addition, Ngũgĩ created dangerously when he introduced new practices and tactics to the Kamĩrĩthũ natives. When Ngũgĩ and Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ, his colleague from the University of Nairobi, joined the community education and cultural centre committee, they helped institute the theory and praxis of Paulo Freire and the Theatre for Development process. These methods were deemed subversive by the neocolonial government and Ngũgĩ was hauled off to jail:

I became more and more convinced that in their vindictive agitation for the banning of our theatre efforts at Kamĩrĩthũ and in their feverish clamor for my incarceration, the comprador bourgeoisie and their foreign friends had been driven by fear. True to their colonial cultural inheritance, they were mortally scared of peasants and workers who showed no fear in their eyes; workers and peasants who showed no submissiveness in their bearing; workers and peasants who proclaimed their history with unashamed pride and who denounced its betrayal with courage. Yes, like their colonial counterparts, they had become mortally afraid of the slightest manifestation of a people’s culture of patriotic heroism and outspoken indomitable courage. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 1981, p. 71)

The Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre enterprise evolved into a solid activist-oriented organization. Its participants became politically astute. The risks increased. By the time the group staged *Maitũ Njugĩra* (*Mother Sing for Me*), it had evolved into a People’s Organization. A People’s Organization by definition is a “conflict group” (Alinsky, 1969, p. 132). “Its sole reason for coming into being is to wage war against all evils which cause suffering and unhappiness” (Alinsky, 1969, p. 132):

A People’s Organization is not a philanthropic plaything or a social service’s ameliorative gesture. It is a deep, hard driving force, striking and cutting at the very roots of all the evils, which beset the people. It recognizes the existence of the vicious circle in which most human beings are caught, and strives viciously to break this circle. It thinks and acts in terms of social surgery and not cosmetic

cover-ups. This is one of the reasons why a People's Organization will find that it has to fight its way along every foot of the road toward its destination—a people's world. (p. 133)

Due to the nature of People's Organizations, it is essential that every member “truly understand(s) the risks they're taking, the things that could go wrong, the losses they might suffer, before they make the decision to act, individually or together” (Kahn, 2010, p. 194). The Kamĩĩĩthũ collective fully comprehended the potential hazards associated with their activities. To be conscious of risks, however, is not enough. Che Guevara said “to be in solidarity is to run the same risks” (Boal, 2001, p. 194). This was impossible. There were class disparities within the group. Ngũgĩ and his colleagues were highly educated. They had more options than the Kamĩĩĩthũ peasants and workers. Ngũgĩ was considered one of East Africa's most prolific authors. The peasants and workers were illiterate and unknown. Ngũgĩ was adopted as one of Amnesty International's prisoners of conscience. When the Kamĩĩĩthũ peasants and workers were brutally attacked by neocolonial officials, the world looked on. Ngũgĩ went into a self-imposed exile. The Kamĩĩĩthũ peasants and workers had limited options available to them following the crackdown.

These are important points for future liberation struggles to consider. Even in cases like Kamĩĩĩthũ, where there was collective leadership, it is important to articulate the politics of privilege. By overlooking the issue, the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre villagers were inadequately prepared for attacks from opposition forces. It costs them. The power elite was able to dismantle the entire operation. There was no structure in place to assist individuals who were persecuted by administrative officials. The cultural activists, like Ngũgĩ and his colleagues, were dispersed, while

community inhabitants fell silent or went underground. Communication between the players stopped, the Theatre for Development experiment was dead. In hindsight, if there had been some strategic mechanism in place, the end result may have been different. No one will ever know. It is all speculation at this point.

Moreover, Ngũgĩ and the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre locals created dangerously when they openly expressed the hidden transcripts of opposing views. James C. Scott (1990) referred to the public expression of hidden transcripts as a “revolution of the soul” (p. 211). When individuals or groups refuse to accept or comply “with a hegemonic performance it is a particularly dangerous form of insubordination” (p. 205).

*Ngaahika Ndeenda (I Will Marry When I Want)* exposed the hardships endured by peasants in a neocolonial state. The opening scenes drew heavily on the battle for land and freedom during the emergency years in Kenya. The script then dramatized the transition to independence. In spite of the thousands that perished, sovereignty had been “hijacked” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2005, p. 44) by Jomo Kenyatta and his henchmen. The play, which was embraced by large audiences, was an embarrassment to the authorities.

*Maitũ Njugĩra (Mother Sing for Me)*, on the other hand, underscored the early Kenyan movements for self-determination in the 1920s and 1930s. The musical epitomized British oppression and African resistance. In spite of its historical nature, President Daniel arap Moi, Jomo Kenyatta’s successor, took it personally and lashed out. Tensions between art and the state were exacerbated:

The more absolutist and conservative a state is, the more it is likely to be hostile to any reminder of its social mortality. Art is always reminding the present of the obvious: even you shall come to pass away. A colonial state and a neocolonial state, which are variants of an absolutist state, will inevitably come into conflict

with any words and images that embody change. Absolute art is for the celebration of absolute motion, which is life: the absolute state is for the absolute cessation of motion, which is death. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998, p. 14)

With the launch of the Community Education and Cultural Centre literacy program a new power group was born. “The creation of any new power group automatically becomes an intrusion and a threat to the existing power arrangements. It carries with it the menacing implication of displacement and disorganization of the status quo” (Alinsky, 1969, p. 132).

By brazenly discrediting the neocolonial government during public performances, the Kamĩĩĩthũ protagonists entered uncharted territory. It was difficult to predict if and how Kenyan officials would react. In general, when formerly hidden transcripts become public, and succeed, even temporarily, they reap positive and negative results:

Its mobilizing capacity as a symbolic act is potentially awesome. At the level of tactics and strategy, it is a powerful straw in the wind. It portends a possible turning of the tables. That first declaration speaks for countless others, it shouts what has historically had to be whispered, controlled, choked back, stifled, and suppressed. If the results seem like moments of madness, if the politics they engender is tumultuous, frenetic, delirious, and occasionally violent, that is perhaps because the powerless are so rarely on the public stage and have so much to say and do when they finally arrive. (Scott, 1990, p. 227)

Additionally, Ngũgĩ and the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre protagonists created dangerously when they favorably spotlighted the hard fought contributions of previous campaigns for independence. Both plays, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Maitũ Njugĩra*, paid homage to revolutionary icons intimately entwined with the Kenya Land and Freedom Army. *Ngaahika Ndeenda* cleverly linked the past to the present, which infuriated the neocolonial government. *Maitũ Njugĩra* was solely placed in a historic context. The reaction from the African ruling party was still fierce. Why would a production about British oppression agitate Presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel

arop Moi? In a speech commemorating the 30th anniversary of the Mau Mau uprising,

Ngũgĩ framed the issue:

How we look at yesterday has important bearings on how we look at today and on how we see possibilities for tomorrow. The sort of past we look back to for inspiration in our struggles affects the vision of the future we want to build. What heroes or heroines do we identify with: People's leaders or colonial chiefs; Patriots or loyalists; Mau Mau fighters or Homeguards; Resistance heroes or collaborators with the imperialist enemy. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1983, p. 8)

Ngũgĩ's eloquent dedicatory October 20, 1982 address touched upon the motives, which instigated the government crackdown. Mainly, when two polarizing intellectual forces reconstruct history the end result is conflict:

What they have in common is an awareness of the importance of the *past* and its interpretation and they go about it with fierce commitment even when hiding under slogans of objectivity and search for truth. But it is a truth, an objectivity, from the standpoint of one or the other class. It is as if they both realize that the distance between the barrel of a gun and the point of a pen is very small: what's fought out at penpoint is often resolved at gunpoint with the possible overthrow of the one class by the other, or the overturning of the existing and apparently fixed status quo, or relations between the two contending classes or nations. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1983, p. 9)

Documented accounts by Ngũgĩ and historian Maina wa Kinyatti concluded that Mau Mau warriors were philosophically out of step with the newly elected officials following Kenya's victory for self-rule. Radical devotees of the opposition parties were eradicated, literally and figuratively. Groups like Kamĩĩĩthũ, who audaciously preserved the memory of the fallen heroes and heroines, were squelched.

In spite of the risks associated with the tutelage of people's struggles, it is important to remember them. When acts of resistance and liberation movements are excluded from the pages of history, it lends support to the official view that supreme power hangs with the elite. When cultural activists like Ngũgĩ and the Kamĩĩĩthũ collective expose hidden triumphs, big and small, they are able to illustrate and

accentuate possibilities for a better future. Sometimes, when the oppressed join forces and stand up or sit down for justice, they occasionally win. It is worth the fight. Spectators, however, must be cognizant of the fact that there is no such thing as neutrality or impartiality. Every point of view reflects the biases of the presenter; even the plays scripted and performed by Ngũgĩ, his colleagues, and the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre inhabitants.

Most importantly and consistent with the findings in the other portraits, popular education is the heart and soul of the create dangerously credo. When Ngũgĩ and his University of Nairobi colleagues launched the Theatre for Development process in Kamĩrĩthũ, it was as an affront to government officials. Ngũgĩ and his associates created dangerously.

Many of the workers and peasants involved with the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre were partisans in the Mau Mau War. Others provided indirect support to the guerrilla wing of the movement. Their land was confiscated, their dwellings were demolished, and their family members were detained and murdered by the colonialists (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005). Their recollections of the emergency years were fresh and they were cognizant of their status under the new East African administration. They were betrayed. The dramatization of their plight in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Maitũ Njugĩra* was their way of taking a stand and fighting back. Through their scripts, they candidly expressed their discontent. The government reacted.

It was more than content, however, that precipitated the severe reprisals. The entire popular education modus operandi struck fear into the Kenyan leadership. First off, the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre was run collectively.

Every member participated in the development of the theatre production: the generation of topics, the writing of the scripts, and the crafting of the scenes. The process was transforming on a personal and community level. The auditions, rehearsals, and performances were open, allowing Kamĩĩĩĩĩũ to spread its message beyond the boundaries of the village. The citizens were galvanized. The incorporation of the authentic language of the region and traditional culture further spawned a spirit of solidarity amongst the masses. The people had power and it shook the established order to its core. An anonymous unlettered non-Kikuyu interviewed by Ingrid Björkman saw it this way:

The remarkable thing is that in our kind of system it is believed that we have people who have to think for us. As workers, peasants, people who actually toil, we are not supposed to use our heads. And you are not supposed to be mentally productive. You are not supposed to associate things and see a picture. You are always supposed to see things in isolation and you always know that you are being led into anything. Now, here Ngũgĩ showed in *Mother, Sing for Me* that peasants can think and they can communicate those thoughts—the understanding of their immediate environment—to other people. They can understand what makes them that which they are. It beats somebody, who has always known that he is a thinker, to think that a peasant could act and could also form songs that could express himself. Because even Ngũgĩ himself confessed that he was to be taught by these people because he might not have understood what he wanted to say—the way it naturally was—as seen and felt by these people.

He has said that he should not be considered as the sole author of the plays. It is the peasants as a group that finally came up with what it is. You can have an idea and as you discuss with people they show you, how you can condense this conception, because you are writing about them, and they know themselves much better.

So this feeling that the peasants can understand a situation and actually communicate what they are thinking is what became the biggest threat. Because to be led you have to be “sheep.” And when you show that you are not “sheep,” the leader becomes disturbed. (Björkman, 1989, p. 97)

In Kamĩĩĩĩĩũ, everyone was a leader. That is one of the attributes of popular education. Sadly, the outside world has a difficult time understanding and accepting the nature of egalitarian ideas. The notion of power sharing is incongruous with an



imperialist society. For this reason, Ngũgĩ was showered with most of the accolades surrounding the success of the Kamĩrĩthũ experiment. It is a bit unfair considering so many people participated in the project.

Ngũgĩ has done his best to perpetuate popular education pedagogy and acknowledge the significant contributions of the community. He is a humble, generous man. That is one of his endearing qualities. It is not his fault that his name has become synonymous with the Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre (Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, 2007).

He was the most visible of the intellectual group working at Kamĩrĩthũ and the one who commanded the most respect among the people. At meetings, he would always let others speak first before offering his ideas. But for the duration of the theatre project, ideas that he has championed elsewhere—self sacrifice, a thorough-going analysis of the problems afflicting the society and the search for structural solutions for them, commitment to the cause of the less fortunate, the use of local languages as medium for literary creativity, defense against cultural imperialism, etcetera, seem to have become the inspiring ideas at Kamĩrĩthũ. Inevitably, Ngũgĩ and the intellectual group supplied the ideological basis for the project (Ndĩgĩrĩgĩ, 2007, pp. 195-196).

Since 1982, I have upheld the Kamĩrĩthũ project as a popular education exemplar. It was not perfect and the aforementioned problems associated with class disparities illustrate that scholars and practitioners have a long way to go when it comes to participatory democracy. Collectively, Kamĩrĩthũ was involved “in making history out of possibility, not simply resigned to fatalistic stagnation. Consequently, the future was (is) something to be constructed through trial and error rather than an inexorable vice that

determines all our actions” (Freire, 2001, p. 54). We are unfinished beings in the world (Freire, 2001). Individuals and groups can choose to sit idly by and “merely adapt” to their environment, which is controlled by outside forces; or they can struggle “to become the subject and maker of history” (Freire, 2001, p. 55). Kamĩĩĩthũ embraced the latter.

Lastly, Ngũgĩ, his collaborators from the University of Nairobi, and the Kamĩĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre constituents led without authority and they created dangerously. Through their art, they publicly challenged the dominating ideology of their time. In the end, the Kamĩĩĩthũ experiment was abruptly terminated. Ngũgĩ’s comrades, Ngũgĩ wa Mĩĩĩ and Kĩmani Gecaũ fled to Zimbabwe, a step ahead of an arrest warrant. Ngũgĩ went into a self-imposed exile to avoid imprisonment, torture and death. They continued to lead from afar. Kenyan authorities fought back with a vengeance. Ngũgĩ illustrated the absurdity of the government’s attacks in *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams*:

Between 1982 and 1986, many writers and intellectuals were sent to prison or else forced into exile. The year 1986 was particularly bad for students and faculty. Even discussions in the university classrooms were often monitored by undercover police. It was in that climate that President Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi ordered the immediate arrest of the main character of my novel after intelligence reports had reached him of a person. Matigari, who was going about asking questions related to the truth and justice of what was going on in the country. Actually Matigari was only asking one question: where could a person wearing the belt of peace find truth and justice in a post-colonial society? When the police found that Matigari was only a character in a novel of the same title good old Toroitich Arap Moi ordered the book to be apprehended instead. How dare a book ask questions? So, in February 1987, in a very well coordinated police action, the book was taken down from all the shelves in all the bookshops and even from the publisher’s warehouse. Art and literature are full of ironies, and what happened to the book in real life had already taken place inside the fictional world of the novel. At one point in the narrative, Matigari is arrested and put first in a police cell and later in a mental asylum, for only the politically deranged could ask the kind of questions he was posing to everyone he encountered. At another moment in the narrative Matigari is on the run, with the armed might of the state after him. More ironies: what happened to Matigari, the

character, and *Matigari*, the novel, has happened to numerous Kenyan writers. The autocratic state does not have the humility implied even in the most ordinary of greetings. (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998, p. 16)

Ngũgĩ presumed that the artist and the state will always be at war (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1998). Artists, like Ngũgĩ, will continue to rise up. The state will do everything in its power to silence the dissenters. History has shown that you cannot kill ideas or the revolutionary soul of a people. New struggles will form and artists will lead. The culture of resistance though "repressed, persecuted, and betrayed . . . [will live on] in the villages, in the forests and in the spirit of generations of victims of colonialism" (Kidd, 1982, p. 56).

## Chapter VI: Mississippi Caravan of Music Portrait

### Introduction

On Saturday, June 20, 2009, we assembled for the March for Justice at Mt. Nebo Missionary Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Mississippi. I was drenched in sweat. It was a scorching, sunny, hot, humid, 98-degree morning.

One of the organizers for the weekend's events was distributing bottled water. I grabbed two. Dehydration was not an option. Others, who gathered for the 45th commemoration of the murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were chatting, seemingly undeterred by the sweltering heat.

I noticed a mound of oversized cardboard crosses neatly situated on the grass. Each one bore the name of a fallen, unsung hero or heroine from the long battle for self-determination in the Magnolia State. Two Jewish stars for Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman were near the top of the pile. It was a daunting sight. More than 50 lives snuffed out by segregationists, intent on keeping African Americans and "outside agitators" in their place.

Around 10:00 a.m., the placards were distributed and the one-mile trek to the Neshoba County Courthouse began. Someone started to sing an old spiritual, first adapted for the United States Freedom Movement in 1962. We all joined in:

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round, turn me 'round, turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin', Marching up to freedom land. (Erenrich, 1999, p. 314)

Other songs were added to the repertoire as we slowly and methodically traipsed to our destination. Local stalwarts from the civil rights struggle led the way: men, women, Black, and White. We deliberately and purposefully marched, adhering to the

route taken by Martin Luther King, Jr., more than four decades before. In 1966, the legendary preacher lent his voice to the Mississippi campaign. Together they walked, demonstrated, and articulated their demands for suffrage. They rallied for the prosecution of members of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan who intimidated, terrorized, and assassinated anyone and everyone who got in their way. The battle for equality in the Black Belt was a dangerous and courageous operation.

On this momentous occasion, the older veterans did not miss a beat. Some hobbled along assisted by canes and walkers, while others caravanned in automobiles led by a police escort. I marveled at the presence of law enforcement officers. In 1964, most of them were affiliated with one of the state's clandestine White supremacist organizations, including Neshoba County Deputy Cecil Price and Sheriff Lawrence Rainey, who were named accomplices in the killings of the three civil rights workers being memorialized that day.

On June 21, 1964, Andrew Goodman a White 21-year-old student from Queens College; James Chaney, a Black 21-year-old Meridian, Mississippi native; and Michael Schwerner, a White 24-year-old social worker from New York City were murdered by the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. It was the beginning of the Freedom Summer Project, where close to 1,000, mostly White college students from the North, joined forces with Civil Rights Movement activists in a formidable undertaking to bring about social reforms for southern Blacks, including voting rights, better schools, adequate housing, and a livable wage. It was a bold initiative.

Andy Goodman was one of the project volunteers. He was in the state one day before Klansmen welcomed him with a gangland-style execution. Michael Schwerner, a

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) staff member, landed in Mississippi in January with his wife Rita. He was appointed “director of the eastern section of the fourth district project, covering six counties—including Neshoba” (Dittmer, 1995, p. 246). The couple was greeted with a special Southern KKK hospitality. When ominous threats and strong-arm tactics failed to expedite their departure from the territory, Michael became a marked man. He met his fate at the end of pointed gun. James Chaney joined CORE in the fall of 1963. After a brief stint in Canton, Greenwood, and Carthage, he joined Michael and Rita Schwerner in Meridian (Dittmer, 1995). On that tragic night in June, James was the last one to receive the lethal blow. The Klansman who shot him exclaimed, “you didn’t leave me anything but a nigger, but at least I killed me a nigger” (Mitchell, 1999, p. 350). With that, the three lifeless bodies were transported to Olen Burrage’s property on the outskirts of town. Burrage was the owner of a local trucking company (Cagin & Dray, 1991). James, Michael, and Andrew were buried at the bottom of an earthen dam. On August 4th, after an anonymous FBI informant disclosed the whereabouts of the disappeared civil rights workers, their corpses were excavated. It took 44 days and a hefty reward to break the case. Eighteen defendants were tried for conspiracy to deny the civil rights of the three martyrs (Arkansas Delta Truth and Justice Center, 2009). Seven were convicted, eight were acquitted, and three received mistrials (Arkansas Delta Truth and Justice Center, 2009). It was not until 2005 that murder charges were finally brought against one of the Klansmen, Edgar Ray Killen. Killen was convicted on three counts of manslaughter. To date, no one else has served a day in jail for these senseless homicides, only for civil rights violations. Hence, the March for Justice continues.

When I reached the Neshoba County Courthouse, the rally was in full swing.

Mississippi Movement luminaries, family members, and lawyers representing countless murder victims, were among the many speakers congregated on the courthouse steps.

I made a beeline to the nearest shade. I was accompanied by MacArthur Cotton and Jesse Harris, who were also seeking refuge from the unbearably high temperature. Both men were Mississippi SNCC field secretaries back in the day. SNCC, the acronym for Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was a major player during the Freedom Summer Project of 1964. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an umbrella group established to help synchronize the various movement factions, also performed salient roles. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was the longest standing organization on the scene. The first Mississippi branch was founded in 1918 (Dittmer, 1995).

As the morning wore on, more civil rights veterans sought protection under the trees. Cleveland, Mississippi native Margaret Block, whose deceased brother Sam was a celebrated SNCC organizer, joined our growing clique, along with Jan Hillegas and Harriet Tanzman. Jan and Harriet were my escorts for the week. The two women migrated to the state in the early 1960s. They graciously chauffeured me around and introduced me to many of the local abolitionists from those turbulent times; first under the shady tree at the Neshoba County Courthouse, and later at the Longdale Community Center, where the commemorative activities continued into the evening.

The folks I met were seasoned Mississippi-born revolutionaries. They performed the arduous and grueling day-to-day tasks of the Civil Rights Movement long before the White Freedom Summer volunteers captured the attention of the media. They were nonviolent soldiers in a domestic war. Steadfast in their determination to break the back

of Jim Crow, they confronted the Klan and the Citizens' Council head-on despite verbal harassment, beatings, arrests, burnings, bombings, and exterminations. They were the next generation in a long line of trailblazers, who tried to open the "closed society." Their tactics were cutting edge. Like their predecessors, they faced fierce resistance.

The Citizens Council was one of the earlier opposition groups formed to maintain the status quo after the Supreme Court mandated the integration of public schools in 1954. On July 11th of that year, Robert Patterson, a 32-year-old plantation manager from the Mississippi Delta, enlisted the support of 14 Indianola men to defy the ruling (Dittmer, 1995). The meeting attendees were upper-middle-class professionals, who were repulsed by the idea of mixed-race educational institutions (Dittmer, 1995). Within a matter of months, Citizens Councils spread throughout the state. They "fostered and legitimized violent actions by individuals not overly concerned with questions of legality and image" (Dittmer, 1995, p. 46).

After a lengthy hiatus, the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan were resurrected in Mississippi on January 31, 1964 (Dittmer, 1995). The Klan's rebirth "resulted from frustration, a gut feeling that the battle for White supremacy was being lost" (Dittmer, 1995, p. 217). By the time the first wave of Freedom Summer Project volunteers set foot in the state, "nearly 5,000 of these later-day 'fire-eaters' had joined the Ku Klux Klan" (Dittmer, 1995, p. 217). The KKK and Citizens Council was no match for the civil rights organizers. The Movement partisans stood their ground effecting necessary changes in the poorest and most treacherous state in the union. It was an honor to be among some of those movers and shakers on that sultry June weekend.

This was my first and only trip to the Magnolia State. It was long overdue. My



original encounter with Mississippi politics came in the fall of 1975. I was a freshman at Kent State University and a founding member of the May 4th Task Force. The group's mission was to inform students, faculty, administrators, and the general public about the history and aftermath of the 1970 shootings. On a beautiful spring afternoon in May, 28 members of the Ohio National Guard gunned down unarmed students on the campus. After 13 seconds and 67 rounds, four were dead and nine others were wounded. Ten days later, the scenario was repeated at Jackson State, where the Mississippi Highway Patrol and law enforcement officers opened fire. Thirty seconds and 230 bullets later, Phillip Gibbs and James Earl Green were gone. Gibbs, age 21, was a pre-law major from Ripley, Mississippi. Green, 17, was a senior at Jim Hill High School in Jackson. An indeterminate number of students were wounded by the fusillade and all of the witnesses were traumatized.

The Jackson State carnage would have gone completely unnoticed had it not occurred in the wake of the Kent State University incident, which claimed the lives of Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer, and William Schroeder. The public outcry over the killing of White students at Kent State gave the Jackson State episode a significance it would not have attained on its own accord.

When I joined the May 4th Task Force, I became familiar with the names Phillip Gibbs and James Earl Green. "Long Live the Spirit of Kent and Jackson State" became more than a slogan, and, in 1990, I edited my first anthology, paying tribute to the six students who were slain. Assembling articles for the Jackson State portion of the book was a difficult task. There was little documentation on the Mississippi bloodbath and what did exist was laden with untruths. As a result, there was insufficient attention given

to the Jackson State section of the document. The imbalance was unsettling. *Kent & Jackson, 1970—1990* (Erenrich, 1990) was released on the 20th anniversary of the Kent State shootings with only four articles from Mississippi.

One year later, the idea for a major project on the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement was born. I was conducting graduate research on songs from that era. Digging through *Broadside*, a national topical song magazine from the early 1960s, I stumbled upon an article written by Bob Cohen, a member of the New World Singers and the Director of the Mississippi Caravan of Music. The Caravan was the cultural wing of the Freedom Summer Project. Participants included Len Chandler, Bob Cohen, Judy Collins, Jim Crockett, Barbara Dane, Alix Dobkin, the Eastgate Singers (Adam and Paula Cochran, James Mason, Jim Cristy), Jim and Jean Glover, Carolyn Hester, Greg Hildebrand, Roger Johnson, Peter LaFarge, Phil Ochs, Cordell Reagon, Pete Seeger, Ricky Sherover, Gil Turner, Jackie Washington, and Don Winkelman (Cohen, 1999, pp. 182-183). All summer long, the artists traveled and performed throughout the state, staying for varied periods of time. They sang at freedom schools, community centers, and mass meetings rendering their support to Movement activists and Northern volunteers. Colorful lyrics were written and swapped with their Southern compatriots, who were the heart and soul of the struggle. Many of the compositions were published in *Broadside*. They were powerful and provocative. I was inspired to act.

I dreamed up *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (Erenrich, 1999), an intensive national project on the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement where participants could document their memories and stories in a non-commercial and uncensored format. For the next eight years, I searched for Freedom Summer volunteers, members of the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Civil Rights Movement activists, native Mississippians, journalists, topical songwriters, artists, and photographers who were part of that historic period. Locating participants and gathering information was not easy. It took months, and in some cases years, to track people down. At the time, I had never been to Mississippi and was in grammar school during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, so I could not rely on personal contacts. Busy schedules prevented the prompt arrival of materials. I was sometimes stood up and promised submissions that never came. In the end, approximately 90 people contributed to this effort.

Besides the anthology, *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (Erenrich, 1994) included a two-CD set showcasing 23 artists and 40 songs. Many of the singers-songwriters featured on the album were involved with the Mississippi Caravan of Music during the summer of 1964. Their recollections are reported here. Some of them have passed on. The ones who remain still belt out the tunes for social justice just like they did so many moons ago.

Members of the Caravan did not participate in the 2009 commemorative weekend. The 45th anniversary marking the deaths of James, Andrew, and Michael was predominantly a local event. The music, however, was always present.

I thought about the Caravan of Music and their brave Southern counterparts as I marched to the Neshoba County Courthouse on that tropical June morning. As I sang Movement songs, I celebrated the fearless warriors who brought the Mississippi caste system to its knees.

## A Note to Readers

The Mississippi Caravan of Music portrait is the outgrowth of almost 20 years of experience. It was born in 1991, with Bob Cohen's article in *Broadside* magazine and has continued through the present. During this period, I forged close relationships with many movement artists including members of the Caravan, the SNCC Freedom Singers, SNCC song leaders, Sis Cunningham, and Guy and Candie Carawan. I listened to their stories, collected testimonials, produced their concerts and CDs, attended celebrations, and hung out. I learned the history of the Mississippi civil rights struggle through their songs and narratives. Some of that history is incorporated below.

I relied heavily on the compositions submitted for the *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (Erenrich, 1999) anthology in the development of the portrait. Even though the artists' accounts have already been published, here they are cast in a new way. In the book, the singers-songwriters are an integral part of a substantive collection on the Mississippi movement, which begins with the murder of Emmett Till and concludes with the 30th anniversary of the 1964 Freedom Summer Project. Their contributions are amidst articles written by historians, veterans, volunteers, journalists, and movement associates on an array of topics. The anthology was not meant to be a scholarly undertaking. It was designed as a platform for people to chronicle their civil rights adventures without fear of censorship or revisions. There was no analysis and no theoretical framework. My intention was to capture as many first-hand accounts as possible before people passed on.

Once I enrolled in Antioch's Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program, I was interested in digging deeper, building an analytical foundation, and reflecting on the

create dangerously theme. Unlike the anthology, this dissertation examines Caravan participants as a group. The singers-songwriters are placed in an academic and historic context. I am not simply repeating what has already been published. This is the first time anyone has studied this band of artists who placed themselves in harms way to bring about a more just, egalitarian society for all of this country's citizens.

This portrait is different from the others in this dissertation. It is a narrative within a narrative, so it requires much more background information. The Caravan was the cultural arm of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, but it was not the soul. Without the rich Movement foundation laid by Highlander, the SNCC song leaders, the SNCC Freedom Singers, and the civil rights veterans, who were on the scene long before the Caravan's entry into the Magnolia State, there might not be a story to tell. The same is true for the northern trailblazers like Sis Cunningham and Pete Seeger, who directly influenced the young topical singers-songwriters. This is their account as much as it is the Caravan's. This dissertation, although featuring the group of troubadours who went south to join the chorus against segregation, places their role in the proper context.

It is essential to illuminate the preceding historical events and points, otherwise this dissertation would be no different than past distorted "Mississippi Burning" tales that captured the general public's attention through lies and deception; or the reports that depicted the White volunteers as saviors, thus mistakenly crediting the wrong sources for the magnanimous changes that occurred in Jim Crow's America.

For those readers unfamiliar with the "Mississippi Burning" terminology, it is the title of a 1988 film that angered Movement veterans because it glorified and elevated the FBI's role in breaking open the case against Klansmen who murdered James Chaney,

Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. Nothing could be further from the truth.

J. Edgar Hoover, the Director of the FBI, was no fan of the Civil Rights Movement.

Readers may also notice I cite some sources more than others. Among them are testimonials submitted for the *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (Erenrich, 1999) anthology. Here again, I am not just duplicating what is already in the public arena. They are sculpted in a new way to shed light on a topic that has never been explored. I also depended upon John Dittmer's (1995) text *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*. John is a respected historian, who taught at Tougaloo College in Mississippi from 1967 to 1979. He is revered by Julian Bond, and others, for publishing "the definitive analytical history of the Black freedom movement" (Dittmer, 1995, back cover). John is the only intellectual that has comprehensively accentuated the bottom-up leadership of the Mississippi struggle. Our paths recently crossed at SNCC's 50th Anniversary Reunion and Conference. I also saw him in Oxford, Ohio in October of 2009 at the 45th commemoration of the Freedom Summer Project. Oxford was the training site for Freedom Summer volunteers.

Many of the aforementioned issues are addressed in chapters 2 and 3 of this document. I am acknowledging them afresh here as a friendly reminder to readers so they can concentrate on the rich stories captured in the pages of this portrait opposed to fixating on academic particulars that may intrude the unconscious and interrupt the flow.

### **Highlander Folk School: The Early Years**

Our hands were tightly clasped, right over left. The *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (Erenrich, 1994) cast gracefully swayed from side to side as we sang the finale, "We Shall Overcome." Marshall Jones, a member of the SNCC Freedom Singers, led the

civil rights anthem on that steamy June night in 1994. The Freedom Singers were the prominent musical arm of the Movement. Unlike the Caravan of Music, which consisted of individual artists who crisscrossed the Magnolia State throughout the summer months of 1964, the SNCC Freedom Singers were on-the-ground Movement warriors. The fight for the nullification of the Jim Crow laws in the South was a full-time job. Marshall, whose beautiful operatic sound graced the stage on this occasion, traveled with the group from 1963 to 1967.

Other singers-songwriters played critical roles in the show. Together, their angelic harmonies filled the chapel. Overwhelmed by emotion, my eyes welled with tears as I raised my voice and joined the others:

We shall over come,  
 We shall over come,  
 We shall over come some day.  
 Oh, deep in my heart,  
 I do believe,  
 We shall over come some day.

I initially rejected James Forman's request to close the dance/theatre/music production with the hymn, which was synonymous with the Civil Rights Movement. James, who was SNCC's Executive Secretary and Director of International Affairs, attended the two previous performances, which concluded with the Phil Ochs tune, "When I'm Gone." Phil was a member of the Mississippi Caravan of Music. His songs were sprinkled throughout the 30th anniversary commemorative program. Ending shows

with “When I’m Gone” had become a tradition over the years. It was my personal tribute to the troubadour of topical music, who committed suicide on April 9, 1976:

There’s no place in this world where I’ll belong, when I’m gone,  
And I won’t know the right from the wrong, when I’m gone.  
And you won’t find me singin’ on this song, when I’m gone,  
So I guess I’ll have to do it while I’m here! (Ochs, 1968, p. 38)

Following weeks of deliberation, James convinced me to shift the song order for the remaining shows. On this particular night, he had arranged for DC Cable to tape the production, which aired throughout the summer, so concluding with the Civil Rights composition was important. Television viewers unfamiliar with the story could connect the lyrical refrain, whose history dates back to the Black Church and Labor Movement, to contemporary battles for social change. Spectators acquainted with the Mississippi narrative could reflect on days gone by. From that point forward, “We Shall Over Come” followed “When I’m Gone.”

I never truly understood the significance of James Forman’s appeal to swap tunes until I visited the Highlander Research and Education Center over Labor Day Weekend in 2007. Formerly known as the Highlander Folk School, the institution was marking its 75th Anniversary. For most of the attendees, it was a walk down memory lane. For me, it was an instructive glimpse into the past.

Highlander, launched in Monteagle, Tennessee in 1932 by Myles Horton and Don West, is a place where “average citizens can pool their knowledge, learn from history, sociology, and seek solutions to their social problems” (Dunson, 1965, p. 28). Cultural expression has been a salient component of the school’s curriculum since its earliest days. Zilphia Mae Johnson, an accomplished instrumentalist and vocalist who joined the Highlander staff in 1935, incorporated the arts into every facet of the program. The



daughter of an Arkansas mine owner, and a graduate of the College of the Ozarks, she was determined “to use her musical and dramatic abilities in some field of radical activity” (Glen, 1996, p. 43). Highlander was the perfect venue. Zilphia married Myles Horton on March 6, 1935, approximately two months after attending her first labor workshop at the adult education center (Glen, 1996). From that point forward, she was known as “the singing heart of the folk school” (Dunson, 1965, p. 28). Ralph Tefferteller, an early Highlander staff member (1934-1938) fondly remembered Zilphia and her contributions:

When people like Zilphia would get songs going on the picket lines, you could feel people’s spirits rising. Or in workshops. If ever there was a person who could invigorate and move a group of adults with musical participation, she was the prime example of an artist at work.

The walls of the old building at Highlander rang with the songs of people during those years, and with the music which she generated and was always encouraging individuals to create in their own way and to bring as contributions to the sessions that were held. She knew, and would use, anything that seemed to suit the occasion—popular music of the late 20s and early 30s, Broadway tunes, old tunes.

I’ll never forget how effectively she used the song “Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?” in little playlets to arouse the emotions of either working people or people to who she was trying to give some appreciation of what the life of the unemployed worker was like. It was just a joy to be a part of it with her and to sit in any group and to see how they would respond. She had an infectious type of presentation that enveloped you and drew you in. You weren’t on the outside as a spectator—you became wholeheartedly involved with the moment. And that was singing either one of the traditional labor songs, which spoke of the struggle of years past and had an application to today, or a new song that had been brought in by a participant in one of the workshops, which was then ingested and became a part of the collective material and would eventually appear in print as part of a little songbook.

“No More Moanin” for example, was literally put together right there in the kitchen at Highlander. People coming from wherever—factories, sharecropper country—brought a little of their lifestyles with them to workshops, and ways they had learned to communicate with each other, and singing was one of those ways.

The old songs became vehicles for carrying new messages, and singing became a unifying force. And because of those deep-rooted traditions of singing in churches and homes, it was very natural that singing should develop in the

Southeastern part of the country as a natural adjunct to the struggle to overcome inhuman situations and to deal with them in song. Preachers and workers all had this sort of experience, whether they were Blacks or Whites. (Carawan, n.d., pp. 3-4)

Zilphia is most closely identified with the song “We Shall Overcome.” In 1945, members of the striking food and tobacco workers’ union in Charleston, South Carolina changed the lyrics of the old religious spiritual “I Will Overcome” to “We Will Overcome” while walking the picket line (Glen, 1996). In 1947, when a few of the striking women attended a Highlander Workshop, they taught the latest version of the tune to the assembled group:

When Zilphia heard the new words, “we will organize” and “the Lord will see us through,” she knew it was a song with meaning for communities all across the South. She adapted it to her accordion and sang it at union meetings, community gatherings and Highlander workshops. It became a theme song at Highlander throughout the labor period of the 1940s and 1950s. (Carawan, n.d., p. 1)

Shortly thereafter, Zilphia shared the song with Pete Seeger. He slightly altered the arrangement, changing “we will overcome” to “we shall overcome.” That same year, Pete published the text in *Peoples’ Songs*, and incorporated it into his set list during concerts (Winkler, 2009). A few years later, “We Shall Overcome” became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement.

Zilphia did not live long enough to see the musical creation take hold. She died in 1956. Prior to her passing, she amassed 1,300 songs from unions, progressive organizations, traditional Appalachian culture, and the South. (Dunson, 1965). These songs played a significant role in the decades ahead. Some of the tunes, like “We Shall Overcome,” were sung during the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964.

## Highlander Folk School and the Civil Rights Movement

Approximately three years after Zilphia Horton's untimely death, Guy Carawan, a folksinger from California joined the Highlander cadre and revived the cultural program. Guy first visited the school in the summer of 1953 with encouragement from Pete Seeger (Carawan & Carawan, 2010). In 1959, after hearing one of Dr. King's orations at a local Black church in Boston, Guy was moved to call Myles Horton (Carawan & Carawan, 2010). He offered to volunteer at Highlander. Myles asked Guy what he could contribute. Guy answered that he knew some songs from the Labor Movement and he could play a guitar and banjo. Myles said "Come on down. We really miss the work that Zilphia did here" (Carawan & Carawan, 2010). Guy accepted the challenge and ushered in the next wave of political balladeers. After three months on the job, Guy felt he had something special to offer:

I had seen from my couple of years in New York, watching Pete Seeger use singing to express the feelings of people for a cause, being in the Jewish Young Folksingers with Bob DeCormier, and seeing great numbers of people singing to express their feelings together and create a sense of cohesion, that singing could be a powerful force. After being in the South for this short time, it was apparent to me that there was the potential for a great singing movement in the Negro struggle. (Dunson, 1965, p. 39)

In July of Guy's inaugural year at Highlander, two letters were dispatched to numerous communities on board the civil rights train (Dunson, 1965). A communiqué from Myles Horton announced Guy's arrival and folk-singing services, which were attainable "without regard to color, religion, or class" (Dunson, 1965, p. 38). A message from Guy was also enclosed in the mailing, which provided a short biographical sketch and his plans for the forthcoming musical agenda. It stated:

- That Highlander put out a book of songs for integration;

- That Highlander hold some workshops to train song leaders who will go back and function in their own communities and organizations;
- That Highlander put out some records of songs for integration to go with the book and to help new song leaders (and the public in general) to learn these songs;
- A festival, bringing together different kinds of Negro and White music, song and dance, both old and new, that could and would be well attended and well integrated;
- Workshops for music educators and workers in schools and churches; and
- Workshops for folklorists. (Dunson, 1965, pp. 38-39)

Guy accomplished most of these goals during the rudimentary stage of his tenure (Dunson, 1965). By the time Guy entered the scene, however, Highlander was already on the integration fast track. In 1944, the institution convened its initial interracial labor workshop. The gathering was the first in a series that disregarded segregated Southern practices and laws. In spite of fierce disapproval and hostility from local, state, and federal agents and vigilante groups, Highlander pushed on.

The adult education center was at the cutting edge of the contemporary Civil Rights Movement. In 1953, Myles professed, “We are at our best at Highlander when we are pioneering” (Glen, 1996, p. 154). Prior to the Supreme Court’s 1954 ruling on *Brown v. Board of Education*, the institution set its sights on the growing tussle for equal rights. During this period, Highlander staff facilitated two exploratory summer workshops titled “The Supreme Court Decisions and the Public Schools” (Glen, 1996). Those in attendance represented labor, religious, civic, and interracial organizations (Glen, 1996). The purpose of the get-together was “to provide leadership during the transition from a segregated to an integrated public school system in the South” (Glen, 1996, p. 155). Zilphia, Myles, and the rest of the Highlander team were well positioned for battle by the time the highest federal court unanimously decided “in the field of public education the

doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Glen, 1996, p. 157).

Highlander’s programs took off. Notables like Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Septima Clark, and Ella Baker were among the many visitors during the embryonic days of the Movement. With growing popularity, the school also captured the attention of its foes. A loud boisterous chorus denounced the adult education facility as a Communist training center and tried to shut it down. Mississippi Senator James Eastland, a staunch segregationist from Sunflower County, led the charge. The elected official, who played a pivotal role during the Freedom Summer Project of 1964, took Highlander to task. For three days in 1954, Eastland, who represented the Jenner Internal Security Committee, conducted hearings in New Orleans. “Just as Joseph McCarthy saw a Red behind every government door, Eastland, in Myles Horton’s view, saw a Red behind every Black” (Adams, 1975, p. 194). The Democratic Senator was:

Convinced that the movement to end segregation was the work of a Communist conspiracy. Eastland thought that if he could expose those who promoted racial equality as subversives he could demolish whatever influence they had in the South and block the desegregation of public schools. (Glen, 1996, pp. 209-210)

Horton won the round against Eastland, but in 1957, the institution temporarily lost its tax-exempt status (Glen, 1996). That same year, Highlander faced down a propaganda campaign spearheaded by the Georgia Commission on Education (Glen, 1996). The onslaught of negative publicity and virulent attempts to close the school continued well into the next decade and beyond.

Undeterred, the Highlander staff designed one of the most important civil rights initiatives during the latter part of the 1950s. The program, known as the Citizenship Schools, started in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. At the outset, the adult literacy

project was established to help African Americans pass the required voter registration examination administered in Southern communities. Due to its success, the Citizenship Schools spread throughout the Black Belt region, teaching tens of thousands of people to read and write, developing local leadership, building a solid movement base, and empowering an oppressed segment of the population to press for change at the ballot box. The project would eventually make its way into Mississippi under the watchful eyes of Senator James Eastland.

The year 1960 was around the corner. No one anticipated the rapid speed of the approaching freedom locomotive, not even Myles Horton. Change was on the horizon and the next generation had already left the station. Highlander was there to welcome them.

Music would play a critical part in the battle for civil rights. After a period of mourning, in 1959, the cultural banner was passed from Zilphia to Guy. Songs in Zilphia's collection, which flourished during the Depression and unionization, would become fundamental in the years ahead. For Zilphia, the arts were the lifeblood of every crusade:

Singing, poetry, literature—all these things that we think make life richer—are like the water lilies. What determines how beautiful that water lily is and how strong it is, is the rich mud at the bottom of that pond. And that's the way I think about songs that we sing. To me, what people stand for represents the roots in the mud at the bottom of the lake. There has to be some central core that holds people together before anything worthwhile comes out in the way of culture. I don't care if people do have one nationality, if they have one religion; there is something else that is essential before they can sing, and that is that they believe in something. (Carawan, n.d., p. 8)

## **The Birth of SNCC**

On Monday, February 1, 1960, four Black students enrolled at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College in Greensboro audaciously parked themselves at a Whites-only Woolworth's lunch counter. Ezell Blair, Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond refused to budge until they were served. After spending hours patiently perched on café stools, the young men vowed to return the next morning (Branch, 1988). The spontaneous deed reinvigorated civil rights movement activity.

Earlier sit-ins like the one carried out on April 22, 1944 by Pauli Murray, a Howard University Law Student, failed to capture the imagination of the nation and the press. Pauli, who joined her friends in Thompson's Washington, D.C. cafeteria grabbed a tray and slipped into the buffet line. When the stone-faced employees denied her service, she carried her empty platter to a table to coalesce with others who had been shunned (Olson, 2001).

About 50 demonstrators, most of them women, disregarded the manager's pleas to vacate the premises (Olson, 2001). They quietly perused literary publications, magazines, and textbooks as chaos mounted around them. By dinner, a directive from national headquarters ordered restaurant employees to feed the rebels (Olson, 2001). There was no fanfare, no publicity, and no further disruptions. It took 14 years for the sit-in tactic to take hold.

In stark contrast to the Pauli Murray incident, news of the February 1, 1960 protest quickly spread. Nineteen eager students joined the original four on Tuesday, February 2nd (Branch, 1988). "On Wednesday, the number swelled to 85 as the sit-in became a contagion" (Branch, 1988, p. 271). Enthusiastic novices from other North

Carolina communities and “more than 30 cities in seven states, including Nashville, Atlanta, and Montgomery” (Glen, 1996, p. 173) tested this fresh movement tactic by the end of the month. By mid-April, after countless arrests, lunch counters in 14 states were desegregated (Glen, 1996). The roughly 50,000 White and Black demonstrators that took part in the various actions in more than 100 southern communities, electrified and galvanized the next wave of Civil Rights combatants (Glen, 1996).

Taking stock of recent events, on April 1st, Highlander Folk School hosted its seventh annual college workshop (Glen, 1996). Eighty-two people attended “The New Generation Fights For Equality” integrated gathering (Glen, 1996). More than half of the participants were Black. The majority of those who turned out were student sit-in veterans from 17 universities in seven states. Supposedly, it was the first opportunity for sit-in delegates to assemble and discuss the impact and future of the Civil Rights Movement (Glen, 1996).

One topic that generated a lot of conversation during the three-day get-together included the role White students should play in future challenges (Glen, 1996). After all, Black students launched, piloted, and in most instances, were the ones laying their bodies on the line during the sit-in protests. The back and forth banter generated doubt among the assembled White students. They wondered if their support was appreciated and whether there was an appropriate place for them in the forthcoming struggle for equal rights (Glen, 1996). This subject resurfaced again and again throughout the decade. Prior to the Freedom Summer Project in 1964, a hot debate ensued at another Highlander Workshop over the inclusion of White volunteers. Throughout the weekend, other



disagreements erupted over adult participation and the prospective relationship with religious and civic organizations (Glen, 1996).

In traditional Highlander fashion, contentious deliberations melded with Movement culture. Tunes amassed by Zilphia and Guy were introduced and adapted to fit the moment. In return, the students shared a potpourri of ditties with the group. Candie Anderson, a White exchange student enrolled at Fisk University, who married Guy approximately one year after the forum, modified an old Wobbly jingle, “They Go Wild Over Me” (Glen, 1996). “Keep Your Eyes On The Prize,” “We Shall Not Be Moved,” and “This Little Light of Mine” were among the weekend’s favorites. “We Shall Over Come” was the biggest hit. Guy initially learned the song in 1952 from Frank Hamilton, a West Coast singer (Winkler, 2009). In 1959, when Guy arrived at the Folk School, he added a pulse, while adhering to Zilphia’s slower tempo (Dunson, 1965). That version stuck, and became the “unofficial theme song of the freedom struggle in the South” (Carawan & Carawan, 1963, p. 11).

A wide assortment of genres such as rock and roll, spiritual hymns, gospel, blues, calypso, folk, and top 40 classics kept the creative juices flowing. “Singing was a natural for the students. They immediately took up the songs, wrote new words, made them their own” (Carawan & Carawan, 1963, p. 5).

Nearly two weeks after the “The New Generation Fights For Equality” Highlander Workshop, sit-in leaders converged at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina and formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, otherwise known as SNCC. The conference, which fell during the Easter holiday weekend, was

engineered by Ella Baker, the Executive Director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

Miss Baker was a seasoned organizer. In 1944, as the director of branches of the NAACP, she coordinated and facilitated a series of leadership training programs around the motif “Give Light and People Will Find the Way” (Grant, 1998). “Techniques and Strategies of Minority Group Action,” “Developing a Program of Action through Branch Committees,” and “Postwar Problems and NAACP Branches” were regular subjects covered during sessions (Grant, 1998, p. 73). The preparation of indigenous, decentralized, bottom-up leadership, however, was always the overlying unifying conference theme. During Miss Baker’s tenure at the NAACP, an estimated 10 “Give Light” seminars were conducted between 1944 and 1946 (Grant, 1998).

Rosa Parks, a Montgomery, Alabama seamstress and active member in her NAACP chapter affiliate, attended one of Miss Baker’s leadership training sessions in Jacksonville, Florida in 1946 (Grant, 1998). In 1955, the seamstress took part in another workshop led by Miss Baker at the Highlander Folk School (Grant, 1998). Shortly thereafter, Rosa was arrested when she refused to relinquish her seat to a White person. Reaction to Rosa’s apprehension was swift, sparking the Montgomery bus boycott, and catapulting her into the pages of history.

By this time, Miss Baker and Rosa had cultivated a long-standing friendship. Together, the two women toured the northeastern corridor of the United States raising funds and mustering support for the boycott (Grant, 1998).

In 1960, with the outbreak of the sit-in protests, Miss Baker was on the scene again to nourish, advise, and solidify the student effort. She persuaded SCLC to

contribute \$800 toward the Easter weekend meeting and enlisted Martin Luther King, Jr. to sign off on the conference statement of purpose, which invited students to “chart new goals and achieve a more unified sense of direction for training and action in nonviolent resistance” (Grant, 1998, p. 126). Miss Baker then dispatched a follow-up message to the sit-in participants that praised their tenacious, mindful leadership and challenged them to contemplate next steps for the Civil Rights Movement. “Where do we go from here?” (Grant, 1998, p. 126) Determined to sustain momentum, Miss Baker then arranged for follow-up nonviolent training in three locations, Nashville, Tennessee; Mobile, Alabama; and Shreveport, Louisiana, for later that spring, while preparing for the Shaw gathering (Grant, 1998). When all was said and done, the Raleigh conference:

Attracted more than 120 Black college and high school students from 12 southern states and the District of Columbia, as well as a dozen southern White students, delegates from northern and border state colleges, and representatives of 13 other groups. (Glen, 1996, p. 177)

The students shared stories from the front, planned for the future, gave birth to SNCC, and sang.

Guy Carawan was at Shaw University for the historic gathering. Ella Baker had invited him to teach songs (Carawan & Carawan, 2010). Miss Baker, who was a strong proponent of the Highlander cultural process, wanted music to have a significant presence at the founding meeting (Carawan & Carawan, 2010). Guy introduced some of the tunes from the “The New Generation Fights For Equality” Highlander Workshop. He also taught “We Shall Overcome” to the enthusiastic crowd (Carawan & Carawan, 2010). Everyone stood, crossed hands, right over left, and swayed from side to side as they sang. The beautiful melody and the feelings of hope and determination, which were embedded

in the lyrics, were so awe inspiring that the song became the anthem of the early Civil Rights Movement (Carawan & Carawan, 2010).

### **Singing for Freedom Cultural Workshops**

During the summer of 1960, the Highlander Folk School launched a series of “Singing for Freedom” cultural workshops. The first workshop, which took place at the school’s headquarters in Monteagle, Tennessee, included musical ambassadors from some of the earlier civil rights campaigns, like Montgomery and Nashville (Carawan & Carawan, 2007). Topical singers-songwriters from the blossoming folk revival in the North were also present (Dunson, 1965). Collectively and creatively, they challenged the segregated Southern stronghold. Their artistic North/South alliance continued through the Freedom Summer Project of 1964 and beyond.

In addition to Highlander’s home base in Monteagle, Tennessee, subsequent gatherings occurred in Atlanta, Georgia, and Mississippi (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). Numerous festivals in the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina were also arranged under the auspices of the Newport Folk Foundation (Carawan & Carawan, 2010). The Foundation awarded Guy a small grant to organize the events. The Sea Islands’ Citizenship Schools, which conducted literacy training centered around voter registration, were in full swing by the time the festivals materialized.

I was initially introduced to the “Singing for Freedom” convocations through Guy and Candie Carawan in 1992. The Carawans authored and submitted an article about the cultural rendezvous for the forthcoming publication *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle: An Anthology of The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (Erenrich, 1999). Their exposé

titled “Carry It On: Roots of the Singing Civil Rights Movement” documented the historical evolution of the Highlander undertaking.

Soliciting the narrative from the Carawans was a natural editorial choice. Guy conducted the August, 1960 “Sing for Freedom” workshop. Candie participated. After their marriage, they carried on with the Highlander platform, in its attempt to nurture the cultural roots of the movement and disseminate the vast repertoire of freedom songs (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). Sessions encouraging composition writing, lyrical adaptations, and the fostering of song leading artistry were common themes (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). In later years, the Carawans made a conscious effort to draw upon the rich indigenous songwriting traditions of Black southern ancestors (Carawan & Carawan, 1999).

Josh Dunson, a contributing editor for *Broadside*, a national topical song magazine (1962 to 1988), and author of *Freedom In The Air: Song Movements of the 60s*, wrote extensively about the cultural wing of the emerging civil rights struggle. The 1960 Highlander workshop was spotlighted in the book:

It was under the direction of Myles Horton and Septima Clark that in August 1960 the first “Sing For Freedom” workshop was organized. Leaders and singers of the embattled Southern communities came, as well as many outstanding topical and folksingers from the North. Attending and participating in the discussions were singers and individuals who were to have an important effect upon the Freedom Movement and the nature and dissemination of its songs. Carawan led the conference and, from Nashville, fresh from their experiences, were Candie Anderson and Julius Lester. Four girls from Montgomery brought their gospel renditions of freedom songs, while two important leaders in the SCLC, the Reverends C. T. Vivian and Frederick Shuttlesworth, set the tone for and keynoted the meeting.

From the North came Gil Turner, Pete Seeger, Bill McAdoo, and Ethel Raim, and all the way from California came Wally Hille, editor of the first *People’s Song Book*. Ernie Marrs rode up from Atlanta, and Richard Chase ran his wonderful story-telling workshops. Hedy West, daughter of Don West, the sharecropper and Southern poet, sang her father’s “Anger in the Land” and

reminded the participants of the radical heritage of the Southern Appalachians that dates back to its large-scale resistance to the Confederacy. (Dunson, 1965, p. 40)

I met Josh for tea at a local Manhattan Starbucks Coffee Shop a few years back. Our paths initially crossed by way of my booking responsibilities for the Peoples' Voice Café, an all-volunteer collective that provides space to artists involved in humanitarian causes. Josh is the founder of the Illinois-based enterprise, Real People's Music. He oversees the careers of multifarious singers-songwriters. I invited several artists on his docket to perform at the Saturday night coffee house. After signing numerous contracts, I realized that Josh penned the acclaimed 1965 book, which eloquently captured the music of the era. Our conversations suddenly veered from administrative accountability to stories and experiences from back in the day. When we got together, we covered a lot of territory, including *Freedom In The Air*, *Broadside* magazine, Highlander Folk School, and the contributions of the North/South artist coalition during the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964.

### **Sing for Freedom: 1964**

On May 7 through May 10, 1964, a "Sing for Freedom" was held on the old campus of the Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia (Dunson, 1965). The workshop, jointly sponsored by groups firmly rooted in the Civil Rights Movement, including Highlander, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, summoned activists from the musical vanguard to network and share the impressive burgeoning repertoire of freedom songs (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). Guy Carawan coordinated the event with help from Andrew Young of SCLC and Bernice Reagon from SNCC (Carawan & Carawan, 1999).

Increasingly, culture acted as a powerful weapon in the struggle for liberation. By 1964, a potpourri of melodious arrangements had pervaded the country. Every tune performed a different function. Some numbers publicized the heinous repressive conditions endured by African Americans. In the southern belly of the beast, songs were used as an organizing tool. The lyrics, which were colorfully scored to suit every circumstance, elicited a range of responses: courage in the face of danger, hope to ward off despair, humor to poke fun at the ridiculous, and joy to deflect the pain. Ditties also helped youthful protesters in their recruitment efforts.

The Atlanta “Sing for Freedom” workshop provided an opportunity for the cultural avant-garde to unite, strengthening the bond first established in 1960 during the original Highlander gathering. On hand were the older culture carriers like Bessie Jones, the Georgia Sea Island Singers, and Doc Reese. Hailing from the North were the *Broadside* balladeers including Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs, and Len Chandler. Theo Bikel, who represented the Newport Folk Foundation, was present (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). Song leading emissaries from the Southern front such as Charles Sherrod, Bernice and Cordell Reagon, Betty Mae Fikes, and Sam Block were also in attendance. The balance of the group was comprised of community leaders, who withstood KKK condemnation and economic retribution for their involvement in the battle for equal rights, and student dissidents (Dunson, 1965). Every Southerner at the gathering was engaged in civil rights activity (Dunson, 1965). Josh Dunson was on the scene to document the affair:

For four days, we all ate three meals a day together in the dining room, sang and talked, traded experiences and songs, gaining new insights all the time. The song leaders from the South all received a free copy of the SNCC song book, *We Shall Overcome*, so they could bring the songs back with them for their own communities to assimilate and develop. The Atlanta “Sing for Freedom” played a great role in spreading many new songs throughout the South.

For the Northern singers, the Atlanta experience drew them into a number of close friendships with people in the freedom struggle and gave them the strong feeling that they had to be there themselves. The effect was most immediate on Len Chandler who stayed in the South an additional three weeks, joining Cordell Reagon in SNCC activity in Tennessee and Arkansas. Those weeks led to a total commitment to the movement, and to eventual participation for most of the summer in the COFO Mississippi Summer Project of 1964.

The contact with a live and functioning movement that operated in terms of its members' goals made the singers and writers down there feel right at home. The "Sing" brought together and spread the new and the old of Negro-American tradition and created a strong bond between the topical songwriter of the North and the new Negro citizen-singer of the South. (Dunson, 1965, pp. 106-107)

In spite of widespread attacks by Highlander's fiercest opponents, the school continued to carry out its programming without interruption. The institution's blatant disregard for southern Apartheid continued to exasperate vigilante groups and officials on the local, state and federal levels of government. In 1962, the group's charter was revoked and its property was confiscated (Glen, 1996).

Unshaken by the state's harsh maneuvers, Myles Horton, Highlander's co-founder, procured a certificate for a new organization, the Highlander Research and Education Center and moved to Knoxville, Tennessee. In 1971, Highlander acquired its current property outside New Market, Tennessee where it has remained for almost four decades

### ***Broadside Magazine***

In 1969 or 1970, on an autumn night in New York City, I was walking the dog in front of our apartment building when I heard the ruckus of merry-making up the block. A group of five or six young people were coming in my direction, laughing, pushing each other around, walking backward one foot in the gutter, goofing off in general. When they got in front of our building, one of the young men sat smack down in a broken chair that was there awaiting disposal by the city's sanitation engineers. It so happened that it was a chair we had thrown out, an old maple chair with its arm broken off. The kid just sat there with a discarded lamp shade on his head, pretending to be king-on-a-throne or something, while the others were expostulating, "Come on, come on, man. Let's get on!" They seemed to be going partying.



The situation interested me, and I got an idea. The dog and I made our way to the center of the little group, and I said, "Young man, do you know who else sat in that chair besides you?" Silence.

Then with a note of sarcasm he asked, "No, who?"

"Bob Dylan sat in that chair many times," I said. The group tittered, and one of them put a hand to the side of his head and made a circular motion with his finger. So for a moment I was a fruitcake. Then I pointed up and said, "See that window up there? That's the office of *Broadside* Magazine, and I'm the editor. Dylan used to come to our audition meetings and sing his songs onto our tape recorder; I transcribed them, and we put them in our magazine. We printed 28 of his earliest songs. 'Blowin' in the Wind' was one."

Then one of the fellows, after somewhat of a pause, said, "Hey, man, she's cool. I think she's tellin' the truth." The group mulled this over. Then the kid in the chair said, "Who else sat in this chair?" I said that was a big order, and I reeled off a bunch of names: Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, the Seegers, Malvina Reynolds, Janis Ian, Peter La Farge, Len Chandler, Reverend Frederick Kirkpatrick, Moe Asch, and so on.

"Did Woody Guthrie sit in that chair?" one of the young women asked. I paused a moment to catch a thought. "No," I said, "Woody Guthrie didn't. But, I have sat in the same chair Woody has. And you can touch me." The kid in the chair got up; I stuck out my arm and they all touched it. Then two of the fellows swung the chair up to their shoulders, a girl picked up the broken arm, and they all pranced off toward Broadway. Resuming their merriment with even more hilarity than before, they disappeared around the corner of the building. (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999, pp. 273-274)

Sis Cunningham, the co-founder and co-editor of *Broadside* magazine, recounted this story in *Red Dust and BroadSides* (1999), the autobiography she shared with her husband Gordon Friesen. The two Oklahomans, who were married in 1941, were not strangers to the political cultural scene (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). Decades before the birth of the publication, the couple was heavily invested in the social concerns of their era.

Prior to their 1941 sojourn to New York City, Sis joined the Red Dust Players, a theatrical ensemble comprised of worker-actors intent on performing for worker-audiences (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). The Players toured throughout Oklahoma offering free entertainment and supper (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). Shows were

scheduled predominantly during evenings and weekends. Sis's membership with the Players was brief. The group, established in 1939, was defunct a few years later. It was subjected to a communist witch-hunt. Norris Houghton, the author of *Advance of Broadway: 19,999 Miles of American Theatre*, wrote about the Oklahoma Red Dust Players' demise:

I tried to call on the Red Dust Players, but they were no more. I talked on the telephone to a young man who I was told had been connected with them, but Peter-like he thrice denied them. You see, Oklahoma's criminal syndicalism law has been freshly invoked; it has become a treasonous act to suggest to sharecroppers or tenant farmers that their lot may be bettered. The Red Dust Players' meager quarters were raided, all their scripts and material were seized; its leaders found it necessary to disband and abandon the theatrical work. (as cited in Cunningham & Friesen, 1999, p. 337)

When Sis was engaged with the Players, Gordon was busy writing for the Associated and United Press bureaus in Oklahoma City (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). The couple fell in love in 1941. It was a chance encounter. Sis attended a local meeting for the Oklahoma Committee to Defend Political Prisoners. Gordon was the group's chair (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). Their paths had briefly crossed on a previous occasion. They married, packed their belongings, and headed to Manhattan where they were welcomed by Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie.

Earlier that year, Pete, Lee Hays, and Mill Lampell organized the Almanac Singers (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). Woody and Sis rounded out the band. An assortment of secondary Almanacs were sporadically on hand to lend their voices when needed (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999).

The group rented a large dwelling in Greenwich Village. There was plenty of space for everyone. Pete occupied a room on the top floor (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). Woody resided on the second floor. Gordon and Sis had private quarters in an

undisclosed part of the house. The office and kitchen/dining area were located on the ground level. A friend of the Almanac Singers constructed a big table with twin wooden benches (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). It could accommodate 14 people. Dinner was always a festive affair:

There was hardly an evening at least at the beginning, when the benches weren't crowded with Almanacs and guests. There was gay and lively conversation, with all kinds of ideas flying back and forth. The guests changed from night to night, most of them at least, and sometimes you weren't sure as to who was who. Total strangers would come in off the street to squeeze in somewhere and silently eat a meal and be on their way, never to be seen again. (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999, p. 210)

Sunday afternoons were reserved for Hootenannies. The price of admission was 35 cents (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). Concert preparations were always a bit hectic:

All the mattresses were gathered up, forced down a narrow stairway leading from the kitchen into the basement, and spread around on the concrete floor. Early-comers dove for these mattresses and packed themselves aboard. Later arrivals had to stand up or sit on newspapers; some regulars learned to come in old coats that could be sat on without further damage. (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999, p. 210)

The Hootenannies were a staple at the Almanac House. The musical performances continued to gain popularity and wow audiences. On any given Sunday, a spectator might hear Woody singing "East Texas Red" or "Worried Man," Bess Lomax tunefully vocalizing "Another Man Done Gone," Earl Robinson skillfully playing the "Tarrier Song," or Leadbelly intensely strumming "Pick a Bale of Cotton" on his 12-string guitar (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999).

The Sunday afternoon revelry lasted until the eviction notice arrived in the midst of World War II. The Almanac Singers had a cash flow problem. When they failed to pay the rent, the city literally threw them out in the cold (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999). Shortly thereafter, the group disbanded.

Pete, Sis, and Gordon remained friends. All of them were blacklisted during the McCarthy Red Scare. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) spearheaded by Senator Joseph McCarthy, targeted subversive individuals like the members of the Almanac Singers and incendiary entities like the Highlander Folk School. After destroying many American lives, the senator and his committee were finally squelched in late 1954. He died three years later (Saunders, 2000).

Pete, Sis, and Gordon persevered. They gave birth to *Broadside* magazine in February of 1962, 20 years after the Almanacs split. Others were on the scene to help catapult the topical songwriting magazine into the national spotlight. Among them were Josh Dunson, Julius Lester, Gil Turner, Gordon's brother Ollie, and the Friesen daughters (Dunson, 1965). "The main contributors, however, were the song writers themselves, known and unknown, who flooded *Broadside* with their creations and then waited more or less patiently to see what would happen to them" (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999, p. 284).

Although I was not a subscriber, the magazine that commanded the attention of the topical songwriting world from 1962 to 1988 literally altered my life's trajectory. Three years after *Broadside's* cessation, I combed through every issue. The periodical lived in the James Madison Memorial Building in Washington, D.C. At the time, I was conducting research for a special graduate project on music of the Civil Rights Movement. The first issue immediately captured my attention:

It had five songs in it, including Bob Dylan's "Talking John Birch Society Blues." It was Bob's first appearance in print (if you can call what a mimeograph machine does *printing*). On its cover was a brief statement, drafted mainly by the third key figure in the birth of *Broadside*, Gil Turner. He was instrumental in seeing that the magazine got not only songs from the northern group but also those created virtually in the streets during Black demonstrations in southern towns and cities.

He returned from a 1962 tour of Mississippi (with the New World Singers) with the first of the latter songs to appear in *Broadside*: “Ain’t Gonna Let Segregation Turn Me Around,” “Oh Pritchett, Oh, Kelly,” and “I Ain’t Scared of Your Jail,” “Never Turn Back,” and others. (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999, p. 284)

Subsequent printings, which I read cover to cover, contained lyrics and lead sheets from Phil Ochs, Len Chandler, Peter La Farge, Malvina Reynolds, Tom Paxton, and Bob Dylan. It was *Broadside* #51, however, which impulsively and instantaneously hurled me on to extraordinary terrain. The October 20, 1964 issue included a comprehensive narrative by Bob Cohen, a member of the New World Singers and the director of the Mississippi Caravan of Music. Bob penned the story following his 1964 Freedom Summer Project tour. In his concluding remarks, he rallied the troops:

If this is beginning to sound like a recruiting message addressed to all of you reading this article and those you can reach with the “good news”—well, that’s exactly what it is. Once you decide on the amount of time you can spend, and when you can do it, contact Wendy Heyel, Caravan of Music, c/o COFO, 1017 Lynch Street, Jackson, Mississippi. She will then plan out a tour for you and expect you on the day you have specified. If you’re in the New York area and have more questions, call me at TR3-9118 or Julius Lester at OR5-8581. The struggle in Mississippi is what this great country of the United States of America is all about. It’s what the songs we sing are about. If people are jailed, beaten, murdered, and their houses and churches bombed and burned, just because they wish to sing life’s song with a straight back and a strong voice, then as long as this is happening none of us are truly free to sing out, be it in nightclubs, concert halls, or even in our own homes. (Cohen, 1999, p. 186)

Twenty-seven years after Bob’s *Broadside* exposé, I hastily volunteered. I devised an intensive national project on the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement where participants recorded their stories and songs in a non-commercial and uncensored format. I searched for survivors of that colossal undertaking. *Broadside*’s co-founder and co-editor, Sis Cunningham, generously led the charge along with Phil Ochs’ sister, Sonny, rustling up Caravan of Music partisans and convincing them to reenlist in this latest endeavor. Besides Sis and Sonny, hundreds of people supported the project, unselfishly

offering articles, testimonies, photographs, and the cherished lyrics and melodies published in *Broadside* magazine decades before. The *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle: Songs of The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* two-compact disc set was released in time to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Jim Crow challenge. The companion anthology was unveiled five years later.

Sis remained my confidant until her death on June 27, 2004. She was 95. I never met Gordon. By the time I initiated the project in 1992, he was already tucked away in a nursing home. He passed on October 15, 1996 (Cunningham & Friesen, 1999).

### **Freedom Summer: 1964**

Hey, Nelly, Nelly, come to the window,  
 Hey Nelly, Nelly, look at what I see,  
 I see White folks and colored walking side by side,  
 They're walkin' in a column that's a century wide,  
 It's still a long and a hard and a bloody ride,  
 In 1964. (Silverstein & Friedman, 1999, p. 3)

Numerous artists rallied in support of the 1964 Freedom Summer Project. One group, the New York Council of Performing Artists, served as a clearinghouse for folk singers interested in social causes. The organization was instrumental in recruiting volunteers for the Mississippi Caravan of Music (Dunson, 1965).

Another group, the Artists Civil Rights Assistance Fund, Incorporated was established out of concern for African Americans, whose civil rights were being violated on a regular basis (*Broadside*, 1964). Members included Peter, Paul, and Mary; the Chad Mitchell Trio; Joan Baez; Steve Allen; Godfrey Cambridge; Harry Belafonte; the Kingston Trio, and Mahalia Jackson. The singers-songwriters in this coterie donated one day's earnings to the philanthropic repository. The money was allocated to voter education projects (*Broadside*, 1964).

The Mississippi Caravan of Music, which is the focus of this portrait, was the most ambitious of the three. It was the cultural arm of the Freedom Summer initiative. Participating artists teamed up with COFO staff in their efforts to jam open the closed society. Over the summer, they sojourned to the Magnolia State for varying periods of time to perform, boost morale, and illuminate problems associated with the segregationist mentality, which plagued the region.

The Caravan's hands on role during the 1964 summer project did not surprise anyone. Bob Cohen, who coordinated the risky singer-songwriter enterprise, was the former roommate of Bob Parris Moses. Bob Moses, after forging a relationship with Ella Baker following the 1960 lunch counter sit-ins, ventured into Amite County, otherwise known as "the Ninth Circle of Hell" (Newfield, 1999, p. 85). After being "beaten twice and jailed thrice" (Newfield, 1999, p. 85), Bob Moses moved to Jackson. Bob Cohen mentioned his friend in the article he submitted to the *Freedom* anthology:

Bob Moses had put on my Odetta record and played the song she sang, "I'm Going Back to the Red Clay Country," over and over again. There was Odetta, a middle-class California Black woman studying to be an opera singer turning to folk music, and here was Bob, a middle-class Black man. Harvard graduate, Bible-thumping fundamentalist in the middle of Harvard Yard, turned into a Camus-reading (in the original French) existentialist, turned into one of the leaders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, planning to turn Mississippi upside down.

Bob and I shared a delight and an enthusiasm for the variety and aliveness of all cultures, as particularly experienced through their music. I had met Bob at a folk dance camp in Maine run by the politically conservative aficionados of folk dance. The campers were a strange mixture of young folkies, older WASPs, anti-communist émigrés from eastern Europe, and other unusual suspects sharing in common a love of English contra-dances and Yugoslavian circle dances with much the same passion as many young people were to bring to rock music, still only on the horizon. Bob was the only Black person in the camp but felt comfortable as he bent the knee or kicked out or followed the myriad patterns of the caller or instructor.

We felt in those days, and I still do now, that the ingesting of other people's cultures strengthened rather than weakened one's own, causing one to

define that which was universal and that which was special, feeling less isolated and more in communication with the rest of humanity. (Cohen, 1999, p. 178)

Bob traveled to Mississippi with the New World Singers (Gil Turner and Delores Dixon) and Bob Moses in 1963 to conduct a freedom songs workshop in Edwards (Cohen, 1999). He was unaware at the time that he would spearhead the Caravan venture approximately one year later. Prior to that pivotal moment in history, Bob and the New World Singers were Highlander guests, raised money for SNCC, and were Gerde's Folk City regulars:

Every night we were on stage Delores (a Black music teacher and singer) would do a stirring version of the post-Civil War freedom song, "No More Auction Block for Me—Many Thousand Gone." Dylan took a liking to her and the song she sang. Pretty soon he called us down to Gerde's rat-infested cellar to hear his "Blowin' in the Wind," which was based on the "Auction Block" tune. In those days Bob (like Woody Guthrie before him) based the tunes for his songs on folk tunes (many Irish folk songs, etc.). "Blowin" along with "We Shall Overcome" and Gil Turner's "Carry It On" (written after the bombing of the Black church in Birmingham, Alabama, resulting in the death of four young girls) became anthems of the Civil Rights Movement.

Our group was the first to record "Blowin" for Moses Asch on Broadside Records (on which Blind Boy Grunt, A.K.A. Dylan, appears along with Happy Traum, who was soon to join our group). We had all been eager participants and contributors to the topical song movement of which *Broadside* magazine was the organizing force. Many an afternoon was spent listening to Phil Ochs, Dylan, Tom Paxton and others sing their latest ripped right out of that morning's headlines. With all our dedication to SNCC it was natural for us to say yes when Bob suggested we go down to give a workshop and "teach-back" the songs that had originally come from the Southern Black culture—the songs of faith with the double entendre of freedom were now being put into use again as the Movement grew. (Cohen, 1999, pp. 180-181)

As director of the Caravan of Music, Bob's job throughout the summer of 1964 was to coordinate logistics for the visiting artists, and to sing. He and his wife Susan were based in the Jackson office where a telephone, map, and calendar were his primary tools (Cohen, 1999). Upon entry into the state, Bob spent a few hours with each singer, orienting him/her to "the unreality of Mississippi—an almost impossible but necessary



effort” (Cohen, 1999, p. 185). Then he charted their tour and dispatched them throughout the state (Cohen, 1999). Everyone traveled in groups. It was safer.

I met Bob in the fall of 1996. I invited him to participate in the *Long Walk To Freedom Reunion Concert*, which featured singers-songwriters from the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. The event was held in Bethesda, Maryland. The night was magical and some of these folks had not seen each other since their days with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee more than 30 years before. The next generation was also there, too young to have participated in the struggle, but old enough to carry the torch for those who have passed on. They gathered to share their melodies, stories, and experiences of the past. They celebrated their victories and harmoniously conveyed their hopes for the future.

Julian Bond, one of the early SNCC pioneers, who served as Communication Director during the Freedom Summer Project of 1964, was the Master of Ceremonies. Following the event, he underscored the transformational power of freedom songs in liner notes penned for the *Long Walk To Freedom Reunion Concert* CD:

Almost everyone in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s sang. Not all were singers, but everyone sang. We sang in churches at mass meetings, on picket lines, in jails and prisons, and even when we were off duty—in Freedom Houses, in roadhouses and after-hours bars, in hamburger stands, and in our cars. Some sang alone, but most in groups of three or more—frequently gospel and spirituals from the church, popular songs from the radio and always, the Freedom Songs that came from each of these sources.

The Movement taught us the Freedom Songs; some we wrote ourselves, and in turn, the Freedom Songs made the Movement.

The Movement was, above all, a singing movement, not at all unusual for a movement that was made by Southern Black people.

Like all Southerners, Black Southerners are storytellers, and these songs told stories. They told of people bound in jail and of determined eyes kept on a distant and elusive prize, and of people holding on. Some sang of the Movement’s dark side—murder and mayhem. Some were meant to evoke laughter. Some literally rocked the church. All were meant to instill courage and

stiffen determination. In their descriptions, these songs served as musical newspapers, reporting the day's events to an evening crowd.

Some served as inspirational hymns. Their song leaders were Movement cheerleaders, summoning spirit and celebrating victories small and large. And they allowed a fearful and frightened people, squeezed together in a tiny church encircled by hostile policemen or walking slowly toward a county courthouse surrounded by dead Confederate statues and live Confederate sympathizers, to overcome fear and fright. You can often say in song words you can't—or shouldn't—say in speech, and these songs give permission for bold thought, which give sanction to bold action.

It has been almost 40 years since I first heard “We Shall Overcome” or “I’m Gonna Sit At The Welcome Table” or “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round.” But when the people we used to call the band of brothers and sisters and the circle of trust get together—and get together we continually do—we cannot gather without song. Song meant everything to us then. Songs and singing bound us together in shared experience, as chains could never have done. Voices raised together in struggle mean everything to me—to us—then and still mean everything now.

As you listen, you’ll find you can’t resist—open your ears, mouth and heart, throw your head back, close your eyes, and SING! (Bond, 1997)

## **Oxford, Ohio**

On October 9, 2009, I headed to Oxford, Ohio to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. It was my second visit to the northwestern corner of Butler County, where Project volunteers prepared for battle more than four decades earlier.

In June 1964, hundreds of predominantly White, affluent university students descended upon the Western College for Women, a four-year liberal arts institution, for two consecutive weeklong orientations. The first session earmarked for voter registration, transpired on June 14th (Bond, 1999). Throughout the training, volunteers were inundated with facts about the Magnolia State’s Closed Society. They were coached in the Movement’s nonviolent protocol and soberly listened as countless civil rights veterans emphatically illuminated the pending danger awaiting them in Mississippi. Among the pragmatists was SNCC’s Executive Secretary, James Forman,

who warned, “I may be killed, you may be killed, the whole staff may go” (Cagin & Dray, 1991, p. 30). John Doar, the Deputy Chief of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department, also cautioned the assembled altruists not to expect protection from federal authorities (Cagin & Dray, 1991).

In between the intense, somber classes, lectures, and simulations, students and staff alleviated anxiety by engaging in lively recreational games like volleyball and soccer. Evenings were relegated to freedom singing (Cagin & Dray, 1991). By week’s end, the first volunteer brigade journeyed south. “It was, as one student wrote, ‘a strange [combination] of children headed for summer camp and soldiers going off to war’” (Dittmer, 1995, p. 246).

Andrew Goodman was part of the first volunteer contingent. On Saturday, June 20th, he left Oxford with Michael Schwerner and James Chaney. The three civil rights workers were murdered the next day. Their bodies were not discovered until August 4th, but everyone knew they were dead.

The second group of recruits had already assembled at the college when news of the disappearance reached the COFO trainers. Those gathered had been assigned to teach in the freedom schools. The tone of the orientation was glum. Bob Cohen, the Director of the Caravan of Music, vividly captured the scene in his piece for the *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (Erenrich, 1999) anthology:

We sat in the hot humid auditorium in the Oxford State College for Women, Oxford, Ohio. Robert Parris Moses, Bob to all of us, and my former roommate, stood in front of us and said: “They are dead, they have been murdered.” For a couple of days we had heard rumors that Mickey Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andy Goodman were missing. They had gone to Philadelphia, Mississippi, to investigate a church burning and reported violence to civil rights workers there.

We were the second wave of northern volunteers in the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964. We had learned how to curl up in the fetal position

and take the batons of cops, as well as how to ignore the verbal abuse. We had held hands and swayed as we sang “We Shall Overcome,” and we had seen a weary, red-eyed, very thin Rita Schwerner walking around the campus.

The newspapers reported the mysterious disappearance of the three civil rights workers—two of whom had trained in the very rooms we trained in and sat in the seats we were sitting in and sang the songs we were singing. But for Bob Moses there was no mystery. He knew from three previous years’ experience in the labyrinth of that tropical state that the three had been killed. And in his soft, almost disappearing voice and with his large brown eyes, he assured us that is what had happened, even though there was no clue as to what had happened.

Then he said we should all think long and hard about what we were getting into. I remembered what my high school classmate Steve Max, son of Daily Worker satirist Alan Max, had said to me when I told him where Susan and I were going. “Oh,” he said, puffing on his pipe and speaking out of the side of his mouth, “so you’re going to be cannon fodder for the Movement.” As Susan was pregnant with our first born. I did not find his observation amusing but attributed it to his rather taciturn nature. Now I sat sweating with fear; the taste of spaghetti sauce in my throat, wondering what others around us were thinking, were feeling. There was silence, not even a murmur from the two hundred or so people, trainees in nonviolence.

Then suddenly, from way back in the large college auditorium, came a woman’s rich alto voice singing slow and mournful a true song of sorrow:

They say that freedom is a constant struggle  
They say that freedom is a constant struggle  
They say that freedom is a constant struggle  
Oh Lord, we’ve struggled so long  
We must be free, we must be free.

Some of us craned our necks, looking backwards, to see who it was, but the auditorium was packed. The minor-mode melody and the slowness of its tempo entered our viscera, and we all started to sing with an almost detached, floating, goading voice. The form made it easy to catch on to—a line repeated three times and then a prayerful fourth line. She sang more verses by only changing one word. Pete Seeger used to call this a “zipper” type song: “...a constant walking . . . a constant talking . . . a constant weeping . . . a constant singing.” By the end of the meeting no one had turned back. We were determined to go down to the “red clay country.” (Cohen, 1999, pp. 177-178)

The landscape had drastically changed by the time I set foot in Butler County.

First and foremost, the Western College for Women was purchased by Miami University in 1974. The academy, which had encountered financial difficulties, could not sustain itself. As a result, the “Unity and Change: Then and Now Reunion and Conference” commenced in a different site.

Another noticeable permutation was the mood of the amassed civil rights veterans. Instead of angst there was joy. In lieu of accessorizing spirited novices for combat, the congregated band of brothers and sisters were planning their 50th anniversary homecoming, which ensued at Shaw University in the spring of 2010.

The weekend was jam-packed with panel discussions, films, freedom songs, and idle chitchat. My presentation, “Documenting the Songs of Popular Movements,” explored the ethical responsibilities associated with chronicling history. Issues covered included, accountability, accuracy, intellectual property, and preservation. TV Reed, an English professor at Washington State University, lectured on the role of music in the freedom struggle, and Allan Winkler, who is on faculty in the Department of History at Miami University, rounded out the 70-minute segment with an exposé on civil rights tunes. The audience, comprised of students, academics, pundits, and a few veterans, politely and attentively listened to the discourse. I enjoyed the session, but I would have preferred that conference organizers ask cultural activists like Guy and Candie Carawan or Margaret Block, who were in attendance, to talk about their experiences. Margaret is a poet and song leader from Cleveland, Mississippi. Her brother Sam, who passed away in 2000, was a legendary Movement warrior. Invitations were not extended to members of the Caravan of Music.

On Sunday, after brunch, we boarded buses and trekked to the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport. We hugged and kissed each other goodbye, hopped on planes, and went home.

## **I'm On My Way and I Won't Turn Back**

Every member of the Caravan of Music meticulously prepped for his/her pilgrimage to the Magnolia State. Some of the singers-songwriters documented this phase of their journey. Len Chandler was among them.

Len, a prolific African American topical composer, attended the Atlanta “Sing For Freedom” in May of 1964 and was an early *Broadside* contributor. One of his original movement tunes was “Move On Over Or We'll Move On Over You.” A verse from the song is below:

Mine eyes have seen injustice in each city town and state  
The jails are filled with Black men  
And the courts are White with hate  
With every bid for justice someone whispers to us wait  
But the Movement's moving on  
Move on over or we'll move on over you  
Move on over or we'll move on over you  
Move on over or we'll move on over you  
For the Movement's moving on. (Chandler, 1999, p. 334)

Len missed the COFO training in Oxford due to a scheduling conflict. He spent a bit of time in the South after the Atlanta “Sing.” This was his first trip to Mississippi, however, and he traveled solo:

I had missed the SNCC field workers' orientation in Oxford, because I was held over for a week with Hoyt Axton at a gig at a coffee house called the Buddhi, in Oklahoma City. (Hoyt had a hit song called “Greenback Dollar.”) I figured the money I'd make would cover expenses for much of the summer. On my last day in Oklahoma, not only did the club owner stiff me for my week's wages, but a local eatery refused to serve me. As I walked out the door, I saw a huge sign in the sky. It said Liberty. The sign was an advertisement for a bank. The irony helped steel my resolve to win some liberty. I was ready for Mississippi. (Chandler, 1999, p. 208)

Len spent the entire summer driving in and out of the Black Belt. Unlike other Caravan of Music participants, who devoted a short spell to the Freedom Summer Project, he was in for the long haul:

I don't know how many times I went back and forth to Mississippi that summer. After the first time, I always drove. I had a blue Hillman Minx convertible, seven or eight years old. When I was getting ready to leave New York, a SNCC worker named Alma Bosley gave me a five-pound jar of peanut butter to take on the trip because, after you got into the South, it was really dangerous to stop to get anything to eat. We called it the "backup peanut butter and bread." That jar of peanut butter in a brown paper bag went back and forth across the country many times with many people. Somehow it got broken and when it was given to the next group going south they said, "Are you crazy? We're not going to eat this." We told them, "Take it anyway. Take it for good luck. Take it because it's a tradition." They took it. (Chandler, 1999, p. 211)

Unlike Len, whose movement activity totally consumed his life, Judy Collins signed on to the Mississippi Summer Project for a short tour after encouragement from ethnomusicologist, Henrietta Yurchenko. Judy also reflected upon her entry into the Magnolia State. She arrived on Sunday August 1st, three days before the decomposing bodies of James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman were found at the bottom of an earthen dam:

We arrived in Jackson on the plane at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, after flying in from Newark Airport. There was a purple and deep red sunset that nearly covered the sky of Jackson like a cloak of blood; the light of the sun passed through it to the wet pavements and the thick green grass. The humidity was high. Walking in the air was a little like swimming. Bob and Sue Cohen picked us up at the airport. We drove to the COFO office in their little red car. Driving along, Bob began to talk about what was going on, and the seepage of understanding and fear soaked into my mind. He started with the basic rules about traveling, (never travel integrated, for instance,) no mingling with Negroes in most public spots, with the exception of one or two spots in Jackson that are integrated restaurants. All the instructions given in the legal guide were restated. Barbara Dane was with me, I neglected to mention. Those first couple of days in Jackson were made really better by her being there with me. When I first planned to go, I didn't know who would be going along; finding she was going on Saturday, August 1, I decided to go with her, saving the people at the office in Jackson a trip to the airport and

providing some great company for the short, but somehow long, trip to Jackson. (Collins, 1999, p. 201)

Barbara Dane was one of the older members of the group. She is a blues and jazz singer, who had lent her voice to the cause of racial and economic justice since 1945. As soon as she learned of the Caravan of Music's recruitment effort, she enlisted:

When, in 1964, I heard about a caravan of singers being organized to support the literacy and voting rights campaigns of the Freedom Summer in Mississippi, I began to prepare myself a way for the journey by talking about it at every opportunity and in every performance.

To raise money for the trip, I started selling off household and personal items through signs on local bulletin boards, and I'm sure some people bought more things than they needed. I went to buy a suitcase and when I told the man in the store what it was for he wouldn't let me pay. A wonderful artist named Earl Newman created a handsome silk-screen portrait of me singing and gave me a box-full to sell as a fund raiser.

I walked up and down Telegraph Avenue with a canister that said "Send a girl to jail!" (meaning me). People actually put money in it!

A dear friend in Venice Beach invited my children to stay with her for the summer as her contribution to the struggle. In short, it seemed like nearly everyone felt proud to know someone who was actually planning to go to Mississippi to help in any way at all, and wanted through that contact to somehow send a part of themselves. (Dane, 1999, p. 223)

SNCC workers met us at the plane in Jackson and took us immediately to headquarters. There they briefed us on the frightening situation surrounding the kidnapping of the three volunteers, details of the ongoing search, as well as what security measures we should follow. Clearly, whatever had happened to the three had been done to try to intimidate the rest of the volunteers in the hopes they'd all go home. But one of the key songs on everyone's lips was "We'll Never Turn Back." (Dane, 1999, p. 223)

Gil Turner drafted Alix Dobkin for the Southern mission. It did not take much convincing. Gil, one of *Broadside's* editors and a member of the New World Singers, was a mentor to many of the artists involved in the burgeoning folk revival. Gil's original tour to the Magnolia State with the New World Singers was in August 1961 (Dunson, 1965). The group was the first from the North to actively take part in the freedom movement in Mississippi. When they returned to New York City, the New



World Singers introduced budding topical singers-songwriters like Alix, to the movement repertoire at Hootenannies and SNCC benefit concerts (Dunson, 1965). Alix credited Gil in her written testimony:

Having spent much of my 24 years in fear of “missing something,” there was no way for me to pass up an invitation to join the Folk Music Caravan in 1964 for the Mississippi “Freedom Summer.” Besides that, my politically activist Communist parents had named me after a heroic uncle killed fighting Franco in Spain, and had trained me to be a political troublemaker. Some of my folkie friends from Greenwich Village, namely Gil Turner and Len Chandler as I recall, recruited me along with other Gaslight Café regulars like Peter LaFarge, Tom Paxton, Eric Andersen and Carolyn Hester. And of course Pete Seeger would be there, as he was on behalf of every cause worth singing for. (Dobkin, 1999, p. 195)

Gil Turner and Carolyn Hester drove to Mississippi in August, a few days after the bodies of the three civil rights workers were discovered. Gil originally contacted Carolyn in the spring of 1964 to request her participation. She agreed. Determined not to worry her parents, however, Carolyn, never disclosed her travel plans:

My family back home in Texas wasn’t going to know the truth concerning my whereabouts that week. They would probably think that I was out on the concert trail as usual. My lawyer father and especially my civil-servant mother would have liked to have been with us—my mother has been a freedom rider her life long. But I didn’t want them to know the specifics—I didn’t want them to waste time worrying about “what might happen.” Also, in a very practical sense, this was not a moment when I was even going to consider turning back. (Hester, 1999, p. 190)

Carolyn and Gil packed their vehicle and left New York City around midnight. Their future was uncertain:

One small suitcase each, one guitar each, some cash, a few sandwiches and apples. We stopped for water, coffee, soft drinks, and restrooms along the way. Otherwise, we drove nonstop, straight through to Jackson. Certain moments stand out in memory—driving past the Lincoln Memorial, all lit up. Gil let me drive that early morning out of Washington, along the Appalachians past Charlottesville. Gil slept about two hours in two days—I slept about four. (Hester, 1999, p. 191)

## A Southern Welcome

Here's to the State of Mississippi,  
 For Underneath her borders the Devil draws no line,  
 If you drag her muddy rivers nameless bodies you will find,  
 And the fat trees of the forest hid a thousand crimes,  
 And the calendar is lying when it reads the present time,  
 And here's to the land you've torn out the heart of,  
 Mississippi, find yourself another country to be part of. (Ochs, 1999, p. 7)

Mississippi officials geared up for the onslaught of visitors prior to the start of the Freedom Summer Project in 1964. In Jackson, the state capital, the police force was increased from 390 to 450 (Bond, 1999). City administrators added two horses, six dogs, and 200 new shotguns to the repository. They amassed tear gas canisters and issued a mask to every policeman to protect him from noxious fumes. Three canvas-topped troop transporters, two half-ton searchlight vehicles, and three colossal trailer trucks were acquired to haul protesters to two vast detention sites erected at the state fairgrounds (Bond, 1999). Lastly, a 13,000-pound armored personnel carrier, "Thompson's Tank," named for the incumbent mayor, was assembled to the city's archetype at a dollar a pound (Bond, 1999).

The White citizenry of Mississippi was also prepared to extend a warm welcome to the summer guests. Some members of the Caravan of Music, like Len Chandler, received a dose of southern hospitality upon entry into the state:

Pop—pop—pop—pop—pop. That didn't surprise me; after all it was the Fourth of July and my first day in Vicksburg, so I thought they were trying to freak me out with some firecrackers. If they were joking they were doing a good job, diving off the porch and going flat on the floor. But when the 15-year-old who had insisted on carrying my guitar said, "You better get your ass down Mr.," I hit the floor just in time to hear the next volley punch several small holes in the wall behind my chair. After lying in the dark in silence for a long time, someone said, "Welcome to Mississippi." (Chandler, 1999, p. 208)

Hotel concierges warmly greeted Carolyn Hester and Alix Dobkin upon their arrival in Jackson. Carolyn was born in the South and was no stranger to the segregationist mindset. Alix, on the other hand, was experiencing Black Belt racism for the first time. Carolyn and Alix shared hotel accommodations on their initial night in the state:

Late in the afternoon of our arrival, Alix, Gil, and I went to eat dinner, and when we returned to the third floor hotel rooms, we had a message waiting. It hadn't been there when we'd left an hour or so before. To our astonishment, on the doors of our rooms was scrawled KKK in huge, black letters. "My guitar," I thought—I hoped my guitar was OK. After carefully opening our doors we found all the instruments and our other belongings intact.

We were in shock. The evening newspapers and the TV news were full of items concerning the impact of the voter registration on the locals. We left a wake-up call with the operator for 6 a.m. I was exhausted but frightened that we already had been singled out as civil rights workers. I lay there wondering if I would be able to sleep in Mississippi at all.

The next morning, I jumped when the wake-up call came but realized thankfully that I had fallen asleep after all. Cancel that comforting thought—the voice on the other end of the line said, "OK, nigger lover, time to get up." I hung up quickly, told Alix, and we dressed immediately, fearing that an unfriendly knock on the door would soon follow. Not only had our operator scared the wits out of us, but it was only 5:30 a.m. We woke Gil anyway and made a hasty exit, looking neither right nor left. (Hester, 1999, p. 191)

## Concerts

It isn't nice to block the doorway,  
It isn't nice to go to jail,  
There are nicer ways to do it,  
But the nice ways always fail.  
It isn't nice, it isn't nice  
You told us once, you told us twice,  
But if that's freedom's price,  
We don't mind . . . (Reynolds, 1999, p. 63)

In November, 1963, Robert Honeysucker, a music major at Tougaloo, a private historically Black liberal arts institution in Jackson, and Nicolas Bosanquet, a White Cambridge alumnus studying in the United States, purchased tickets to a Royal

Philharmonic Orchestra of London concert, which had been booked at a local Mississippi venue (Dittmer, 1995). The night of the performance, they were promptly arrested upon entering the site.

Two weeks later, three Tougaloo students unsuccessfully attempted to buy tickets for the Original Hootenanny USA troupe show at the Jackson auditorium (Dittmer, 1995). The outraged university community contacted the entertainers and convinced them to cancel the performance. Instead, the Hootenanny group presented at Tougaloo for free (Dittmer, 1995).

These events led to the creation of the “Tougaloo Cultural and Artistic Committee,” and sparked a major letter-writing campaign (Dittmer, 1995). Well-known artists and celebrities contacted by the organization were asked to stand with the movement by refusing to stage productions at Whites-only or racially segregated public events in Jackson. Most artists complied with the exception of Holiday on Ice (Dittmer, 1995).

In the spring of 1964, folksinger Joan Baez appeared at the Tougaloo chapel (Dittmer, 1995). In spite of threats of expulsion by Mississippi college administrators, White students occupied the majority of seats. During the finale, they joined hands with their Black counterparts and sang “We Shall Overcome” (Dittmer, 1995).

Incremental change was on the rise in Mississippi. By the time the Caravan of Music entered the scene, integrated concerts were spreading throughout the region. Local Whites turned out to hear Julius Lester, Len Chandler, and Cordell Reagon when they performed on the Gulf coast. In McComb, two White college students attended a Pete Seeger event:

When Pete Seeger sang in McComb, two White college students came to hear him. Several days later they had dinner with some of the civil rights workers. Soon afterward when Pete sang in Jackson four students from Ole Miss attended. They, too, were so impressed that they showed up a few days later in the Jackson Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) office, expressing interest in the freedom schools. All this, of course, took considerable courage on the part of these White local youths. One of the main aims of the Citizens Councils and their ilk is to intimidate and terrorize local Whites so that they will suppress any decent instincts and remain immobilized. You might say that the above was another example of the power of music! (Cohen, 1999, p. 185)

Besides integrated concerts, members of the Caravan of Music sang to support the embattled warriors. Judy Collins recalled joining a couple hundred people at a freedom house staff party:

All of us went to the staff party at the freedom house. They don't very often get out of the routine of work and eating and sleep, and so it was very festive for everyone. About 200 people were there. The food, (hot dogs, potato salad) was gone in five minutes and the singing started, in the backyard, with people standing and sprawling on the lawn. Barbara sang the new song, "It Isn't Nice," a rock-and-roll song, with her melody and Malvina Reynolds's words, and the place really rocked. They are so thirsty for music. It was so great, singing, with the sweat just pouring off, and the people just singing out with all their might. That's one thing you see right away; just start a song, and everyone is right there, singing out. The evening finished with all of us singing "We Shall Overcome," and you know, even though you know it is true all the time, when you sing it together, there is something that happens that makes you just as sure as you live that it is going to happen, and happen when you will see it happen. It was very beautiful.

It was after I sang that Heidi came up to me, and something special happened there in the Mississippi heat, in the night. Sometimes I wonder in spite of my convictions, if what I sing really means something to people. And what she said removed any doubts I might have ever had. She said, "Did you ever sing at City College?" I said yes. She said, "I came into the foyer the afternoon you were singing; your back was to me. That's why I didn't know who you were right away. You sang a song—that one you sang tonight about Medgar Evers. It was because of hearing that song at the concert that I decided to come to Mississippi." She was crying. (Collins, 1999, p. 203)

### **Freedom Schools**

And they had a bunch of Africans  
 And they sold them to the Americans  
 They sold them to the Americans.  
 They bought those folks. Just think of that

To plow the fields and feed the cat  
 They called them slaves. What d'ya think of that?  
 And all they said was yessuh and no, suh  
 Please, suh and thank you, suh.  
 To everything they said yessuh.  
 Five ones are five  
 Five twos are ten  
 Five threes are fifteen  
 Five fours are twenty  
 Five fives are twenty five  
 Six fives are thirty  
 Seven fives are thirty five  
 Eight fives are forty  
 So now we're fighting one more war  
 To make us free for evermore  
 Free for evermore  
 'Cause we don't wanna say yes, sir and no, sir  
 Please, sir and thank you sir  
 We don't want to say yes, sir. (Landrón, 1999, pp. 140-141)

After the Supreme Court unanimously voted to strike down segregation in the public schools on May 17, 1954, Mississippi Senator James Eastland positioned himself for battle. "The South will not abide by nor obey this legislative decision of a political court. . . . We will take whatever steps are necessary to retain segregation in education. . . . We are about to embark on a great crusade to restore Americanism" (Dittmer, 1995, p. 37).

Through the early 1960s, the Senator from the Magnolia State managed to elude the mandate. Mississippi's academic institutions remained separate and unequal. Based on the appropriation of resources, Black children did not have a chance.

The state's allocation to White schools was disproportionately larger: four times greater than to its Black equivalent. Disparities were considerably higher in rural districts (Dittmer, 1995). On the average, Black students only completed six years of education compared to their White counterparts who finished the 11th grade (Dittmer, 1995).

Limited classroom materials, under experienced teachers, and shoddy content contributed to the repressive environment.

Prior to the Summer Project of 1964, movement veterans took matters into their own hands. They created a freedom school program and curriculum that turned the Mississippi educational system on its head. Myles Horton of the Highlander Center; Septima Clark, a former teacher and SCLC staff member; Norma Becker, a New York educator and United Federation of Teachers activist; Noel Day, who developed a citizenship curriculum in question and answer format; and Staughton Lynd, who authored *Guide To Negro History* (as cited in Chilcoat & Ligon, 1999), were delegated the cumbersome task of planning and cultivating the project (Cobb, 1999). Staughton assumed the directorship role once the freedom school model was established.

Besides fleshing out curriculum content and logistics, the role of the teacher had to be reconciled. Educator Florence Howe, a Jackson Freedom School instructor, underscored her concerns:

The teacher is not to be an omnipotent, aristocratic dictator, a substitute for the domineering parent or the paternalistic state. He is not to stand before rows of students, simply pouring pre-digested, pre-censored information into their brains. The Freedom School teacher is, in fact, to be present not simply to teach, but rather to *learn with* the students. (Dittmer, 1995, p. 258)

When all was said and done, a Highlander model was adopted. Then the arduous job of implementation fell back to on the ground COFO organizers, like Charlie Cobb, who conceptualized the freedom school alternative.

By the time the Caravan of Music arrived, freedom schools throughout the state were operating. Bob Cohen described the overall Caravan freedom school experience in his original *Broadside* article:

A typical Caravan day would begin with the singers participating in a class on Negro history at the freedom school. They showed that freedom songs were sung back in the days of slavery—and how some songs even blueprinted the way to freedom on the underground railroad. The singers demonstrated the important contribution of Negro music in every aspect of American musical and cultural history. For children who have been educated—or rather brainwashed—by the public school system to accept the myth of their own inferiority, this was an exhilarating revelation. For the majority of adults, as well as children, it was the first time they had heard of such great musical artists as Leadbelly and Big Billy Broonzy. For many the music they had learned to be ashamed of was given new stature by the visiting musicians.

Completing a program at one freedom school, the Caravan group would travel on to another, usually a trip of one or two hours. There they would hold a workshop informally with the students in the afternoon. These workshops generally wound up with whatever the singers and children were mutually most interested in—anything from folk dancing to African rounds to English ballads to learning the guitar chords for “Skip To My Lou.” (Cohen, 1999, pp. 183-185)

Approximately 2,000 students enrolled in some 40 schools in the face of White opposition (Cobb, 1999). Black ministers welcomed movement personnel and students in spite of being threatened with violence by the local power elite. Black families housed volunteer teachers undeterred by the warnings. The consequences were dire in some cases, like McComb where a bomb flattened a church, which harbored a freedom school (Dittmer, 1995). Determined COFO staff, Freedom Summer recruits, and students kept right on learning. Seventy-five students attended class on the lawn outside the smoky building (Dittmer, 1995).

### **Voter Registration**

You've long been on the open road,  
 You've been sleeping in the rain,  
 From the dirt of words and the mud of cells your clothes are smeared and stained,  
 But the dirty words, the muddy cells will soon be judged insane,  
 So only stop and rest yourself till you are off again.  
 Then take off your thirsty boots and stay for a while,  
 Your feet are hot and weary from a dusty mile,  
 And maybe I can make you laugh,  
 Maybe if I try,



Just lookin' for the evenin' and the mornin' in your eyes. (Andersen, 1999, p. 283)

On September 25, 1961, Herbert Lee was shot in the brain with a .38 caliber revolver (Newfield, 1999). E. H. Hurst, a member of the Mississippi state legislature, executed the 52-year-old father of nine from Amite County because he attended voter education classes and volunteered to register at the Liberty County Courthouse. The fatal blow occurred around noon (Newfield, 1999). A dozen witnesses watched as Herbert fell out of the cab of his pick-up truck into the gutter. For two hours, his insect infested lifeless body lay in a pool of blood. It was another case of state sanctioned violence against Mississippi's Black residents. The coroner's jury ruled in favor of E. H. Hurst, declaring the incident a matter of self-defense (Newfield, 1999).

Traumatized, but undeterred by the fatal assault, movement veterans continued to push their agenda forward. During the summer of 1962 and the spring of 1963, Bernice Robinson a seasoned teacher with Highlander's Sea Island Citizenship Schools, directed a series of voter education workshops with SNCC field secretaries and local Mississippi leaders in Jackson, Edwards, Greenwood, and Ruleville (Glen, 1996).

The voter registration sessions and campaign climaxed in the fall of 1963, when a symbolic mock election was held to dispute the myth perpetuated by White segregationists concerning Black apathy. Over 80,000 Mississippi Blacks chose their candidates and cast their ballots in the "freedom vote" offensive (Glen, 1996). Due to the success of the "freedom vote," COFO staff hammered out their design for the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964.

The voter registration drive was one of the signature programs of the 1964 project. Members of the Caravan of Music did not directly participate in the door-to-door

canvassing. Instead, they raised their voices in song to provide moral support and spiritual sustenance to their movement brothers and sisters who spent their days trudging on the hot dusty dirt roads of Mississippi. Through their music and informal conversations, the artists also rallied the local troops and encouraged involvement in the democratic process. Alix Dobkin provided a synopsis of her backcountry tour with Carolyn Hester:

Carolyn and I began our backwoods tour, singing for meetings and rallies, visiting families in one community after another who treated us to spectacular meals consisting of endless courses of home cooked, crispy fried chicken and ham, luscious mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, biscuits, gravy, corn, black-eyed peas, greens and beans cooked in lots of salt pork, and unfamiliar chitterlings and okra which I sampled and praised politely, coffee with evaporated milk, pies, cookies, jello, fruit and much more. Were we quite sure that we didn't want another helping? My stomach was completely full, but my mouth wanted to eat that southern food forever, and I've been a fan ever since.

Our week was spent driving many miles on two-lane highways and dirt roads, going from churches to schools, from simple, comfortable houses on the outskirts of small towns to isolated, run-down wooden shacks stuck way out in a lonely field. We talked with people about the importance of voting, and how their vote would make a difference. I remember standing in front of a mailbox listening to one resolute, old woman, her eyes glittering as she declared that nothing could keep her from exercising the right to vote on election day. Then she turned and made her painstaking way down the narrow, potholed road, leaning on a cane for support. She was awe-inspiring, like Fannie Lou Hamer was awe-inspiring.

But some people were reluctant to register. We understood why and asked them to think about it and contact a worker if they changed their minds, wanted to talk, or needed a lift to the polls. Children sat quietly attentive or peeked out from around a doorway or their mother's legs. Even though we must have looked strange to them, although I can't now picture what we looked like then or what we wore, and even if they were hesitant about our purpose, everyone treated us kindly and cordially. We spent the days exchanging many handshakes and conducting many hunkered-down conversations with barefoot children, each a radiant jewel, each endangered, like the four girls killed less than a year earlier by a bomb in the basement of a Birmingham, Alabama church. We asked and answered questions about our lives and shyly touched each other to affirm the extraordinary occasion. (Dobkin, 1999, p. 197)

Len Chandler had a chance encounter with voter registration canvassing during his summer expedition:

I had heard the staff talk about the patience and the time it took to register people to vote. I believed the vote to be the source of real power and the reason we were there. I had always wanted to do voter registration, but they drafted me to play at mass meetings and rallies. Consequently, I traveled from place to place all the time, sleeping in cars, on church benches and on the floors of freedom houses. I got my registration chance one day quite by accident. I was walking down a dirt road outside Hattiesburg. I can't recall where I was going. I passed a house that must have been about 50 yards off the road. A woman came to the edge of her porch and said, "Boy, didn't your mama ever teach you to say 'howdy do' to old folks? You must be from up North." I went up and introduced myself, and we talked for a while. She asked me if I could play that box I was carrying. I played and sang, and she went in the house and got me a glass of lemonade and asked me did I know how to string beans. Well, at stringing beans, I'm an expert. My Alabama-born grandma grew plenty of string beans in our victory garden during World War II. Instead of just snapping them one by one, I would line up the ends of about four and nap them with one move. She said she had been stringing beans for nearly 70 years but she had never seen anyone do them like that. She laughed and said it looked like it could save some time, which was always a good idea.

We talked about the dirt road that ran in front of her house and how she had to carry her good shoes to church in a paper sack and put them on when she got there because the road was so dusty. We talked about how the road turned to blacktop as soon as it crossed the railroad tracks to where the White folks lived and how maybe voting could change things like that. She talked about how crazy dangerous the White folks were and how all the Movement people would be leaving soon. She asked me to come back the next day to eat some of the beans I helped her string. She would cook them with a ham hock and some white potatoes and make some corn bread. I told her I was going that night and I didn't know if I'd ever get back that way again. She said she had lived a hard life and that she was old and hadn't seen too much of the world. But there was one thing she thought she would like to see. I asked her what that was. She wanted to see the inside of that voting booth that they were so busy trying to keep her out of. The next day SNCC workers took her to vote. (Chandler, 1999, p. 210)

### **Mass Meetings**

I'm goin' down to Mississippi,  
I'm goin' down a southern road,  
And if you never see me again  
Remember that I had to go,  
Remember that I had to go. (Ochs, 1999, p. 234)

Artists involved with the Caravan of Music sang at mass meetings during their stay in the Magnolia State. The meetings, which were rooted in the sacrosanct traditions of the Black church, were a salient part of movement culture. They brought people together, served as a platform to debate strategy and tactics, provided an outlet for sharing news from the front, and afforded a framework to confront fear. Music was the glue:

Every night or so, sometimes twice a day, we would sing at a mass meeting. Sometimes we sang in churches with three or four hundred people and no amplification. Sometimes we sang on a flat bed truck, in the middle of a field, with a mike taped to a rake. I grew up in a Baptist church, I even led the junior choir, but they wanted the youth to be sophisticated and would not let us rock the gospel songs like the old folks. They made us sing anthems.

So I had never experienced singing like the singing of Mississippi. Those people could kill you. It would be humid, 100+ degrees, and a song would start. People would be standing and rocking—children, teenagers, old people in their 60s and 70s, playing tambourines and swaying and shouting on one song for over 30 minutes.

I was playing my guitar and singing with sweat splashing on my boots, when this small, stout lady locked me with her eyes. She was short and heavy but you couldn't call her fat. She had on a stingy-brim, straw hat and a flowered cotton dress that seemed to be designed to test the strength of buttons. I swore that I was not going to let some little old lady wear me out. The whole church was rocking, verse after verse. We made up verses then started at the beginning again.

Somewhere I turned a consciousness curve and was transported. I became a transcendental surfer riding the crest of a never-ending musical wave. I had joined them in the zone. I didn't know it then, but I had just met the soon-to-be-legendary Fannie Lou Hamer and we were singing her favorite song, "This Little Light of Mine." (Chandler, 1999, pp. 210-211)

Len Chandler was not the only artist to cross paths with Fannie Lou Hamer at a mass meeting during the summer of 1964. Other members of the Caravan of Music documented their encounters with the brave, celebrated, local song leader from the Mississippi Delta. Barbara Dane was among them:

Most of all I remember the power of Fannie Lou Hamer among her people, weaving together song and talk and song again, making the spirits of her weary,

sweaty neighbors visibly rise as their hearts connected. She seemed the perfect fulfillment of the concept “singer:” not just one who sings, not only a great voice, but a shaman, preacher, teacher, healer taking responsibility for community and continuity, making sure that life itself will go on with any sense of the reasons for it. As she reminded them again of the rightness of their struggle and led them into the cadences of call and response so old and yet so new, you could almost touch the ties that bound them ever closer into a community with the strength to resist and triumph. (Dane, 1999, p. 225)

Judy Collins distinctly recalled her rendezvous with Fannie Lou Hamer at a voter registration meeting in Drew, Mississippi. She was also cognizant of her disquietude.

Drew was a perilous place in the summer of 1964. Judy expected the worst:

I sat in the bus and changed the strings on my guitar to keep my hands from trembling. Their trembling made the task longer than it normally takes. Mrs. Hamer came out pretty soon and got in the car in front of us. We followed the car out of Ruleville and into Drew. I found that the only way to settle the terror—direct it—inside me was to sing. And so we sang softly *ain't gonna let nobody*. . . The conviction that some Southern White bastard with gun racks and an aerial whip and a rifle was going to shoot us was positive.

We drove into Drew and into the Negro neighborhood. It is a relatively small town. Strange that it should house such hatred. The home where the meeting was held was owned by a woman whose son was beaten nearly to death only a few months ago by the sheriff, who sat outside the house in his car during the whole time of our meeting—their meeting, for it is not ours.

Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer spoke to them, and to us; she who has been beaten and arrested and harassed for saying that she has a right to vote. To vote man. Fired from her job the day after she registered in 1962 in Indianola in Sunflower County, the lady of dignity who stood up and sang with us “This Little Light of Mine.” She led us in singing that song while the police cars roamed the neighborhood and the cars of the Klan circumnavigated the block and the town stood in horror at the gall of 75 Negroes who had come to sing about freedom and listen to a beautiful woman talk about the right of a man to be human. (Collins, 1999, pp. 205-206)

In spite of moments of impassioned exhilarating singing at mass meetings, danger was ever present and it was real. Everyone and everything was a target. By the end of the summer “four project workers had been killed; four people had been critically wounded; 80 workers had been beaten; there had been over 1,000 arrests; 37 churches

had been bombed or burned; and 30 Black businesses or homes had been burned” (Bond, 1999, p. 82).

### **Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP)**

We who believe in freedom cannot rest  
 We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes  
 Until the killing of Black men, Black mothers’ sons  
 Is as important as the killing of White men, White mother’s sons  
 We who believe in freedom cannot rest  
 We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes. (Reagon, 1999, p. 385)

On April 26, 1964, civil rights activists formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) during a statewide meeting (Miller, 1999). The purpose of the new political body was to provide an alternative to the all-White segregationist Democratic Party and to challenge them during the forthcoming Atlantic City National Convention. Fundamental to the Atlantic City challenge were three underlying principals outlined in a special MFDP report:

1. The long history of systematic and studied exclusion of Negro citizens from equal participation in the political processes of the state;
2. The conclusive demonstration by the Mississippi Democratic Party of its lack of loyalty to the national Democratic Party in the past;
3. The intransigent and fanatical determination of the state’s political power structure to maintain the status quo. (Miller, 1999, p. 297)

Throughout the summer of 1964, project recruits assisted the MFDP with preparations for the Atlantic City showdown. Besides the day-to-day voter registration work, the summer volunteers cataloged cases of elector interference, intimidation, and terror for use in future lawsuits (Bond, 1999). They also helped to organize the required progression of activities, which would catapult the MFDP into the public spotlight—“precinct conventions to county conventions to district conventions to state conventions—to establish the MFDP as a bona fide party” (Bond, 1999, p. 82).

On August 6th, two days after the discovery of the dead bodies of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, 68 delegates, including four Whites, were elected to represent the MFDP at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City (Bond, 1999). Fannie Lou Hamer was one of the emissaries.

Two members from the Mississippi Caravan of Music, Carolyn Hester and Len Chandler, joined the MFDP contingent and watched the events unfold in Atlantic City. Len described his experiences for the *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (Erenrich, 1999) anthology:

One scene will always remain fresh in my memory. The bus leaving for Atlantic City was filled with freedom workers and representatives of the Mississippi Freedom delegation. We were singing. *You should a been there, you you you should a been there, you should have been there to Roll Freedom Roll. Roll Freedom Roll, Roll Freedom Roll. I've got to get my freedom before I die, so Roll Freedom Roll.* We were singing "This Little Light of Mine," "Ain't Going To Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round," and "Freedom Is A Constant Sorrow." Then someone started singing *This May Be The Last Time. This May Be The Last Time. This May Be The Last Time, I don't know.*

The fact is, we did not know if we would be alive to sing, to work, to pray, or play together again because this was a war. Although most of us had embraced the principles of nonviolence, the White racists that we opposed had not.

I had never been to a convention before, nor had I been to Atlantic City. Security was very tight around the convention hall. The Mississippi Freedom delegation was going to try to be seated, and I knew it was something that I didn't want to miss. Of course, we had no credentials to get down to the floor. We didn't even have spectators' tickets. So we came into the convention center through an underground service entrance, hiding behind garbage bins, ducking into utility closets until we worked our way up to a spectator's area. I saw a girl who was with the Young Democrats For Freedom. I later learned her name was Posey Lumbard. I asked if she was going to be in the area for a while. She said she was, so I asked her to hold my leather vest and my freedom hat and said I would get it from her later.

I kept a small pair of scissors in my pouch to trim my beard. I used them to liberate a pass from a Mississippi delegate who had been holding it hostage. I jumped the rail and ended up standing next to Fannie Lou Hamer as she threatened to sit down in the lap of one of the delegates if he refused to relinquish his seat. The failure of the Democratic Party to recognize the Mississippi Freedom delegation marked a low point in the history of representational democracy. (Chandler, 1999, pp. 215-216)

**SNCC: 50th Anniversary Reunion: April 15 - 18, 2010**

*When I was young, I fought for freedom.  
 When I was young, I fought the Klan.  
 Who would have thought, I'd still be fighting  
 Thirty or forty years down the line.  
 When I was young, I fought for justice.  
 When I was young, I fought for peace.  
 Who would have thought, I'd still be fighting  
 Thirty or forty years down the line.  
 Freedom, fighting for freedom;  
 Fifty or sixty years down the line. (Jones, 1999, p. 504)*

The doors opened. I rushed down front to secure two seats: one for me, and one for Harriet Tanzman. Harriet was one of my hosts while I was in Mississippi. I wanted to ensure that both of us could see the stage.

The Fletcher Auditorium Progress Center for the Performing Arts in Raleigh, North Carolina was already packed with Movement veterans by the time I entered the scene, so I had to gently push through the crowd. The Hot Eight Brass Band from New Orleans was serenading hundreds of folks that had gathered to celebrate the 50th anniversary of SNCC. Everyone was dancing in the aisles.

I managed to snatch a premier unobstructed spot near the reserved section. Harriet and I settled in and joined the party. The other performers situated themselves across the raised platform as the Hot Eight Brass Band's set came to a close.

Chuck Neblett, the Freedom Concert's Musical Director, made his way to the microphone. He introduced the artists and kicked off the remarkable evening with the entire cast singing traditional freedom songs. Gracing the stage were the original SNCC Freedom Singers, who hailed from Albany, Georgia; the men's group directed by Matt Jones from 1963 to 1967; SNCC Song Leaders Wazir Peacock, Charles Jones, and



Bernard Lafayette; Jamila Jones; Len Chandler, a member of the Mississippi Caravan of Music; and Guy and Candie Carawan from Highlander. We raised our voices, clapped our hands and tapped our feet. Our hearts soared. It was a magnificent jubilee.

Following the classic civil rights melodies, singers-songwriters, accompanied by the group, reacquainted the audience with ditties written from back in the day. Len Chandler belted out “Murder on the Road in Alabama” and “Move On Over.” Matt Jones paid homage to the slain Mississippi activist, Medgar Evers with a beautiful hymn. Marshall Jones riveted spectators with “In the Mississippi River” and Guy and Candie Carawan brought the house down with “Ballad of the Student Sit-Ins.”

Harry Belafonte made a guest appearance. He sang an adaptation of “The Banana Boat Song,” along with Bernice Johnson Reagon. It was an electric moment:

*Took a trip down Alabama way,  
Freedom's comin' and it won't be long,  
Met much violence on Mother's Day,  
Freedom's coming and it won't be long,  
Freedom, freedom, freedom's coming and it won't be long,  
Freedom, freedom, freedom's coming and it won't be long.* (Carawan & Carawan, 1990, p. 46)

The historic festivities concluded with the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.” The amassed assembly stood, crossed arms, right over left, swayed from side to side and sang. It was a fitting end to a magical affair. The Hot Eight Brass Band led us out of the auditorium and into the crisp cool night air where we boarded buses and headed back to the conference hotel.

The fine and performing arts were ever present throughout the reunion conference weekend. After all, the freedom struggle was a cultural movement.

Panel discussions covered an array of arts-oriented topics, which included: “Depictions of the Movement in Popular Culture” and “The Influence of SNCC on the Black Arts Movement.” Harry Belafonte and Danny Glover were featured speakers during meals. Dick Gregory entertained us with his dark sidesplitting humor during one of the Saturday afternoon sessions. There was a film festival scheduled for two evenings at the hotel, and a photo exhibit spotlighting Danny Lyon’s work at Shaw University. Most of the day’s activities transpired on Shaw’s campus where the founding meeting occurred 50 years before. Other photojournalists, like Matt Herron, displayed their effectual creations during plenary sessions. Last, but certainly not least, Bernice Johnson Reagon concluded the conference weekend with a commanding farewell oration titled “Solidarity of Past, Present, and Future.” And, of course, we sang and sang and sang.

More than 1,000 people descended upon Raleigh to attend the gathering. They came from far and wide. They met, reminisced, schmoozed, talked, argued, hugged, and cried. Their children came as well. During a special Saturday morning plenary, SNCC veterans introduced their offspring. Many of them were already seasoned activists. There were tender moments and I found myself choking back tears as I watched proud parents interact with the next generation, who have already hoisted the torch and run the next mile for a better world.

Thirty-five authors, including myself, participated in a book signing at the conference hotel on Thursday night and late Saturday afternoon, there was an emotional general session at the host institution: “In Remembrance of Ella Baker, Howard Zinn, and all the others who have passed on.” Howard had assisted the planning committee prior to

his death. He was a beloved figure and everyone was devastated by the news. And without Ella Baker, there would have never been a SNCC.

As I wrote my brief account of the SNCC Reunion Conference weekend, I was still sorting and reflecting on the intense experience. This overview is only a tip of the iceberg. It is impossible to record the entire event. I will leave that task to the organizers. The jam-packed weekend was filled with interesting diverse topics, speakers, events, and informative awe-inspiring moments; too many to describe, too many to catch.

This was my second SNCC Reunion. I attended the 40th shortly after the *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (Erenrich, 1999) anthology was released. This time, my mission was different. I was there to reconnect with my old compatriots, meet new veterans, engage in rich dialog centered on this dissertation's create dangerously theme, and take advantage of every opportunity to expand my knowledge base. It was a phenomenal six days. I was lovingly embraced and welcomed into the inner circle. It was an honor to be in the presence of so many civil rights warriors.

On Monday morning, I headed back to New York City. I ruminated over the life-enriching, transformational sojourn. I am a lucky woman. I consider myself an adopted child of SNCC. Many of the movement veterans have entrusted me with their most precious memories: the pain, the euphoria, and details of personal experiences that collectively shaped the nation, and brought segregation to its knees. They are the unsung heroes and heroines of the country, but they are not perfect by any means. During this long journey, I have encountered the good, the bad and the ugly. Like all relationships, they are based on a series of negotiations. I have persevered. My liaison with this special band of brothers and sisters is a gift and a responsibility. Like other activist

scholars, I take my role seriously. I realize that there probably will not be a 60th SNCC Reunion Conference. Sadly, many of the veterans will be dead and gone.

My hope is that this dissertation sheds a little light on an underappreciated subject. Also, my hope is that the contributions of the Mississippi Caravan of Music and the other artists involved in movement activity will find their rightful place in the growing scholarship on that shameful period in this country's past.

### **Lessons Learned**

The Caravan was the cultural arm of the Freedom Summer Project. Most of the singers-songwriters toured through the Magnolia State for short stints, supporting the dangerous frontline operation. Their job was to provide sustenance to the troops and draw attention to the racist practices perpetuated by southern whites throughout the Black Belt region. Following their pilgrimage to Mississippi, Caravan artists educated audiences through their lyrics and raised money for SNCC, COFO, and other organizations that were combating segregation. They accompanied the freedom struggle in vital ways.

It was the day-to-day grueling tedious work by local leaders, SNCC, CORE, and COFO organizers, however, that broke the back of Jim Crow with assistance from their northern friends. The indigenous folks and civil rights warriors were the decision makers. They were the planners. They endured the routine harassment and brutality. They were in Mississippi for the long haul.

Similar to the other portraits characterized in this dissertation, the evolution of the Caravan of Music motif was spearheaded by the create dangerously questions discussed in chapter 2. As I combed through the dense literature on the 1964 Freedom Summer

Project and conversed with Movement veterans, I depended upon those questions to guide me through the discovery process.

Contrary to the other portraits in this dissertation, I chose to include new material in this section. Doing so provides readers the opportunity to compare and contrast the Caravan with on-the-ground Movement activists who created dangerously on a daily basis. Caravan artists were not leading change initiatives inside the Magnolia State, so I felt it was imperative to insert additional information to drive home what I uncovered during the research stage of this portrait. In short, the Caravan accompanied the real actors in the freedom struggle. They played a salient role and it was dangerous. Readers may remember that Andrew Goodman was in Mississippi one day before he was murdered. Thankfully, Caravan artists survived their brief Freedom Summer Project tours.

In the synopsis below, I reflect upon the Caravan's contributions as they relate to the create dangerously theme and show that the true movers and shakers of the Mississippi Movement were the seasoned veterans who never turned back. By spotlighting a few of the veteran's experiences, I was able to place my findings in the proper framework.

First, the Mississippi Caravan of Music created dangerously by threatening the social, economic, and political status quo. Each close associate of the Movement who entered the Magnolia State was viewed as a menace; and in the case of the northern White singers-songwriters, a traitor to their race. A number of African American Caravan members, like Jackie Washington and Len Chandler, stayed in Mississippi for

extended periods of time. Jackie performed with the Free Southern Theater. Peter La Farge, a Native American topical singer-songwriter, was also part of the group.

Everyone was a target. The Caravan artists were not an exception. The White Citizens Council and the KKK instituted a variety of state-sanctioned methods of terror in order to preserve the southern segregated way of life. Thrashings, arrests, cross burnings, drive-by shootings, bombings, harassment, loss of employment, and murder was the *modus operandi* to stop the freedom train.

Considering the hyped-up war-like atmosphere during the summer of 1964, Caravan lyricists were fortunate. They survived their tours of duty and went home relatively unscathed. The long-term battlefield activists and volunteers did not fare as well.

By the end of the summer “four project workers had been killed; four people had been critically wounded; 80 workers had been beaten; there had been over 1,000 arrests; 37 churches had been bombed or burned; and 30 Black businesses or homes had been burned” (Bond, 1999, p. 82). Change eventually came to Mississippi, but the cost of freedom was high. No advancement can heal the walking wounded or bring back the martyrs. The debate over the Freedom Summer Project of 1964 continues to this day.

Secondly, in chapter 2, I asked if artists create dangerously when they mobilize for systemic change. In some respects, the question does not apply to the Caravan of Music.

Unlike Augusto and Ngũgĩ, who directly energized the oppressed through theatrical popular education methods, the Mississippi Caravan of Music reinforced the organizing efforts of others. Their job was to accompany and support Black communities

in their campaign to exercise their constitutional rights and assert their political power.

James Forman, the Executive Secretary of SNCC, accentuated the role of volunteers in his book, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*:

We felt that it was high time for the United States as a whole, a White-dominated country, to feel the consequences of its own racism. White people should know the meaning of the work we were doing—they should feel some of the suffering and terror and deprivation that Black people endured. We could not bring all of White America to Mississippi. But by bringing in some of its children as volunteer workers, a new consciousness would feed back into the homes of thousands of White Americans as they worried about their sons and daughters confronting “the jungle of Mississippi, the bigoted sheriffs, the Klan, the vicious White Citizens’ Councils. (Forman, 1985, p. 372)

Even though the Caravan of Music did not create dangerously by mobilizing in Black communities in Mississippi, as a group they successfully provided necessary assistance to the freedom crusade. Through their celebrity, a few of the participants managed to lure White students to movement-sponsored concerts, resulting in integrated audiences. This was a major step forward. When they returned home, most of them composed songs that revealed Mississippi’s brutality towards its Black populace. They also raised money for the struggle.

Thirdly, the Mississippi Caravan of Music created dangerously when they sang in the Freedom Schools, during mass meetings, voter registration drives, and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party events. The new practices and tactics were already in place prior to the Caravan’s arrival. They were the brainchild of SNCC, CORE, and COFO staff members. The Freedom Schools, mass meetings, voter registration drives, and the MFDP were instituted after endless strategizing sessions at Highlander, the various Movement offices in Mississippi and elsewhere. By the time the summer volunteers and

Caravan of Music arrived, they were funneled to the various project sites to lend their support and provide sustenance to the troops.

Regarding the fourth question discussed in chapter 2, the Mississippi Caravan of Music created dangerously when they openly expressed the hidden transcripts of opposing views. Every member of the Caravan was a prolific topical songwriter. Their in-your-face confrontational lyrics served as an educational platform, a rallying cry, and a recruitment tool for new enlistees. Through their music they managed to focus the nation's attention on the harsh rural conditions endured by Black Mississippians, and embarrass the perpetrators of the segregated Jim Crow system.

There was a downside to maintaining a topical singer-songwriter lifestyle. Besides the typical risks, associated with the Freedom Summer Project, some members of the Caravan were targeted by the FBI. J. Edgar Hoover was no friend to the Movement and he hated Communists. Publicly exposing the government's hidden transcripts did not endear these artists to this country's officials.

Alix Dobkin, a topical singer-songwriter, who joined the Caravan, was a red diaper baby. She was followed by agents early on. Her parents had been members of the Communist Party. Alix joined a party affiliated youth group and remains politically active to this day. Much of her FBI report is rubbed out.

Phil Ochs' FBI report was 410 pages. He was censored and his songs were banned from the airwaves. After his death, Gordon Friesen filed for his papers through the Freedom of Information Act. His sister, Sonny, shared some of them with me for a forthcoming book. Many of the pages are blacked out. The surviving Caravan



participants have never sold out in spite of the hardships. All of them, without exception involved themselves with other crusades.

Question number five in the literature review speaks to artists creating dangerously when they keep the stories of repressive power alive. Music was the anchor of the Movement. Every song highlighted an aspect of oppression and rallied the troops to keep marching in the face of adversity. Prior to the arrival of the Mississippi Caravan, SNCC song leaders utilized music as an organizing tool. Wazir Peacock, a native Mississippian and SNCC field secretary captured the essence of how singing was incorporated early on:

One night in February, we held a mass meeting. It was the largest one yet—we had to hold it in the First Christian Church. It was powerful. We couldn't stop singing freedom songs. Those songs had a real message that night: Freedom doesn't come as a gift. It comes through knowledge and power—political power. It comes from the vote. That night I went to bed at the office. That next morning, people started knocking on the door first thing in the morning. They were ready to go down and attempt to register. They kept coming and coming—they knew they probably wouldn't be allowed to register, but it was their right to try.

We hadn't but one car to get people to the courthouse, and people were afraid that if they used their own cars, they'd be tagged and arrested later, on the way out of town, so they decided to walk to the courthouse—two by two, in a line, so they could be sure to arrive safely. (Peacock as cited in SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference Book, 2010, p. 47)

After the Caravan arrived a new type of lyric was introduced to the communities. Many of the ballads and ditties, such as Phil Ochs' "Here's to the State of Mississippi," Len Chandler's "Move On Over," and Malvina Reynolds' "It Isn't Nice" were hard-hitting and confrontational. They delighted freedom struggle activists and agitated the segregationists who tried to discredit the Movement and squelch all forms of protest.

The songs have continued to focus attention on Mississippi's sorted past for half a century. The quest for justice persists. The SNCC Freedom Singers, song leaders, and

Caravan artists have carried their songs into the new millennium. They are performed at concerts, inserted into documentary films, and played at demonstrations and large gatherings. The contemporary outlets for the troubadours do not pose the same type of threat as their days trudging the hot dirt roads in the Magnolia State. They have provided inspiration and fodder for people like Jerry Mitchell, however, the courageous investigative Clarion Ledger Reporter. Jerry's muckraking journalism resulted in the successful incarceration of Byron De La Beckwith, responsible for the murder of Medgar Evers; Imperial Wizard Sam Bowers, for ordering the fatal firebombing of Vernon Dahmer's house (Vernon was a Mississippi leader in the NAACP); Edgar Ray Killen for helping to organize the June 21, 1964 executions of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner; and Bob Cherry, for the 1963 Birmingham Church bombing. The FBI is currently conducting an inquiry into death threats received by the award-winning columnist.

I first met Jerry around 1992 when he shared Horace Doyle Barnette's November 20, 1964, FBI testimony regarding the Mississippi burning assassinations. I included the affidavit in the *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* (1999) anthology. Recently, Jerry escorted me to Medgar Evers' former residence for a private tour during my visit to the Magnolia State. He is a 2009 recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

Question number 6 is the core of the create dangerously phenomenon, popular education; when artists assist ordinary people usually locked out of the political process to write their own scripts. Popular education pedagogy is discussed at length in chapter 2 of this dissertation. The popular education philosophy and method was the centerpiece of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964. The Freedom Schools, voter

registration, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and the local Movement leadership were grounded in participatory democracy principles. “Trust in the people’s ability to govern themselves” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 185). Each component was directly related to the Black indigenous population’s struggle against oppression and was based upon Highlander’s doctrine and conviction. Myles Horton believed that:

For people to be really free they must have the power to make decisions about their lives, so that they can acquire knowledge as tools to change society. The people that conceived all the programs held a radical philosophy: the system was bad and had to be changed. They all had a revolutionary purpose. (Jacobs, 2003, p. 184)

Besides Highlander, it was Ella Baker’s indomitable spirit and mentorship that helped shape SNCC’s bottom-up leadership philosophy. Miss Baker deserves credit for ushering in the next generation of civil rights activists. James Forman, SNCC’s Executive Secretary, said, “without her, there would be no story of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee” (Grant, 1998, p. 140). Miss Baker’s sentiments about the founding of the student civil rights organization are revealed in Joanne Grant’s (1998) book, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound*:

The chief emphasis I tried to make was their right to make their own decision. . . . The only reason that I became relevant . . . was because I had lived through certain experiences and had had certain opportunities to gather information and organizational experience. . . . I have always felt that if there is any time in our existence that you have a right to make mistakes it should be when you’re young, cause you have some time to live down some of the mistakes, or to offset them. I felt that what they [the students] were doing was certainly . . . creative [and] much more productive than anything that had happened in my life, and it shouldn’t be stifled. . . . I must have sensed also that it was useless to try to put the brakes on, because it was unleashed enthusiasm . . . an overflow of a dam that had been penned up for years, and it had to run its course. (p. 125)

Approximately four years after Miss Baker convened the initial 1960 meeting at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, SNCC’s popular education agenda was

implemented throughout the Magnolia State. SNCC song leaders/field secretaries, along with COFO staff members set the stage for future events. When Caravan artists arrived on the scene they supported the existing programs. Some of the topical singers-songwriters were already drilled in popular education techniques. Among them were Bob Cohen, Gil Turner, Phil Ochs, and Len Chandler. They had attended previous Highlander sponsored events leading up to the summer project of 1964.

Their participation in the Mississippi popular education enterprise was risky business. Everyone was prey. The Caravan artists were not instrumental in the development of the overall scheme. Nevertheless, siding with an enemy of the state made them vulnerable. The Mississippi education for liberation programs defied the government's agenda to continue to subjugate local blacks:

Instead of teaching people to take orders and to respect the experts, they were doing the opposite. They were teaching people to make decisions, to act on those decisions, and to learn how to work with other people to achieve their goals and to challenge an exploitative system. (Jacobs, 2003, p.187)

When all was said and done, the psychological shackles, that kept Black Southerners in physical and mental bondage was destroyed (Bond as cited in SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference Book, 2010). SNCC, along with assistance from the outside world, helped break those chains forever. That is SNCC's legacy.

Lastly, it was the unsung local SNCC song leaders, like Fannie Lou Hamer, Hollis Watkins, Wazir (Willie) Peacock, and Sam Block who created dangerously when they led without authority. They were organizing in the state long before the Mississippi Caravan of Music signed on to the Freedom Summer Project of 1964, and they continued to organize in their communities long after the Caravan went home. Wazir Peacock described what it was like to be a SNCC warrior in the early days of the Movement:

In one day we'd drive out to help some organizers in Clarksdale, then go over to Sunflower County and go over to Ruleville, where Mrs. Hamer lived, and take some people down to vote, then we'd go on to Greenwood to get ready for a mass meeting at night. There were no more than 12 of us working the whole state, but if you asked Governor Barnett how many there were, he would have said there was an army! We were so busy, some days we didn't even eat!

Everything I've heard about soldiers in combat describes us—the never-ending tension, the exhaustion, the constant danger. We were guerrillas. The difference was we weren't going in to fight and win, we were teaching people who were already there how they could win. You don't liberate people—you teach them how to liberate themselves. (Seeger & Reiser, 1989, p. 181)

Music was the glue. Wazir talked to me on a number of occasions about the power of song. He recently articulated his thoughts during the session “From Student Activists to Field Organizers” at the SNCC 50th Anniversary Reunion. Much of what he said was documented in Pete Seeger's book, *Everybody Says Freedom: A History of The Civil Rights Movement In Songs And Pictures*:

When you sing, you can reach deep into yourself and communicate some of what you've got to other people, and you get them to reach inside of themselves. You release your soul force, and they release theirs, until you can all feel like you are part of one great soul. Sometimes when Hollis and I were leading a song, we could feel it. We were together with the people, and they would not let us go, you knew you could not cut the singing short until it reached a conclusion. The singing could go on for hours.

When you have that kind of unity and that kind of communication, there is nothing the police can do to stop you. They can put you in jail, but you can sing in jail and organize the inmates and the other prisoners. (Seeger & Reiser, 1989, p. 180)

Once the Caravan of Music arrived in the summer of 1964, they received their marching orders from seasoned local activists. Bob Cohen, the director of the Caravan, coordinated schedules and provided orientation for the artists, but it was the SNCC Field Secretaries and COFO organizers who were leading the charge. The artists fell in wherever they were needed. No one had authorization from the state. It was an all-out nonviolent war against Mississippi's caste system.

After the Caravan of Music, the volunteers and the media went home at the end of the summer, on-the-ground organizers continued to cultivate and incorporate culture into the Movement's agenda. In May of 1965, Bob Moses invited Guy and Candie Carawan to the Mississippi Delta to conduct a Sing For Freedom Workshop. Edwards, Mississippi was the designated location. The workshop design was similar to the one that transpired in Atlanta prior to the start of Freedom Summer. Wazir Peacock and Willie McGhee helped to plan and carry out the event (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). The targeted audience was the Mississippi "Freedom Corps" trainees who committed to serve one year in various communities throughout the state (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). They ranged in age from 18 to 25. Participating artists included Doc Reese from Texas, the Georgia Sea Island Singers, the Moving Star Singers from Johns Island, and Ed Young, a Mississippi fife player (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). Folklorists Alan Lomax and Ralph Rinzler, from the Newport Folk Foundation, also took part. The gathering was financed by Highlander, the Newport Folk Foundation, and the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches. It was an important weekend. Alan Lomax, who envisioned a promising future that linked the freedom struggle to a Mississippi cultural revival, passionately addressed those assembled about the history of Black music in the United States:

Continual cultural development should go hand in hand with political and educational development. The healthiest cultural growth always is rooted in the resources native to the people of an area.

It is a fortunate thing that along their way the Negro people have created a rich lore of tales, dances, songs, oratorical techniques, ways of praying, recipes, riddles, forms of greeting, lullabies, and a thousand other ways of doing and speaking which give Negro life a special flavor. Why should all this be given up in return for economic betterment? It need not be. The Negro people should be encouraged to be themselves, to develop themselves in their own way as they move along freedom's road.

But here they must draw upon their own past, as all people have done before them. They must not be ashamed of their forefathers, but proud of them for their courage, the wit and the beauty that they continually expressed, even though they were for a time in bondage. . . .

SNCC, composed as it is of individuals who are unashamed and flexible and unhampered by stuffy middle class prejudice, must provide the leadership and sponsorship that will nurture this cultural movement. (Carawan & Carawan, 1999, p. 149)

The workshop convinced Bob Moses and COFO staff members that the cultural movement component had real significance. Sam Block, Wazir Peacock, and Willie McGhee were so inspired that they organized the first grassroots Mississippi festival, which took place in Mileston that August (Carawan as cited in Erenrich, 1999). To help defray costs, the trio applied and was awarded a grant from the “We Shall Overcome” fund. The fund was established with royalties from commercial uses of the song (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). The Highlander Research and Education Center has administered the fund since 1966.

The two-day celebration included an African and African American art show, a slavery-time barbecue, old-time secular and sacred music, and buck dancing (Carawan & Carawan, 1999). This festival was the first of many organized in different parts of the state by the threesome, and the precursor of a Mississippi Delta blues festival, which continues to this day. In his committee report to the “We Shall Overcome” Fund, Wazir wrote:

Through song and dance a people are able to share their burden, triumph, sadness and gladness of heart. People sing songs of heroism. They sing songs about the common oppressor or exploiter. The smallest and the greatest desires of a people are brought out in folk music. These songs can be used to draw people together and unite them in one common aim, goal, and purpose. (Carawan & Carawan, 1999, p. 150)

The cultural carriers of the Movement made their mark on Mississippi. Most of them continued to influence, uphold, reinforce, and lead other struggles following the Freedom Summer Project of 1964. They get together now and then. When they do, they remember the past, create dangerously in the present, and strategize for the future. Most importantly, they sing and sing and sing.



## **Chapter VII: Symposium**

Chapter 7 is a mock symposium. It is an innovative way to summarize, evaluate, and interpret the results for the original dissertation question: What does it mean to create dangerously? The symposium also serves as an instrument for integrating the research findings. By bringing the artists and artist group together in a simulation format, the reader is extended the opportunity to compare and contrast the portrait data in a holistic, unpretentious manner.

In actuality, the artists in this dissertation never met. They joined forces with fellow partisans to sever the chains of oppression in opposite ends of the globe during varied moments in history. Uniting these cultural activists here, for the first time, accords the reader a chance to not only celebrate their achievements, but to gain insight into how they blazed trails for generations of artist activists who have chosen to follow suit in their determination to win some victory for humanity.

The symposium is also a space for discourse. The artists and artist group depicted in this dissertation were amazing and courageous, but they were not perfect. Through the imaginary dialog, the reader will glean glimpses into the world of cultural activism. The reader will also be able to learn from the artists' successes and mistakes and place them into a special kind of transformational leadership context.

Lastly, unlike the dissertation portraits, where the artists and artist group were furnished with a podium and microphone to speak to readers in their own voice, in this venue, the dialog is a combination of their thoughts and mine. Overall, the symposium is an amalgamation. It is my apparatus; a means for me to unearth, analyze, and synthesize

the dissertation discoveries in a palatable way for readers. It is this dissertation's aesthetic whole.

### **Artists Creating Dangerously for Social Change Symposium**

December 14, 2010

Carnegie Hall, New York City

Moderator: Susie Erenrich

Panelists: Augusto Boal, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, selected members from the Mississippi Caravan of Music

*Susie:* Good evening. Welcome to the “Artists Creating Dangerously For Social Change Symposium.” I am thrilled to see a standing room only crowd here at Carnegie Hall, one of New York City's finest venues. My name is Susie Erenrich. I will be your moderator. Before I introduce the esteemed panelists, I would like to provide some background information regarding tonight's event. I am a doctoral student in Antioch University's Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program. In December of 2007, I advanced to candidacy and launched my dissertation research. My educational milestone coincided with the 50th anniversary of Albert Camus' Nobel Lecture at the University of Uppsala in Sweden. The title of Camus' address was “Create Dangerously.” It was a powerful challenge to artists to immerse themselves in the burning global affairs of the day. The speech was also a passionate commentary on the potential perils and risks associated with confronting the state. Camus' delivery resonated with me, even though he never defined what it meant to create dangerously. So, I chose the compelling concept as the centerpiece of my study.

Initially, I conducted a literature review on the create dangerously topic. I discovered that leadership scholars had ignored Camus' speech and the artists who heeded his call, in spite of the significant contributions they made to social change crusades. In fact, artists as activists were barely mentioned in a number of fields. Tonight, I hope to trigger a paradigm shift. So sit back, relax, enjoy, and engage.

Now, I would like to take this opportunity to present the symposium discussants. On my far right is Augusto Boal. I am thrilled that Augusto agreed to participate in this monumental historic happening. Born in Brazil, Augusto is a political activist, director, playwright, author, teacher, chemical engineer, and a major innovator of post-Brechtian theatre. He served as Artistic Director of the Arena Theater in São Paulo from 1956 to 1971. In 1964, his theatre productions were repressed after the Brazilian coup, and in 1968, during the state of siege, he boldly produced and directed Feira Paulista de Opinião (São Paulo's Fair of Opinions). After an 80-page playbook came back from the state censor with 65 pages cut, Augusto had enough. In defiance, he disregarded the official faultfinder's mandates and instructed the actors to perform the original script. When the military arrived, artistic solidarity had its say. "The artists decreed a general strike in the city's theatres and came to join us. Never before had there been such a concentration of artists per square centimeter: no one was missing. Even the most timid turned up." (Boal, 2001, p. 266). The dictatorship caught up with Augusto in the 1970s. He came under attack resulting in his imprisonment, torture, and exile. During this period, Augusto started to develop Theatre of the Oppressed, an integrated system of techniques that have become an international phenomenon. Augusto returned to Brazil when the political climate changed. Please give a big round of applause for Augusto Boal. [applause]

Next to Augusto is an empty chair. Excuse me—has anyone seen Ngũgĩ? I spotted him in the lobby earlier.

*Ngũgĩ*: Here I am. I apologize. I was catching up with some of my former colleagues from New York University. Ah. Augusto. Greetings. Augusto and I are contributing editors to (TDR), The Drama Review. We have never formerly met.

*Susie*: Everyone, this is Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Ngũgĩ is one of East Africa's most prolific writers. Always on the side of the poor and oppressed, he writes about economic exploitation and cultural domination by the West, encouraging his readers to liberate themselves by resisting the imperialistic forces that hold them down. In the 1970s, while a professor at the University of Nairobi, Ngũgĩ was invited to participate in a literacy project by co-authoring a play for the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre in Limuru, his home village. The popular theatrical piece, which spotlighted neocolonialism was shut down by the Kenyan authorities. Ngũgĩ was arrested and detained in a maximum-security prison for almost a year. After his release from the correctional facility, Ngũgĩ rejoined Kamĩrĩĩthũ and co-authored another script with the former emergency village inhabitants. The musical infuriated the government. After a series of events that will be discussed later this evening, Ngũgĩ went into exile in 1982. He currently serves as Director of the International Center for Writing and Translation at the University of California, Irvine. Please welcome Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. [applause]

On my left (actually all of these panelists are on the left—ha ha ha) are topical singers-songwriters who participated in the Mississippi Caravan of Music. In the summer of 1964, close to 1,000 college students from the North joined civil rights workers in a dangerous operation to bring about social reforms. Brave soldiers in this

domestic war, were joined by artists in this pivotal, historic moment known as the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. One group, the Caravan of Music, joined forces with the infantry on the ground. They went south for varying periods of time, traveling and performing at more than 30 projects in Mississippi. The Caravan was the cultural arm of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. Bob Cohen, sitting here with his guitar, was the Director of the Caravan of Music. He wrote about his Freedom Summer Project experience in a 1964 issue of *Broadside* magazine. “Singing is the backbone and balm of this movement. Somehow you can go on in the face of violence and death, cynicism, and inaction of the FBI, the indifference of the federal government—when you can sing with your band of brothers” (Cohen, 1999, pp. 182-183). And, of course, sing with your band of sisters! In the interest of time, I will introduce other Caravan members before they address questions. Let us hear it for the Mississippi Caravan of Music. [applause]

Let the games begin.

*Susie:* As many of you know, I chose December 14th for this symposium, because it is the 53rd anniversary of Albert Camus’ create dangerously Nobel Lecture. Tonight’s program is meant to spark dialog and serve as a starting point, laying a foundation for others to go deeper into the topic.

My first question deals with your political awakening as cultural activists. It is directed to Augusto, followed by Ngũgĩ, and then the Caravan. Please be cognizant of the time. We only have two hours in this space; that includes the audience participation segment. Here we go: Augusto—in the early 1960s, you performed for members of the Brazilian *Ligas Camponesas* (Peasant Leagues) during a tour in northeastern Brazil.

What lessons can we learn from your encounter with the peasants, good and bad, and how did that experience transform your thinking?

*Augusto:* In 1961, I was a young, somewhat inexperienced theatre director from a big city. I talked about agrarian reform with Arena São Paulo actors, but until our tour to the northeast, it was from an armchair radical perspective. I had no previous rendezvous with the Brazilian *Ligas Camponesas* (Peasant Leagues). I touted theory, like many of my leftist compatriots, but my knowledge was not empirically based. It was shameful.

During our expedition, we staged a show for a group of local peasant farmers. The spectacle ended “with the actors singing frenetic revolutionary salutations, left arm raised, fist clenched: ‘the land belongs to the people! We must give our blood to reclaim it from the landowners!’” (Boal, 2001, p. 193). Emotionally moved by our performance, one of the onlookers invited the cast to join the revolt against the colonial invaders. We had gotten ourselves in a real predicament. We were real actors and militant imposters. That Northeast production was a turning point. It forever changed my thinking. “As artists, we have no right to incite anyone to do something we are not prepared to do ourselves” (Boal, 2001, p. 193). I like to quote Che Guevara. He said “To be in solidarity is to run the same risks!” I hope you all remember that.

*Susie:* Thanks for sharing that story with us Augusto. For a full, unedited account of Augusto’s early experiences with the Brazilian *Ligas Camponesas* (Peasant Leagues), please peruse his autobiography *Hamlet and the Baker’s Son: My Life In Theatre and Politics* (2001). Books and compact discs are available for purchase following tonight’s discussion. The artists have agreed to stick around for a signing. That is my commercial break. Now let us get back to business.

Ngũgĩ—In *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (2005), you said Kamĩĩĩthũ necessitated “an epistemological break” with your past (p. 44). What did you mean by that? Can you provide some take-away for the audience?

*Ngũgĩ*: My answer to your question is twofold. First, there was the struggle over national theatre: the content of the plays; access and affordability; control of the space and so on. The National Theatre was not national. It was an organization controlled in theatre performance. The staging of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* augmented my thinking on this issue. I concluded that national theatre was not a location, a building or a place. It is what people do.

Secondly, after joining Kamĩĩĩthũ, I became aware of the fact that one does not take theatre and cut it to the people or culture—it should be cut *from* the people. So, in a way the move to Kamĩĩĩthũ was the assimilation of both of these ideas, the whole notion of national theatre and taking theatre to the people.

Additionally, my position on language totally changed as a consequence of Kamĩĩĩthũ. I am African, I am Kenyan African, and I was born and raised in Limuru with humble beginnings. When I joined the Kamĩĩĩthũ experiment, however, my English-oriented college education had not prepared me for the transition—returning home and converting ideas back into an African dialect, my mother tongue.

In fact, my colleagues from the University of Nairobi were faced with the same dilemma. We arrived at an identical conclusion. We could only work in the vernacular of the community. Choosing to operate in this manner eliminated the communication barrier. It was a big eye opener for me. The impact was long lasting (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2008).

My takeaway for cultural activists in the audience: you must start where people are—and preferably work in communities that you are linked to in some way.

*Susie:* Thank you Ngũgĩ. I will follow-up on yours and Augusto's spect-actor takeaways after the Caravan have an opportunity to hold court. I look forward to that discussion. Now, let us get back to the issue of political awakenings. I would like Bob Cohen to address this topic since he was the Director of the Mississippi Caravan of Music. The rest of you will have a chance to chime in as the evening moves along.

*Bob:* I think it is safe to say that all of us were influenced by Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Sis Cunningham, and Gordon Friesen. These legendary cultural activists helped usher in a new generation of topical singers-songwriters. They taught us how to compose meaningful ballads, serenade audiences, and woo prospective rebels. No one could have prepared us for Mississippi, however. Not even my former roommate, Bob Parris Moses. Bob forged a relationship with Ella Baker following the 1960 lunch counter sit-ins. He ventured into Amite County, otherwise known as “the Ninth Circle of Hell” (Newfield, 1999, p. 85). After being “beaten twice and jailed thrice,” Bob moved to Jackson where he continued to organize along side local long-time freedom fighters, SNCC, CORE, and COFO (Newfield, 1999, p. 85).

In 1963, the New World Singers (Gil Turner, Delores Dixon, and I) traveled to Edwards, Mississippi with Bob to conduct a freedom songs workshop. Approximately one year later, I coordinated the cultural arm of the 1964 Summer Project. I had also been to Highlander, performed regularly at Gerde's Folk City with the New World Singers, and raised money for SNCC. Gil Turner, a member of the New World Singers, was an early contributing editor to *Broadside* magazine. He also attended the first *Sing*



*for Freedom* workshop at Highlander in 1960. Pete Seeger was there as well. So, all of the forces of change converged during the summer of 1964 and we found ourselves in a pivotal moment in time (Cohen, 1999). My advice to budding and seasoned activists: learn about the successes and failures of previous struggles. Do your homework. We are all links on a chain.

*Susie:* Thanks Bob. That is a great entrée into the next topic, which I feel speaks directly to the heart and soul of tonight's create dangerously motif: popular education. Everyone on this stage was involved with a popular education project. Augusto devised Theatre of the Oppressed, a system of theatrical techniques, which is heavily immersed in Paulo Freire's pedagogy. Ngũgĩ and his colleagues introduced and incorporated Paulo's methods at Kamĩrĩthũ, which became a model for Theatre for Development cultural activists in Africa and beyond. The Caravan of Music joined the freedom movement, which was steeped in the Highlander doctrine. All of us are popular education proponents and believe in its transformative power. There are drawbacks, however. I would like each of you to discuss problems that have arisen in your practice and provide some pearls of wisdom for everyone attending this gathering. Let us do another round robin, starting with Augusto, then Ngũgĩ, and lastly the Caravan. Here we go.

*Augusto:* As you said Susie, Theatre of the Oppressed is an artistic model based on Paulo Freire's pedagogy. I deliberately adopted the popular education paradigm and customized it for theatre. In an ideal world, Theatre of the Oppressed is community specific, and tailored to fit the needs of homogeneous marginalized groups. Participation in this democratically oriented approach can be liberating. But can also be deadly. Artists who engage in the system I created do so at great risk. Authoritarian

governments, like the ones who ruled with an iron fist in Brazil for 21 years, took every measure to safeguard their power base. Practicing Theatre of the Oppressed techniques under those conditions requires commitment and solidarity amongst the group.

*Susie:* I would like to follow-up. The system you devised is supposed to be theatre of the oppressed, by the oppressed, and for the oppressed. The methods were formulated for situations where there is severe repression, external and internal. The modus operandi comes with responsibilities and a warning sign. Yet, during abbreviated workshops you have taught around the globe to enthusiastic practitioners like myself, quite often, the nuts and bolts of the techniques are emphasized with limited attention paid to theory and context. I am wondering if your desire to universally spread the Theatre of the Oppressed system has violated your original intention for the work. For instance, how do you know in such a short span of time that a workshop participant is qualified to carry out the techniques in a conscientious manner? There are no prerequisites. There is no school or certification program. Anyone can do it. There is no required reading prior to the sessions, only recommendations. So people from all walks of life, who spend three intensive days studying with you, can apply what they have learned without a solid foundation. I believe a dangerous precedent has been set by this practice. To unleash a group of untrained zealots, who barely grasp the mechanics without the fundamentals can wreak havoc on a community and place marginalized populations in harms way. Would you consider this a pedagogical flaw?

*A Shout From A Man In The Second Row To The Moderator:* I am offended by your tone. It is harsh and a bit over the top.

*Augusto:* It is okay. I am used to her. She has been following me, and my son Julian around for years. [There's laughter throughout the auditorium.] Now, let me address your challenge. I believe there are pedagogical shortcomings. I have no illusions about the inherent imperfections and risks associated with the Theatre of the Oppressed system. On the other hand, Theatre of the Oppressed has the potential to yield extraordinary benefits. The method, which is designed to challenge myths perpetuated by the dominant ideology, is empowering. Subjugated groups assembled in a safe space can confront an assortment of issues pertaining to who wields power and why. They see their reality, analyze the root causes of their problems, and develop strategies and tactics to change the situation. I suggest that cultural activists interested in this work visit some of the Theatre of the Oppressed model programs. They can intern with me at the Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro. They can see Julian's work in France. They can go to one of the many Theatre of the Oppressed festivals sponsored by the Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed in India. Jana Sanskriti means the people's culture. The group, which is based in West Bengal, consists of approximately 1,000 peasants. It is part of a larger movement that has fanned out across the country. Theatre of the Oppressed is at the root of that movement. There are many more examples. Interested parties can ask me about the various opportunities after the symposium or write to me at CTO Rio.

*Susie:* Augusto, with all due respect, you dodged my question.

*Augusto:* What was the question? [chuckles]

*Susie:* Are you concerned about misrepresentation, co-optation, or deficient Theatre of the Oppressed training resulting in bad community practices? We are all

aware of the positive aspects of the system. What about the problems that have arisen due to worldwide multiplication?

*Augusto:* I am not worried. I am only one person and I cannot be everywhere at once. Spreading the Theatre of the Oppressed seeds is important! It comes down to solidarity! There are plenty of us out there that are doing wonderful things with the method. As you know, Susie, Theatre of the Oppressed is *ethical* theatre!

*Susie:* Okay Augusto. I am still troubled by the whole multiplication issue, so I am not going to let this go. I will be challenging you again in the future. Inadequate preparation can lead to catastrophic results.

*Augusto:* [laughs] Maybe I will not accept you into any more workshops.  
[applause]

*Susie:* Very funny. Now . . . before Ngũgĩ responds I would like to address the man who shouted at me from the second row. As moderator, part of my job is to encourage critical thinking and discourse. What is the point of participating in this gathering if it is just some kind of love fest? As cultural activists, it is our duty to rigorously question our motivation, strategies, tactics, and ideas. Otherwise, we will continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. Hopefully, through this dialogue we can build upon the legacy of these incredible human beings. This is a wonderful once in a lifetime opportunity for everyone amassed here. My goal for this evening is twofold: to celebrate the achievements of these pioneers and to learn from their successes and failures. As moderator, in order to achieve that aim, I am going to ask some hard-hitting questions. That way, we can all walk out of here with substantive

material to help us in our current and future efforts. Enough said. Now I would like to give Ngũgĩ the floor.

*Ngũgĩ:* Well, I agree with Augusto's first point. Paulo Freire's pedagogy, when adapted for theatre, can be transformative and dangerous. In Limuru, Kenya, many of the workers and peasants involved with the Kamĩĩĩĩĩ Community Education and Cultural Centre were partisans in the Mau Mau War. Others provided indirect support to the guerrilla wing of the movement. Their land was confiscated; their dwellings were demolished; their family members were detained and murdered by the colonialists (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005). Their recollections of the emergency years were fresh and they were cognizant of their status under the new East African administration. They were betrayed. The dramatization of their plight in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and *Maitũ Njugĩra* was their way of taking a stand and fighting back. Through their scripts they candidly expressed their discontent. The government reacted.

It was more than content, however, that precipitated the severe reprisals. The entire popular education modus operandi struck fear into the Kenyan leadership: the Kamĩĩĩĩĩ Community Education and Cultural Centre was run collectively. Every member participated in the development of the theatre production: the generation of topics, the writing of the scripts, crafting of the scenes. The process was transforming on a personal and community level. The auditions, rehearsals, and performances were open, allowing Kamĩĩĩĩĩ to spread its message beyond the boundaries of the village. The citizens were galvanized. The incorporation of the authentic language of the region and traditional culture further spawned a spirit of solidarity amongst the masses. The people had power and it shook the established order to its core. Kenyatta and his henchmen

struck back. They took us by surprise. We were not adequately prepared for the governmental onslaught. In hindsight, we should have planned better and expected the unexpected. I advise everyone to do the same.

*Susie*: What about my apprehension regarding untrained fanatics?

*Ngũgĩ:* As for your contentious provocation, I empathize with Augusto's conundrum. It is important to disseminate popular education pedagogy. I also agree that the manner in which liberation education is propagated is paramount. For example, in Kamĩrĩthũ, all of my colleagues and I believed in this whole notion that you start from where people are. One way we did that was to insist that every participant come from the village. Or have some connection to the village. Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩ and I lived in Nairobi, but we came from that village. Some people from other villages worked with us as well, but the majority of project associates were local inhabitants. Others came to observe. We had them do something for as long as they were there. That way, we could show and demystify the process and serve as a model for others who wanted to do this work. For instance, the auditions and rehearsals were open. People could see the unfolding of events: someone stumbling over lines, or awkward movement and paralysis on stage. The process was empowering. The unveiling of possibilities was dramatized. The villagers realized that everyone could do theatre.

Getting to this point, however, was a struggle. When we first went to Kamĩrĩthũ, people were really amazing. Some of them had fought in the mountains. Some of them had made homemade guns, technology for the fighting during the Mau Mau War. Yet, when they were singing, they always sang about our heroes who were out of the village. Singing about Kenyatta and other national leaders. Every verse was conferring to an

external person. The Kamĩrĩĩthũ villagers even sang about Ngũgĩ wa Mĩrĩĩ and I when we first joined the collective. It was problematic. So Ngũgĩ and I would say: Dedan Kimathi was important during the Mau Mau resistance. Who reminds you of Kimathi? Who in the village is like Kimathi? They said, oh. Yeah. This guy makes big guns. He works in a factory. Through this method everyone learned that they could make a contribution to the community. The villagers had experience and we had experience. Our experiences were equal in value (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2008). If, however, my colleagues and I did not have roots in the region, were not familiar with the historical underpinnings of colonialism and neocolonialism, and were not properly trained in popular education, the outcome would have been totally different. It could have been disastrous. So, I understand your concerns regarding multiplication without a theoretical framework. It is definitely food for thought for all of us.

*Susie:* Thank you Ngũgĩ. I really hope you and Augusto follow up after this symposium. Maybe you could collaborate on some venture. That would be exciting. [applause] It is unfortunate the two of you have not met until now. Okay. Moving right along. Let us hear from the Caravan. The popular education model was the centerpiece of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project of 1964. This time, however, instead of Paulo Freire's tutelage, it was the indomitable spirit and mentorship of Ella Baker and Myles Horton who introduced the popular education paradigm into the fold. The Freedom Schools, voter registration drive, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and the local Movement leadership were grounded in participatory democracy principles: "trust in the people's ability to govern themselves" (Jacobs, 2003, p. 185). Given that the Caravan of Music was the cultural caboose of the freedom struggle opposed to the

locomotive, I am wondering about some of the problems that arose while you were on tour. Especially since, with the exception of Bob Cohen, the majority of you did not attend the June 1964 orientation and training at the Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. Let us start with Bob.

*Bob:* Even though most of the artists did not participate in the instructional sessions at the Western College for Women in Oxford, they still received some preparation before their Mississippi stint. SNCC, CORE, and COFO did not just turn them loose and hope for the best. The Freedom Summer Project was highly organized. In fact, my role as director for the Caravan was conceived long before 1964. Gil Turner and I had been to Highlander. We traveled with my former roommate, Bob Moses to Edwards, Mississippi in 1963 and we participated in fund raising events for the movement. Prior to the start of the Summer Project, I asked Bob how I could help. He suggested that I come down to sing and bring others to do the same. He thought it would be a creative act of witnessing that would, in addition, help focus the media's and the nation's attention on the injustice and violence there. It would also be a morale booster for all those putting their lives on the line to exercise basic American rights. And so, that spring, with the help of Harold Leventhal and others, we got commitments from performers to come down and travel around the state to sing at rallies, lending their voices, names, and presence to the devilish inferno of the delta (Cohen, 1999, p. 182).

After the project began, my job was to direct and coordinate throughout the summer, and travel around and sing. The phone, a map, and a calendar were the main equipment in the Jackson office where my wife Susan and I were stationed. Singers came into Jackson, and I would spend a few hours trying to orient them to the unreality of



Mississippi—an almost impossible, but necessary effort. Then, I would plan a tour for them, sending them north, south, east, and west (not all at once). Everyone traveled with groups. As far as these singers went, there were only two instances of police harassment—one person arrested for reckless driving and the other fined for blocking traffic. This was extremely good luck, considering the amount of traveling done. Unfortunately, it was not typical for most of the other volunteers and the Black Mississippians (Cohen, 1999, p. 185). So you see, Caravan participants did get some coaching. Of course, some of the performers behaved a bit like artists, saying they already knew what to do and refused to tone down their 1960s lifestyle in order to survive and not cause themselves or any others trouble. And then there were the gems, like Carolyn Hester, who stood out as one of the most humble and loving of people. Perhaps coming from Texas, she was a bit more realistic about the situation (Cohen, 1999).

*Carolyn:* That is so sweet of you to say Bob.

*Susie:* Carolyn do you have something to add?

*Carolyn:* No, not at the moment.

*Susie:* Okay. I see Len wants to respond. Everyone—Len Chandler. [wild applause] Len, despite missing the Oxford orientation due to your gig with Hoyt Axton at the Buddhi, in Oklahoma City, you were prepared for your tour in the Magnolia State. You had attended the Atlanta “Sing for Freedom” gathering organized by SNCC, Highlander and SCLC a few months before and were already palling around with Cordell Reagon, one of the original SNCC Freedom Singers. Based on your published narrative in the *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle* anthology, however, my guess is that everyone

was not up to speed. I am wondering if you could provide one brief example for the audience.

*Len:* All right. [Bob Cohen passes the microphone to Len.] I flew into Vicksburg from New York. I was supposed to meet Cordell Reagon, who was driving, but I was there several days before he arrived. I wandered over to the Vicksburg Freedom House. Mario Savio was there. Mario later became a leader in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. All of a sudden I heard pop—pop—pop—pop—pop. That did not surprise me. After all it was the Fourth of July and my first day in Vicksburg, so I thought they were trying to freak me out with some firecrackers. If they were joking they were doing a good job, diving off the porch and going flat on the floor. But when the 15-year-old who had insisted on carrying my guitar said, “You better get your ass down Mr.,” I hit the floor just in time to hear the next volley punch several small holes in the wall behind my chair. After lying in the dark in silence for a long time, someone said, “Welcome to Mississippi.” The day after the shooting there was a lot of discussion about security. The Vicksburg Freedom House was surrounded by woods and thick underbrush. It also sat nearly three feet off the ground on cinder blocks. Their so-called watchdog loved everybody and would not even bark if you stepped on his tail, so they devised a plan. Armed with flashlights, sentries were to patrol the grounds all night in shifts. That night some locals invited me to hang out with them at the Black VFW. When I returned at about three in the morning, I asked them to drop me off down the road just to test the newly instituted security program. The sentry with the flashlight was sitting on a mattress outside the house, asleep. I petted the dog, tied the sentry’s shoelaces together, and took his flashlight. I covered the flashlight with a blue bandanna and crept through

the house. Everyone was sleeping. I left notes that said, “You’re dead . . . your throat was cut in your sleep.” They did not like the joke, and they did not learn the lesson. About four months later, the Vicksburg Freedom House was severely damaged by a bomb blast. Fortunately, there were no injuries (Chandler, 1999, pp. 208-209). [some chuckles from the spectators]

*Susie:* Hmmmmmm. Len’s illustration reveals endemic glitches in the system. The Vicksburg Freedom House residents were summer project volunteers. All of them were trained at the Western College for Women in Oxford. Now, let us hear from another Caravan member, Barbara Dane. [cheers and applause]

*Barbara:* At one point during my tour, I wound up in a car with a SNCC volunteer and a singer-songwriter from New York, who insisted on riding hunched down on the floor of the car the whole way. As soon as we arrived at the humble home of a supporter in the crossroads town where we were to stay that night, I overheard the singer on the telephone detailing our entire itinerary to someone at the top of his lungs. This was the very thing we had been warned not to do, for fear more of us would be kidnapped on the back roads, so I shouted at him to shut up at once. “Leave me alone, I’m talking to *Newsweek!*” was his reply, indicating a unilateral plan he had worked out. I avoided riding with him from then on (Dane, 1999, p. 224). Each of us had our agendas. They were not always foolproof.

*Susie:* Thanks everyone. A lot has been said. I would like to take a moment to do a little recap. First, I asked this evening’s participants about their political awakenings. They traveled different paths, were radicalized at different times, and are from different parts of the globe. Yet, they ended up in the same place: artists who

created dangerously by utilizing a popular education format. That is astounding. The fact that all of these artists ideologically arrived at the same spot and abided by the same pedagogical principles, is incredible. To be completely transparent, however, I knew they were philosophically in sync before I invited each of them to join this forum. [chuckles] Nevertheless, it is still noteworthy.

That is my gateway into the summation of my second question where I explored the popular education theme; highlighting the successes and challenges faced by everyone on stage. Each artist agreed that popular education has the power to be transformative. Each artist also agreed that there are risks. We got into trouble and had some discord when we discussed how to vigilantly pass on the techniques. Which leads me to my next question. I would like to examine ethics and responsibilities. As cultural activists, what is our obligation to the people and communities we serve and disturb? When and how do we rally for direct action or discourage and impede risk-taking? You all know the drill. We will start with Augusto, then Ngũgĩ, and last, but certainly not least, the Caravan.

*Augusto:* Instead of directly answering your question, I would like to read a letter I posted to the International Theatre of the Oppressed website on December 8, 2005. I feel it addresses some of your fears. At that time, there was a lot of hoopla over ethics. My response to the worldwide community is just as pertinent today as it was back then. Do you mind if I recite the written communiqué?

*Susie:* In the interest of time, it would be better if you chose the most pertinent sections of the correspondence. [Augusto removes the letter from his pants pocket. He

puts on his glasses, pulls over the microphone and begins to articulate his message to the crowd.]

*Augusto*: Dear Friends,

Many of you have expressed your concern about themes not sufficiently clear in our world's community of Theatre of the Oppressed. This may have led some of you into justifiable apprehensions about our future.

I have the obligation to clarify my views about some points that remain, perhaps, obscure. Some of my ideas are based on the philosophy of TO, so they are not modifiable. Some others are opinions that I have now, so they can change after an open dialogue with you.

The first controversy refers to the expression "Ethical Board" that has been used lately by some of you. I must say that I did not introduce that expression in our dialogue—it sounds like Secret Service, Political Police. . . . I did not write about sanctioning power, either; it sounds like death row . . .

Clarification, however, is necessary to give ITO an identity—it cannot be an umbrella for all kinds of theatre, good or bad, right or left. Every person and every association needs to have an identity. We have to declare who we are and who we are not.

Let us go back in time. *Theatre of the Oppressed* is a method that I created and systematized—with the help of thousands of people in dozens of countries!—From 1970 in Brazil, then during my exile and after, all over Latin America, Europe, and North America where I have extensively worked.

In 1973, I wrote my first book about this Method, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, in

which I explained the basic philosophy of this new way of making theatre. These philosophical choices are solid, well explained, and non-modifiable . . . [Augusto removes his glasses and looks up from the paper.] Is it clear?

*Audience:* Yes!

*Augusto:* Good. I am skipping ahead. [Augusto puts his glasses back on and begins to read.] Theatre of the Oppressed is democratic. We do not want to anesthetize our audiences or make them accept our ideas: we want to help them to express their own desires and needs, to examine their possibilities, to use theatre to rehearse actions to be extrapolated into their own reality to fight against oppression wherever it is exerted, at home or in the whole country, concerning gender, age, sex, nationalities, race, or religion, in psychological relations or in social classes: we want to transform and create a better society . . .

Those who do not accept these simple ideas, so clearly expressed in my book, of course do not belong in our community, and they themselves should not want to stay with us in the same organization—it would be a lie. This is crystalline. [Augusto removes his glasses and looks up again.] Is it crystalline to all of you?

*Audience:* Yes!

*Augusto:* [Augusto places his glasses back on and continues to read his letter.] When we talk about the basic philosophy of a Method we are not referring to the artistic qualities of those who practice it. We know that all 176 groups in our YP have not the same economical conditions, the same maturity, the same oppressions to fight against; it is natural not to have the same artistic qualities. We have to accept this diversity, knowing that it is our moral duty to help those who need and wish our help. I am ready

to do what is possible. [applause]

*Augusto:* We want to have an ITO with a strong personality, a very clear identity. We should not accept any group for the sole reason that it has artistic excellence. Suppose that Stanislawski himself asked us to be included in our YP, or to have a Theatre of the Oppressed label and, consequently, ours and my own endorsement, to his project to stage Uncle Vanya—what should we do?

After thanking him for his enormous contributions to the modern theatre, after revealing our great admiration for this giant of the Arts, we should humbly tell him that he had knocked at the wrong door, he definitely was not a Theatre of the Oppressed practitioner. ITO, as its name clearly says, is for those who practice TO, and for them alone. [applause]

On the other hand, having taken our basic options, we cannot accept in our community, groups that work for corporations, obeying them on how to artistically sedate workers or employees. Some people use theatre to reinforce oppression. Sad, but true.

Those groups explain that they have no other way to subsist in their countries, which is an excuse that we cannot morally accept.

I have also heard people saying that in their rich countries “society is more complex,” so they have to find new ways of using TO. By saying so, they reveal blindness, not seeing complexities that, of course, exist in other societies, and shortsightedness thinking only about their country, like rich people think only about their power and their profits, ignoring that they live in a world that is interrelated. Economically, no country is an island. If Switzerland can afford more comfort to its population than African countries can, it is because the money dictators stole from their

African people are stored in Swiss banks, or because rich countries profit from their exploitation against poor ones.

All countries are related to one another in many senses; the fact that women in my country can vote cannot make me forget that in many countries they cannot even walk in the streets alone and have to hide their faces; the fact that Brazil is clearly winning over HIV cannot make me forget that Africa is dying. [Augusto briefly looks up, but does not remove his glasses.] Is it clear?

*Audience:* Yes!

*Susie:* I am sorry to interrupt. I appreciate the content. It is a lengthy letter. There are lots of people here that want to talk. Please try to shorten the remaining parts. If you give the letter to my assistant, he can copy it in time for the book and CD signing.

*Augusto:* [Augusto never looked up. He perused his paper in an attempt to locate the most significant nugget for the audience.] Okay. I will wrap it up.

It is important to have clear our aim of liberation, emancipation: it is by fighting oppression in whatever form it appears that we will help to humanize Humanity. Our work has this truly civility essence; some barbarians want to keep societies as oppressive as they have always been, they want progress only in technology and profits, not in human rights. We, definitely, do not. We are democrats . . .

We all know that TO is the theatre *of* the oppressed, *by* the oppressed, and *for* the oppressed. That is total TO at work.

I have, however, seen many excellent groups of professional actors playing about oppressions that are not theirs, like HIV, drugs, etc., for a public that suffers from those oppressions. It is not the same as when you have the oppressed on the scene and in the



audience, but can give important results if the actors really know the theme and are willing to leave the stage, during the Forum, for the real oppressed to take their place and rehearse their future actions.

The third possibility, with poor results, is when actors play only out of solidarity, but do not identify themselves with the theme. I have seen a White group playing Black characters—it was painful to watch.

I think that we should demand to all groups that are in the YP to describe the work they are doing with TO, what they have done and are planning to do, their objectives and their achievements. This is important to better understand their TO projects and to exchange with those involved in similar work as we are.

We have to create a network of groups that can help and learn from one another when they are facing similar problems and finding original solutions. Then, we will have an integrated ITO for the benefit of all of us, and of all persons involved. . . . I'm going to end it here. [Augusto takes off his glasses and places them on the table.]

*Susie:* Thanks Augusto. You have provided something for us all to chew on. Please give the letter to my assistant so he can make copies for the audience. We do not have a lot of time for follow-up, but I would like to leave you with this thought: If your sessions had provided a solid foundation, placing the Theatre of the Oppressed system in its proper historical context and theoretical framework, would you still have been attacked by your critics?

*Augusto:* That is a good question! I am not sure I have a good answer! [chuckles]

*Susie:* Okay, think about this—in your autobiography you admit you made mistakes. Then, you let the issue drop, leaving your readers wondering about those

errors. Now you have a captive audience eager to learn from you. Some of them are from the International Theatre of the Oppressed community—the ones you addressed in your 2005 letter. Do you believe it is time to alter your workshop structure? If you incorporated more theory and context would this appease the faultfinders and provide a holistic and ethical framework for multiplication?

*Augusto:* As you know, Susie, I am always devising new Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. In 2007, you enrolled in my “Aesthetics of the Oppressed Workshop” at The Brecht Forum. That was an experimental session. I will consult with my son Julian about these matters. You will have to attend the gathering next spring to see the results. [a short pause] If I let you in! [loud laughter]

*Susie:* We have to leave it there and move on to Ngũgĩ. I would like to go back to my original question. As cultural activists, what is our obligation to the people and communities we serve and disturb? When and how do we rally for direct action or discourage and impede risk-taking?

*Ngũgĩ:* Many of the workers and peasants in Kamĩrĩĩthũ had participated in the struggle for land and freedom either in the passive wing or in the active guerrilla wing. Many had been in the forests and the mountains, many in the colonial detention camps and prisons, while some had of course collaborated with the British enemy. Many had seen their houses burnt; their daughters raped by the British; their land taken away; their relatives killed. Kamĩrĩĩthũ itself was a product of that history of heroic struggle against colonialism and of the subsequent monumental betrayal into neocolonialism (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2005, p. 45). They were in the heat of battle while I was a child. They were

well aware of the perils associated with their activities. And . . . they recruited me to join their efforts, not the other way around.

*Susie:* That is all well and good, but I am wondering about class disparities within the group. Che Guevara said “to be in solidarity is to run the same risks” (Boal, 2001, p. 194). Was that really possible? You and your colleagues were highly educated. You had more options than the Kamĩrĩthũ peasants and workers. You are considered one of East Africa’s most prolific authors. The peasants and workers were illiterate and unknown. You were adopted as one of Amnesty International’s prisoners of conscience. When the Kamĩrĩthũ peasants and workers were brutally attacked by neocolonial officials, the world looked on. You went into a self-imposed exile. The Kamĩrĩthũ peasants and workers had limited options available to them following the crackdown. Even in cases like Kamĩrĩthũ, where there was collective leadership, it is important to articulate the politics of privilege. These are important points for future liberation struggles to consider.

*Ngũgĩ:* This is all true, but I did not abandon the community when I went into exile. Here is what happened: I was on the verge of taking a flight back to Kenya on 31 July 1982 when I learnt that two of the people I used to work with at Kamĩrĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre had fled the country barely ahead of the police squad which had been sent by the regime to arrest them. I myself received urgent messages to the effect that the governing regime had planned a secret Red Carpet welcome for my arrival in Nairobi. In a neocolonial dictatorship, the word red has other, more literal and sinister meanings.

I remained in London as a self-employed artist for seven years, but really, six of them were spent working for the release of political prisoners in Kenya. It seemed to me my duty to do so for I could not bear the fact of some of Kenya's finest minds languishing in jail for crimes of thought. In those days, it was very difficult to convince people in the West of the terrorist character of the Moi government. Kenya was an island of peace and democracy proven by the fact that the government always sided with the West in the politics of the cold war. It was only when Amnesty International produced the 1987 special report on torture, detention without trial, and imprisonments on false charges that the world came to realize the truth of what the London-based Committee for the Release of Political Prisoners and its allies in Europe and the world had been saying and writing in their documents. During the same period, Kenyans abroad started regrouping, trying to organize themselves as Kenyans, and to link their struggles abroad with those inside the country (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1997, p. x).

*Susie:* In retrospect, could you have done anything differently? None of you were adequately prepared for the attacks from opposition forces. As a result, the power elite was able to dismantle the entire Kamĩĩĩĩthũ operation. There was no structure in place to assist individuals who were persecuted by administrative officials. You and your colleagues were dispersed while community inhabitants fell silent or went underground. Communication between the players stopped, and the Theatre for Development experiment was dead.

*Ngũgĩ:* It is hard to say. It is all speculation at this point. I was a marked man, so there was not anything I could do inside the country. As many of you know, in August of 2004, I returned to Kenya, as part of an African speaking tour, after 22 years in exile.

Hired gunmen broke into my apartment two blocks from the Central Police Station and brutally attacked my wife and me. These men stole the computer that contained the lecture, the only major item taken. We narrowly escaped death (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2009, p. x). I am certain that Augusto understands my predicament. He had to flee his homeland as well.

*Augusto:* For the exiled and the banished . . . a letter from a friend, even scrawled in pencil, was consolation and stimulus. Those who have never been exiled have no idea how much good it did us when people wrote, even telling of the everyday and the banal: it was enough . . . I never threw a letter away. If new ones did not arrive, I used to reread the ones I had (Boal, 2001, p. 320).

*Susie:* Yes, I suppose it is unfair for those of us sitting on the sidelines to judge. Unless a person has been in the thick of battle, it is hard to know what he/she would do. In some respects, this forum is an academic exercise. Even so, I am certain there are takeaways for everyone assembled here.

For me, this is a wonderful chance to sort and synthesize the ups and downs associated with creating dangerously. Through the artists' stories, I can vicariously experience their liberation struggle ordeals, and figure out how I can ethically and responsibly move forward in my own life.

Now, I would like to hear from the Caravan. I am giving them the final word on the ethics and responsibility theme. [Susie turns in the direction of the Caravan.] Your situation is a bit different from Ngũgĩ's and Augusto's. With the exception of Augusto's abridged workshops, both men worked long-term within host communities. In Ngũgĩ's case, it was his place of birth. Augusto stayed in Brazil until he was forced into exile

following his imprisonment. He continued to develop the Theatre of the Oppressed arsenal wherever he was stationed. The Caravan participants, on the other hand, were invited guests.

*Charlie Cobb Calls Out From The Center Of The Sixth Row:* Hey Susie. Do you mind if I comment? I would like to frame the issue.

*Susie:* Come on up. Please welcome Charlie Cobb, one of the stalwarts of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement. [Applause from the audience. Charlie excuses himself as he climbs over other spectators to get to the stage. When he reaches the elevated platform, he embraces Susie and greets the other featured speakers. Susie hands him a microphone.]

*Charlie:* The arguments for and against the 1964 Mississippi summer project framed the issue of change in terms of race, nonviolence, and the need for national pressure on the state. But, at its most basic, the debate was over whether hundreds of White college students would take over the Movement and, with what was presumed to be their superior resources, education, and connections, stifle local Black leadership, some of it just developing. Or, did the inarguable and immediate facts of terrible violence, economic reprisal, and the low level of national concern outweigh this? After all, violence was on the increase. Federal authorities still insisted their hands were tied in responding to it. Media, for the most part, did not get to the out-of-the-way rural counties where SNCC and CORE organizers worked. And, insofar as success could be measured by attempts at voter registration, few in the prevailing climate of terror were attempting it.

In a sense, the debate was never resolved, although by default, plans for the summer project went ahead; the students were on their way. If SNCC/COFO did not bring them down, the National Council of Churches said it was going to. Organizers, no matter where they stood in the complex debating about the summer project, finally said, if they are coming down, we will organize them (Cobb, 1999, p. 135).

*Susie:* Thanks Charlie. [Charlie hands the microphone to Susie and makes his way back to his seat.] Any additional remarks from the Caravan singers-songwriters? [They all shake their heads no.]

Before we leave this issue I would like to read something from Si Kahn's (2010) new book *Creative Community Organizing*. Unfortunately, Si was not able to make it to tonight's event. I'm quoting from page 65: "As ethical organizers, we need to be absolutely certain the people we work with truly recognize the risks they're taking, the things that could go wrong, the losses they might suffer, before they make the decision to act, individually or together." [Susie looks up and speaks to the audience.] I totally agree with Si's statement. From the comments made thus far, I trust the esteemed assembled cast concur as well.

Si goes on to say: "For the most part, the communities where we organize are not our communities. The people we work with are not our families, our friends, or our neighbors. When the organizing campaign is over, whether the battle is won or lost, whether the organization is built or not built, we leave. They stay. So whatever decisions are made must be theirs, not ours." (Kahn, 2010, p. 65). [Susie closes the book and places it on the table.] Si's comments sum up this evening's ethics and responsibilities segment. As cultural activists who engage in popular education

pedagogy, I hope all of us heed his warning. When we enter communities, our job is to accompany indigenous populations in their struggle for emancipation, not to take the reigns of power away from local organizers. We are not saviors. We are outsiders. And eventually we will go home. The artists gathered here are exemplars. Please learn from them; buy their books and recordings; and make certain that you are adequately prepared before you enter the scene.

Okay. Let us move on. I have one final question. Near the beginning of C. Wright Mill's 1948 publication *The New Men of Power*, he recounted eyewitness testimony of an incident that occurred in Everett, Washington during the Free Speech battle waged by the IWW in 1917. When a ship full of Wobblies approached the shore, Sheriff McRae shouted out to them, "Who is your leader?" "We are all leaders!" was the response. The sheriff and his men opened fire on the vessel killing five of the protesters on board (Lynd & Grubacic, 2008).

The Wobblies were leadership practitioners and scholars in their own right long before leadership studies became an acceptable academic field. They used popular education techniques advocating for the transformation of the individual, which in turn can transform society.

During the first Industrial Workers of the World Convention in 1905, held in Chicago, the Wobblies set the stage for major change in the social order. At the top of the list was the abolition of the capitalist wage system, replacing it with a form of industrial democracy where the workers collectively build the apparatus and own the means of production. Decades later, all of the cultural activists on this stage, have mirrored Wobbly antics, yet none of them are mentioned in the traditional leadership



texts. How would you convince these writers that artists have contributed significantly to social change initiatives and that a bottom-up paradigm is not only paramount for transformation; it is the quintessential model? That leadership without followership is not only possible; it is democratic, ethical and just? Unfortunately we are running out of time, so I am going to have to ask you to keep your answers brief. Augusto, what do you think?

*Augusto:* I believe that all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so that the people themselves may utilize them. The theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who should wield it. In Theatre of the Oppressed, the spectator delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary, he himself assumes the protagonist role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change—in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action! (Boal, 1985, p. 122). I recommend that ivory tower skeptics come study with me.

*Susie:* I second that motion. [Some chuckles in the house. Susie turns to Ngũgĩ.] A quick response?

*Ngũgĩ:* I am not that familiar with the field of leadership, but I certainly do not expect traditionally trained intellectuals to endorse, practice, or teach popular education methods. The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to

annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities, and ultimately, in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary—all those forces that would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death wish . . .

The classes fighting against imperialism even in its neocolonial stage and form have to confront this threat with the higher and more creative culture of resolute struggle. These classes have to wield even more firmly the weapons of the struggle contained in their cultures. They have to speak the united language of struggle contained in each of their languages. They must discover their various tongues to sing the song: A people united can never be defeated (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 2005, p. 3).

*Audience:* [chants] The people united can never be defeated. The people united can never be defeated. The people united can never be defeated. [wild applause throughout the house]

*Susie:* Thank you Augusto and Ngũgĩ. [Susie faces the Caravan singers-songwriters.] Who wants to answer the closing question about leadership? Bob? [Bob Cohen grabs the microphone.]

*Bob:* It is not about changing the opposition. It is about strengthening our forces. The way we do that is through education. Through education we can build a movement. I highly recommend that people visit Highlander in Tennessee and partake in a workshop or two. Read, read, read. Expand your knowledge base. Build your network. There is power in numbers. [applause]

*Susie:* Sadly, we do not have time for Q & A.

*Audience:* [Booooooooooooo]

*Susie:* We do have time for one song. [applause] I would like to give this one to Carolyn Hester. She has not said much this evening. [Carolyn picks up her guitar and moves to the center of the stage.]

*Carolyn:* I'm going to play a song written by our dear friend Gil Turner. Gil recruited a lot of us for the Mississippi tour. You all know it. Sing with me:

There's a man by my side a walkin'

There's a voice inside me a talkin'

There's a word needs a sayin'

Carry It On. Carry It On. Carry It On. Carry It On.

[The audience and featured artists join in by the second verse.]

They'll tell to you their lyin' stories

Send killer dogs to bite your bodies

Though they lock us into prison

Carry It On. Carry It On. Carry It On. Carry It On.

[Hundreds of spectators stood at their seats, singing and swaying.]

All their lies be soon forgotten

All their dogs gonna lie there rotten

All their prison walls will crumble

Carry It On. Carry It On. Carry It On. Carry It On.

[Knowing this was the last verse the audience loudly and harmoniously filled the hall.]

If you can't go on any longer

Take the hand held out by your brother

Every victory gonna bring another

Carry It On. Carry It On. Carry It On. Carry It On. [applause]

*Susie*: That's it. Carry it on out into the corridor. The hootenanny will resume there along with refreshments, and a book and CD signing. Thank you all for coming.

Good night. [applause]

The audience slowly made its way out of the auditorium. The festivities continued into the wee hours of the morning. It was a glorious affair.

**APPENDIX**

### **Appendix A: *Create Dangerously* by Albert Camus (1957)**

*Create Dangerously*: (A Lecture Given by Albert Camus On December 14, 1957 at the University of Uppsala in Sweden)

An Oriental wise man always used to ask the divinity in his prayers to be so kind as to spare him from living in an interesting era. As we are not wise, the divinity has not spared us and we are living in an interesting era. In any case, our era forces us to take an interest in it. The writers of today know this. If they speak up, they are criticized and attacked. If they become modest and keep silent, they are vociferously blamed for their silence.

In the midst of such din the writer cannot hope to remain aloof in order to pursue the reflections and images that are dear to him. Until the present moment, remaining aloof has always been possible in history. When someone did not approve, he could always keep silent or talk of something else. Today everything is changed and even silence has dangerous implications. The moment that abstaining from choice is itself looked upon as a choice and punished or praised as such, the artist is willy-nilly impressed into service. “Impressed” seems to me a more accurate term in this connection than “committed.” Instead of signing up, indeed, for voluntary service, the artist does his compulsory service. Every artist today is embarked on the contemporary slave galley. He has to resign himself to this even if he considers that the galley reeks of its past, that the slave-drivers are really too numerous, and, in addition, that the steering is badly handled. We are on the high seas. The artist, like everyone else, must bend to his oar, without dying if possible—in other words, go on living and creating.

To tell the truth, it is not easy, and I can understand why artists regret their former comfort. The change is somewhat cruel. Indeed, history's amphitheater has always contained the martyr and the lion. The former relied on eternal consolations and the latter on raw historical meat. But until now the artist was on the sidelines. He used to sing purposely, for his own sake, or at best to encourage the martyr and make the lion forget his appetite. But now the artist is in the amphitheater. Of necessity, his voice is not quite the same; it is not nearly so firm.

It is easy to see all that art can lose from such a constant obligation. Ease, to begin with, and that divine liberty so apparent in the work of Mozart. It is easier to understand why our works of art have a drawn, set look and why they collapse so suddenly. It is obvious why we have more journalists than creative writers, more boy-scouts of painting than Cézannes, and why sentimental tales or detective novels have taken the place of *War and Peace* or *The Charterhouse of Parma*. Of course, one can always meet that state of things with a humanistic lamentation and become what Stepan Trofimovich in *The Possessed* insists upon being; a living reproach. One can also have, like him, attacks of patriotic melancholy. But such melancholy in no way changes reality. It is better, in my opinion, to give the era its due, since it demands this so vigorously, and calmly admit that the period of the revered master, of the artist with a camellia in his buttonhole, of the armchair genius is over. To create today is to create dangerously. Any publication is an act, and that act exposes one to the passions of an age that forgives nothing. Hence the question is not to find out if this is or is not prejudicial to art. The question, for all those who cannot live without art and what it signifies, is

merely to find out how, among the police forces of so many ideologies (how many churches, what solitude!), the strange liberty of creation is possible.

It is not enough to say in this regard that art is threatened by the powers of the State. If that were true, the problem would be simple: the artist fights or capitulates. The problem is more complex, more serious too, as soon as it becomes apparent that the battle is waged within the artist himself. The hatred for art, of which our society provides such fine examples, is so effective today only because it is kept alive by artists themselves. The doubt felt by the artists who preceded us concerned their own talent. The doubt felt by artists of today concerns the necessity of their art, hence their very existence. Racine in 1957 would make excuses for writing *Berenice* when he might have been fighting to defend the Edict of Nantes.

That questioning of art by the artist has many reasons, and the loftiest need be considered. Among the best explanations is the feeling the contemporary artist has of lying or of indulging in useless words if he pays no attention to history's woes. What characterizes our time, indeed, is the way the masses and their wretched condition have burst upon contemporary sensibilities. We now know that they exist, whereas we once had a tendency to forget them. And if we are more aware, it is not because our aristocracy, artistic or otherwise, has become better—no, have no fear—it is because the masses have become stronger and keep people from forgetting them.

There are still other reasons, and some of them less noble, for this surrender of the artist. But, whatever those reasons may be, they all work toward the same end: to discourage free creation by undermining its basic principle, the creator's faith in himself. "A man's obedience to his own genius," Emerson says magnificently, "is faith in its



purest form.” And another American writer of the nineteenth century added: “So long as a man is faithful to himself, everything is in his favor, government, society, the very sun, moon, and stars.” Such amazing optimism seems dead today. In most cases the artist is ashamed of himself and his privileges, if he has any. He must first of all answer the question he has put to himself: is art a deceptive luxury?

# 1

The first straightforward reply that can be made is this: on occasion art may be a deceptive luxury. On the poop deck of slave galleys it is possible, at any time and place, as we know, to sing of the constellations while the convicts bend over the oars and exhaust themselves in the hold; it is always possible to record the social conversation that takes place on the benches of the amphitheater while the lion is crunching the victim. And it is very hard to make any objections to the art that has known such success in the past. But things have changed somewhat, and the number of convicts and martyrs has increased amazingly over the surface of the globe. In the face of so much suffering, if art insists on being a luxury, it will also be a lie.

Of what could art speak, indeed? If it adapts itself to what the majority of our society wants, art will be a meaningless recreation. If it blindly rejects that society, if the artist makes up his mind to take refuge in his dream, art will express nothing but a negation. In this way we shall have the production of entertainers or of formal grammarians, and in both cases this leads to an art cut off from living reality. For about a century we have been living in a society that is not even the society of money (gold can arouse carnal passions) but that of the abstract symbols of money. The society of merchants can be defined as a society in which things disappear in favor of signs. When

a ruling class measures its fortunes, not by the acre of land or the ingot of gold, but by the number of figures corresponding ideally to a certain number of exchange operations, it thereby condemns itself to setting a certain kind of humbug at the center of its experience and its universe. A society founded on signs is, in its essence, an artificial society in which man's carnal truth is handled as something artificial. There is no reason for being surprised that such a society chose as its religion a moral code of formal principles and that it inscribes the words "liberty" and "equality" on its prisons as well as on its temples of finance. However, words cannot be prostituted with impunity. The most misrepresented value today is certainly the value of liberty. Good minds (I have always thought there were two kinds of intelligence—intelligent intelligence and stupid intelligence) teach that it is but an obstacle on the path of true progress. But such solemn stupidities were uttered because for a hundred years a society of merchants made an exclusive and unilateral use of liberty, looking upon it as a right rather than as a duty, and did not fear to use an ideal liberty, as often as it could, to justify a very real oppression. As a result, is there anything surprising in the fact that such a society asked art to be, not an instrument of liberation, but an inconsequential exercise and a mere entertainment? Consequently, a fashionable society in which all troubles were money troubles and all worries were sentimental worries was satisfied for decades with its society novelists and with the most futile art in the world, the one about which Oscar Wilde, thinking of himself before he knew prison, said that the greatest of all vices was superficiality.

In this way the manufacturers of art (I did not say the artists) of middle-class Europe, before and after 1900, accepted irresponsibility because responsibility presupposed a painful break with their society (those who really broke with it are named

Rimbaud, Nietzsche, Strindberg, and we know the price they paid). From that period we get the theory of art for art's sake, which is verily a voicing of that irresponsibility. Art for art's sake, the entertainment of a solitary artist, is indeed the artificial art of a factitious and self-absorbed society. The logical result of such a theory is the art of little cliques or the purely formal art fed on affectations and abstractions and ending in the destruction of all reality. In this way a few works charm a few individuals while many coarse inventions corrupt many others. Finally art takes shape outside of society and cuts itself off from its living roots. Gradually the artist, even if he is celebrated, is alone or at least is known to his nation only through the intermediary of the popular press or the radio, which will provide a convenient and simplified idea of him. The more art specializes, in fact, the more necessary popularization becomes. In this way millions of people will have the feeling of knowing this or that great artist of our time because they have learned from the newspapers that he raises canaries or that he never stays married more than six months. The greatest renown today consists in being admired or hated without having been read. Any artist who goes in for being famous in our society must know that it is not he who will become famous, but someone else under his name, someone who will eventually escape him and perhaps someday will kill the true artist in him.

Consequently, there is nothing surprising in the fact that almost everything worth while created in the mercantile Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—in literature, for instance—was raised up against the society of its time. It may be said that until almost the time of the French Revolution current literature was, in the main, a literature of consent. From the moment when middle-class society, a result of the

revolution, became stabilized, a literature of revolt developed instead. Official values were negated, in France, for example, either by the bearers of revolutionary values, from the Romantics to Rimbaud, or by the maintainers of aristocratic values, of whom Vigny and Balzac are good examples. In both cases the masses and the aristocracy—the two sources of all civilization—took their stand against the artificial society of their time.

But this negation, maintained so long that it is now rigid, has become artificial too and leads to another sort of sterility. The theme of the exceptional poet born into a mercantile society (Vigny's *Chatterton* is the finest example) has hardened into a presumption that one can be a great artist only against the society of one's time, whatever it may be. Legitimate in the beginning when asserting that a true artist could not compromise with the world of money, the principle became false with the subsidiary belief that an artist could assert himself only by being against everything in general. Consequently, many of our artists long to be exceptional, feel guilty if they are not, and wish for simultaneous applause and hisses. Naturally, society, tired or indifferent at present, applauds and hisses only at random. Consequently, the intellectual of today is always bracing himself stiffly to add to his height. But as a result of rejecting everything, even the tradition of his art, the contemporary artist gets the illusion that he is creating his own rule and eventually takes himself for God. At the same time he thinks he can create his reality himself. But, cut off from his society, he will create nothing but formal or abstract works, thrilling as experiences but devoid of the fecundity we associate with true art, which is called upon to unite. In short, there will be as much difference between the contemporary subtleties or abstractions and the works of a Tolstoy or a Moliere as between an anticipatory draft on invisible wheat and the rich soil of the furrow itself.

In this way art may be a deceptive luxury. It is not surprising, then, that men or artists wanted to call a halt and go back to truth. As soon as they did, they denied that the artist had a right to solitude and offered him as a subject, not his dreams, but reality as it is lived and endured by all. Convinced that art for art's sake, through its subjects and through its style, is not understandable to the masses or else in no way expresses their truth, these men wanted the artist instead to speak intentionally about and for the majority. He has only to translate the sufferings and happiness of all into the language of all and he will be universally understood. As a reward for being absolutely faithful to reality, he will achieve complete communication among men.

This ideal of universal communication is indeed the ideal of any great artist. Contrary to the current presumption, if there is any man who has no right to solitude, it is the artist. Art cannot be a monologue. When the most solitary and least famous artist appeals to posterity, he is merely reaffirming his fundamental vocation. Considering a dialogue with deaf or inattentive contemporaries to be impossible, he appeals to a more far-reaching dialogue with the generations to come.

But in order to speak about all and to all, one has to speak of what all know and of the reality common to us all. The sea, rains, necessity, desire, the struggle against death—these are the things that unite us all. We resemble one another in what we see together, in what we suffer together. Dreams change from individual to individual, but the reality of the world is common to us all. Striving toward realism is therefore legitimate, for it is basically related to the artistic adventure.

So let's be realistic. Or, rather, let's try to be so, if this is possible. For it is not certain that the word has a meaning; it is not certain that realism, even if it is desirable, is possible. Let us stop and inquire first of all if pure realism is possible in art. If we believe the declarations of the nineteenth-century naturalists, it is the exact reproduction of reality. Therefore it is to art what photography is to painting: the former reproduces and the latter selects. But what does it reproduce and what is reality? Even the best of photographs, after all, is not a sufficiently faithful reproduction, is not yet sufficiently realistic. What is there more real, for instance, in our universe than a man's life, and how can we hope to preserve it better than in a realistic film? But under what conditions is such a film possible? Under purely imaginary conditions. We should have to presuppose, in fact, an ideal camera focused on the man day and night and constantly registering his every move. The very projection of such a film would last a lifetime and could be seen only by an audience of people willing to waste their lives in watching someone else's life in great detail. Even under such conditions, such an unimaginable film would not be realistic for the simple reason that the reality of a man's life is not limited to the spot in which he happens to be. It lies also in other lives that give shape to his—lives of people he loves, to begin with, which would have to be filmed too, and also lives of unknown people, influential and insignificant, fellow citizens, policemen, professors, invisible comrades from the mines and foundries, diplomats and dictators, religious reformers, artists who create myths that are decisive for our conduct—humble representatives, in short, of the sovereign chance that dominates the most routine existences. Consequently, there is but one possible realistic film: the one that is

constantly shown us by an invisible camera on the world's screen. The only realistic artist, then, is God, if he exists. All other artists are, *ipso facto*, unfaithful to reality.

As a result, the artists who reject bourgeois society and its formal art, who insist on speaking of reality, and reality alone, are caught in a painful dilemma. They must be realistic and yet cannot be. They want to make their art subservient to reality, and reality cannot be described without effecting a choice that makes it subservient to the originality of an art. The beautiful and tragic production of the early years of the Russian Revolution clearly illustrates this torment. What Russia gave us then with Blok and the great Pasternak, Maiakovski and Essenine, Eisenstein and the first novelists of cement and steel, was a splendid laboratory of forms and themes, a fecund unrest, a wild enthusiasm for research. Yet it was necessary to conclude and to tell how it was possible to be realistic even though complete realism was impossible. Dictatorship, in this case as in others, went straight to the point: in its opinion realism was first necessary and then possible so long as it was deliberately socialistic. What is the meaning of this decree?

As a matter of fact, such a decree frankly admits that reality cannot be reproduced without exercising a selection, and it rejects the theory of realism as it was formulated in the nineteenth century. The only thing needed, then, is to find a principle of choice that will give shape to the world. And such a principle is found, not in the reality we know, but in the reality that will be –in short, the future. In order to reproduce properly what is, one must depict also what will be. In other words, the true object of socialistic realism is precisely what has no reality yet.

The contradiction is rather beautiful. But, after all, the very expression socialistic realism was contradictory. How, indeed, is a socialistic realism possible when reality is

not altogether socialistic? It is not socialistic, for example, either in the past or altogether in the present. The answer is easy: we shall choose in the reality of today or of yesterday what announces and serves the perfect city of the future. So we shall devote ourselves, on the one hand, to negating and condemning whatever aspects of reality are not socialistic, and, on the other hand, to glorifying what is or will become so. We shall inevitably get a propaganda art with its heroes and its villains—an edifying literature, in other words, just as remote as formalistic art is from complex and living reality. Finally, that art will be socialistic insofar as it is not realistic.

This aesthetic that intended to be realistic therefore becomes a new idealism, just as sterile for the true artist as bourgeois idealism. Reality is ostensibly granted a sovereign position only to be more readily thrown out. Art is reduced to nothing. It serves and, by serving, becomes a slave. Only those who keep from describing reality will be praised as realists. The others will be censured, with the approval of the former. Renown, which in bourgeois society consisted in not being read or in being misunderstood, will in a totalitarian society consist in keeping others from being read. Once more, true art will be distorted or gagged and universal communication will be made impossible by the very people who most passionately wanted it.

The easiest thing, when faced with such a defeat, would be to admit that so-called socialistic realism has little connection with great art and that the revolutionaries, in the very interest of the revolution, ought to look for another aesthetic. But it is well known that the defenders of the theory described shout that no art is possible outside it. They spend their time shouting this. But my deep-rooted conviction is that they do not believe it and that they have decided, in their hearts, that artistic values must be subordinated to the



values of revolutionary action. If this were clearly stated, the discussion would be easier. One can respect such great renunciation on the part of men who suffer too much from the contrast between the unhappiness of all and the privileges sometimes associated with an artist's lot, who reject the unbearable distance separating those whom poverty gags and those whose vocation is rather to express themselves constantly. One might then understand such men, try to carry on a dialogue with them, attempt to tell them, for instance, that suppressing creative liberty is perhaps not the right way to overcome slavery and that until they can speak for all it is stupid to give up the ability to speak for a few at least. Yes, socialistic realism ought to own up to the fact that it is the twin brother of political realism. It sacrifices art for an end that is alien to art but that, in the scale of values, may seem to rank higher. In short, it suppresses art temporarily in order to establish justice first. When justice exists, in a still indeterminate future, art will resuscitate. In this way the golden rule of contemporary intelligence is applied to matters of art—the rule that insists on the impossibility of making an omelet without breaking eggs. But such overwhelming common sense must not mislead us. To make a good omelet it is not enough to break thousands of eggs, and the value of a cook is not judged, I believe by the number of broken eggshells. If the artistic cooks of our time upset more baskets of eggs than they intended, the omelet of civilization may never again come out right, and art may never resuscitate. Barbarism is never temporary. Sufficient allowance is never made for it, and, quite naturally, from art barbarism extends to morals. Then the suffering and blood of men give birth to insignificant literatures, and ever-indulgent press, photographed portraits, and sodality plays in which hatred takes the place of

religion. Art culminates thus in forced optimism, the worst of luxuries, it so happens, and the most ridiculous of lies.

How could we be surprised? The suffering of mankind is such a vast subject that it seems no one could touch it unless he was like Keats so sensitive, it is said, that he could have touched pain itself with his hands. This is clearly seen when a controlled literature tries to alleviate that suffering with official consolations. The lie of art for art's sake pretended to know nothing of evil and consequently assumed responsibility for it. But the realistic lie, even though managing to admit mankind's present unhappiness, betrays that unhappiness just as seriously by making use of it to glorify a future state of happiness, about which no one knows anything, so that the future authorizes every kind of humbug.

The two aesthetics that have long stood opposed to each other, the one that recommends a complete rejection of real life and the one that claims to reject anything that is not real life, end up, however, by coming to agreement, far from reality, in a single lie and in the suppression of art. The academicism of the Right does not even acknowledge a misery that the academicism of the Left utilizes for ulterior reasons. But in both cases the misery is only strengthened at the same time that art is negated.

### 3

Must we conclude that this lie is the very essence of art? I shall say instead that the attitudes I have been describing are lies only insofar as they have but little relation to art. What, then, is art? Nothing simple, that is certain. And it is even harder to find out amid the shouts of so many people bent on simplifying everything. On the one hand, genius is expected to be splendid and solitary; on the other hand, it is called upon to resemble all.

Alas, reality is more complex. And Balzac suggested this in a sentence: “The genius resembles everyone and no one resembles him.” So it is with art, which is nothing without reality and without which reality is insignificant. How, indeed, could art get along without the real and how could art be subservient to it? The artist chooses his object as much as he is chosen by it. Art, in a sense, is a revolt against everything fleeting and unfinished in the world. Consequently, its only aim is to give another form to a reality that it is nevertheless forced to preserve as the source of its emotion. In this regard, we are all realistic and no one is. Art is neither complete rejection nor complete acceptance of what is. It is simultaneously rejection and acceptance, and this is why it must be a perpetually renewed wrenching apart. The artist constantly lives in such a state of ambiguity, incapable of negating the real and yet eternally bound to question it in its eternally unfinished aspects. In order to paint a still life, there must be confrontation and mutual adjustment between a painter and an apple. And if forms are nothing without the world’s lighting, they in turn add to that lighting. The real universe, which, by its radiance, calls forth bodies and statues receives from them at the same time a second light that determines the light from the sky. Consequently, great style lies midway between the artist and his object.

There is no need of determining whether art must flee reality or defer to it, but rather what precise dose of reality the work must take on as ballast to keep from floating up among the clouds or from dragging along the ground with weighted boots. Each artist solves this problem according to his lights and abilities. The greater an artist’s revolt against the world’s reality, the greater can be the weight of reality to balance that revolt. But the weight can never stifle the artist’s solitary exigency. The loftiest work will

always be, as in the Greek tragedians, Melville, Tolstoy, or Moliere, the work that maintains an equilibrium between reality and man's rejection of that reality, each forcing the other upward in a ceaseless overflowing, characteristic of life itself at its most joyous and heart-rending extremes. Then, every once in a while, a new world appears, different from the everyday world and yet the same, particular but universal, full of innocent insecurity—called forth for a few hours by the power and longing of genius. That's just it and yet that's not it; the world is nothing and the world is everything—this is the contradictory and tireless cry of every true artist, the cry that keeps him on his feet with eyes ever open and that, every once in a while, awakens for all in this world asleep the fleeting and insistent image of a reality we recognize without ever having known it.

Likewise, the artist can neither turn away from his time nor lose himself in it. If he turns away from it, he speaks in a void. But, conversely, insofar as he takes his time as his object, he asserts his own existence as subject and cannot give in to it altogether. In other words, at the very moment when the artist chooses to share the fate of all, he asserts the individual he is. And he cannot escape from this ambiguity. The artist takes from history what he can see of it himself or undergo himself, directly or indirectly—the immediate event, in other words, and men who are alive today, not the relationship of that immediate event to a future that is invisible to the living artist. Judging contemporary man in the name of a man who does not yet exist is the function of prophecy. But the artist can value the myths that are offered him only in relation to their repercussion on living people. The prophet, whether religious or political, can judge absolutely and, as is known, is not chary of doing so. But the artist cannot. If he judged absolutely, he would arbitrarily divide reality into good and evil and thus indulge in melodrama. The aim of

art, on the contrary, is not to legislate or to reign supreme, but rather to understand first of all. Sometimes it does reign supreme, as a result of understanding. But no work of genius has ever been based on hatred and contempt. This is why the artist, at the end of his slow advance, absolves instead of condemning. Instead of being a judge, he is a justifier. He is the perpetual advocate of the living creature, because it is alive. He truly argues for love of one's neighbor and not for that love of the remote stranger which debases contemporary humanism until it becomes the catechism of the law court. Instead, the great work eventually confounds all judges. With it the artist simultaneously pays homage to the loftiest figure of mankind and bows down before the worst of criminals. "There is not," Wilde wrote in prison, "a single wretched man in this wretched place along with me who does not stand in symbolic relation to the very secret of life." Yes, and that secret of life coincides with the secret of art.

For a hundred and fifty years the writers belonging to a mercantile society, with but few exceptions, thought they could live in happy irresponsibility. They lived, indeed, and then died alone, as they had lived. But we writers of the twentieth century shall never again be alone. Rather, we must know that we can never escape the common misery and that our only justification, if indeed there is a justification, is to speak up, insofar as we can, for those who cannot do so. But we must do so for all those who are suffering at this moment, whatever may be the glories, past or future, of the States and parties oppressing them: for the artist there are no privileged torturers. This is why beauty, even today, especially today, cannot serve any party; it cannot serve, in the long or short run, anything but men's suffering or their liberty. The only really committed artist is he who, without refusing to take part in the combat, at least refuses to join the

regular armies and remains a free-lance. The lesson he then finds in beauty, if he draws it fairly, is a lesson not of selfishness but rather of hard brotherhood. Looked upon thus, beauty has never enslaved anyone. And for thousands of years, every day, at every second, it has instead assuaged the servitude of millions of men and, occasionally, liberated some of them once and for all. After all, perhaps the greatness of art lies in the perpetual tension between beauty and pain, the love of men and the madness of creation, unbearable solitude and the exhausting crowd, rejection and consent. Art advances between two chasms, which are frivolity and propaganda. On the ridge where the great artist moves forward, every step is an adventure, an extreme risk. In that risk, however, and only there, lies the freedom of art. A difficult freedom that is more like an ascetic discipline? What artist would deny this? What artist would dare to claim that he was equal to such a ceaseless task? Such freedom presupposes health of body and mind, a style that reflects strength of soul, and a patient defiance. Like all freedom, it is a perpetual risk, an exhausting adventure, and this is why people avoid the risk today, as they avoid liberty with its exacting demands, in order to accept any kind of bondage and achieve at least comfort of soul. But if art is not an adventure, what is it and where is its justification? No, the free artist is no more a man of comfort than is the free man. The free artist is the one who, with great effort, creates his own order. The more undisciplined what he must put in order, the stricter will be his rule and the more he will assert his freedom. There is a remark of Gide that I have always approved although it may be easily misunderstood: "Art lives on constraint and dies of freedom." That is true. But it must not be interpreted as meaning that art can be controlled. Art lives only on the constraints it imposes on itself; it dies of all others. Conversely, if it does not constrain

itself, it indulges in ravings and becomes a slave to mere shadows. The freest art and the most rebellious will therefore be the most classical; it will reward the greatest effort. So long as a society and its artists do not accept this long and free effort, so long as they relax in the comfort of amusements or the comfort of conformism, in the games of art for art's sake or the preachings of realistic art, its artists are lost in nihilism and sterility. Saying this amounts to saying that today the rebirth depends on our courage and our will to be lucid.

Yes, the rebirth is in the hands of all of us. It is up to us if the West is to bring forth any anti-Alexanders to tie together the Gordian Knot of civilization cut by the sword. For this purpose, we must assume all the risks and labors of freedom. There is no need of knowing whether, by pursuing justice, we shall manage to preserve liberty. It is essential to know that, without liberty, we shall achieve nothing and that we shall lose both future justice and ancient beauty. Liberty alone draws men from their isolation; but slavery dominates a crowd of solitudes. And art, by virtue of that free essence I have tried to define, unites whereas tyranny separates. It is not surprising, therefore, that art should be the enemy marked out by every form of oppression. It is not surprising that artists and intellectuals should have been the first victims of modern tyrannies, whether of the Right or of the Left. Tyrants know there is in the work of art an emancipatory force, which is mysterious only to those who do not revere it. Every great work makes the human face more admirable and richer, and this is its whole secret. And thousands of concentration camps and barred cells are not enough to hide this staggering testimony of dignity. This is why it is not true that culture can be, even temporarily, suspended in order to make way for a new culture. Man's unbroken testimony as to his suffering and

his nobility cannot be suspended; the act of breathing cannot be suspended. There is no culture without legacy, and we cannot and must not reject anything of ours, the legacy of the West. Whatever the works of the future may be, they will bear the same secret, made up of courage and freedom, nourished by the daring of thousands of artists of all times and all nations. Yes, when modern tyranny shows us that, even when confined to his calling, the artist is a public enemy, it is right. But in this way tyranny pays its respects, through the artist, to an image of man that nothing has ever been able to crush.

My conclusion will be simple. It will consist of saying, in the very midst of the sound and the fury of our history: "Let us rejoice." Let us rejoice, indeed, at having witnessed the death of a lying and comfort-loving Europe and at being faced with cruel truths. Let us rejoice as men because a prolonged hoax has collapsed and we see clearly what threatens us. And let us rejoice as artists, torn from our sleep and our deafness, forced to keep our eyes on destitution, prisons, and bloodshed. If, faced with such a vision, we can preserve the memory of days and of faces, and if, conversely, faced with the world's beauty, we manage not to forget the humiliated, then Western art will gradually recover its strength and its sovereignty. To be sure, there are few examples in history of artists confronted with such hard problems. But when even the simplest words and phrases cost their weight in freedom and blood, the artist must learn to handle them with restraint. Danger makes men classical, and all greatness, after all, is rooted in risk.

The time of irresponsible artists is over. We shall regret it for our little moments of bliss. But we shall be able to admit that this ordeal contributes meanwhile to our chances of authenticity, and we shall accept the challenge. The freedom of art is not worth much when the only purpose is to assure the artist's comfort. For a value or a



virtue to take root in a society, there must be no lying about it; in other words, we must pay for it every time we can. If liberty has become dangerous, then it may cease to be prostituted. And I cannot agree, for example, with those who complain today of the decline of wisdom. Apparently they are right. Yet, to tell the truth, wisdom has never declined so much as when it involved no risks and belonged exclusively to a few humanists buried in libraries. But today, when at last it has to face real dangers, there is a chance that it may again stand up and be respected.

It is said that Nietzsche after the break with Lou Salome, in a period of complete solitude, crushed and uplifted at the same time by the perspective of the huge work he had to carry on without any help, used to walk at night on the mountains overlooking the gulf of Genoa and light great bonfires of leaves and branches which he would watch as they burned. I have often dreamed of those fires and have occasionally imagined certain men and certain works in front of those fires, as a way of testing men and works. Well, our era is one of those fires whose unbearable heat will doubtless reduce many a work to ashes! But as for those which remain, their metal will be intact, and, looking at them, we shall be able to indulge without restraint in the supreme joy of the intelligence which we call "admiration."

One may long, as I do, for a gentler flame, a respite, a pause for musing. But perhaps there is no other peace for the artist than what he finds in the heat of combat. "Every wall is a door," Emerson correctly said. Let us not look for the door, and the way out, anywhere but in the wall against which we are living. Instead, let us seek the respite where it is—in the very thick of the battle. For in my opinion, and this is where I shall close, it is there. Great ideas, it has been said, come into the world as gently as doves.

Perhaps then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear, amid the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, the gentle stirring of life and hope. Some will say that this hope lies in a nation; others, in a man. I believe rather that it is awakened, revived, nourished by millions of solitary individuals whose deeds and works every day negate frontiers and the crudest implications of history. As a result, there shines forth fleetingly the ever-threatened truth that each and every man, on the foundation of his own sufferings and joys, builds for all.

(Camus: 1988: 249-272).

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