

Introduction

This is the improbable story of a simple song and its long and complicated journey across oceans and continents. And I am an improbable person to be telling it, so let me explain how I came to write this book. I grew up in a white, middle-class home in a white, middle-class neighborhood in the middle of the United States a bit after the middle of the twentieth century. My parents loved music but weren't musicians, and, like most middle-class families in the middle of the country at that time, we didn't own a lot of records or listen to a lot of recorded music in the house when I was young. There was, however, one record we owned that captured my imagination and that I listened to on the turntable again and again. It was by the folk music trio Peter, Paul, and Mary. My favorite song on the record was "If I Had a Hammer," whose driving rhythm in their arrangement made me want to learn to play the guitar. When I was eight years old, my father retrieved for me an old "Stella" guitar that he had given away to a friend after giving up on learning to play it himself. My parents signed me up for group guitar lessons at the local YMCA, and

Note: The contents of this book are accompanied by a website containing numerous photographs, videos, and other supplementary materials that can be accessed at <http://gotu.us/nonosmoveran>.

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“If I Had a Hammer” was one of the first songs I learned how to play. Another was “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” from that same Peter, Paul, and Mary album. Both were written by Pete Seeger, a man whose name appears repeatedly in the pages of this book.

By the time I was a teenager, I’d become a pretty good guitar player and also had discovered my singing voice. I’d begun listening to Seeger’s records, memorizing the chords and lyrics to his songs and imitating his distinctive vocal style. In the mid-1970s, I finally had the opportunity to see Seeger perform in person, in a concert with Arlo Guthrie, Woody’s son, at the Mississippi River Festival in Edwardsville, Illinois. Although I don’t remember all the details of that concert, I do remember Seeger strumming his twelve-string guitar while reciting a bilingual version of a poem written by a South American songwriter that I had never heard of. The songwriter’s name was Víctor Jara, he was from Chile, and he had been murdered by soldiers of his own country’s government. Seeger’s somber recitation of the poem did not make much of an impression on me at the time; there were other songs that I was already familiar with and had appreciated much more.

A few years later, I was living in Madison, Wisconsin. I had started college there but had dropped out. Dreaming of rising to fame as the next Bob Dylan, I played my guitar and sang around town at any bar or coffeehouse that would have me. I had gotten interested in the left-wing revolutions that were going on in Central America. These armed struggles were inspiring a great deal of activism in solidarity with the revolutionaries, centered around the University of Wisconsin campus where I had been a student. I found myself living in a communal house with other amateur musicians, students, and sometime political activists. One night, several of my housemates attended a concert by Inti-Illimani (IN-tee-yee-MAHN-ee),¹ a Chilean band that had come through Madison on tour. I didn’t go to the concert, since I didn’t speak Spanish, had never heard of the band, and was short on cash. A housemate who did go to the concert bought a copy of one of the band’s LPs, titled *Hacia la libertad* (*Toward Liberty*), on the Monitor Records label. She lent me the record and insisted that I listen to it. I’d never heard music quite like this before, full of powerful masculine voices accompanied by bamboo flutes, pan pipes, calf-skin drums, and a variety of stringed guitar and mandolin-like

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instruments whose names I did not know. The vinyl disc inside the album cover came sheathed in an envelope on which were printed the titles of the songs, the names of their authors, and the lyrics in both English and Spanish. One song in particular caught my eye: “Vientos del pueblo” (“Winds of the People”), by Víctor Jara. Beautifully arranged and recorded by Inti-Illimani, the song was written by Jara in the last year of his life. Its lyrics cried out in anguish about the wealthy Chilean elite’s preparations to violently roll back the hard-won gains that were being made by the country’s poor and working-class majority. *Winds of the People* was also the title of a mimeographed collection of songs of liberation and social justice in multiple languages that circulated among “movement” people in Madison and other progressive cities around the United States. We used it for the songfests we occasionally organized in our communal household. So, now I knew where the songbook’s title came from.² I was inspired: I needed to learn Spanish. I needed to hear more of this music. Just like Mr. Jones in Dylan’s song “Ballad of a Thin Man,” I knew something was going on here, but I did not know what it was. I needed to find out.

Fast forward a little more than thirty years. In 2011, I found myself in the Chilean port city of Valparaíso. I had long since given up the dream of becoming the next Dylan. Instead, I found myself working as something a bit less glamorous—a sociology professor at a small college in Texas who had spent most of his career studying the Mexico-U.S. border. In a mid-career detour, I had gone to Chile to study the history of the genre of music that Víctor Jara helped create—*la nueva canción*, the new song—and its relationship with movements for social justice there. I was in Valparaíso to interview Jorge Coulon, one of the founding members of Inti-Illimani, who lived in an old house on one of the city’s many *cerros* (hilltops) overlooking the port and the Pacific Ocean. We were near the end of a wide-ranging conversation about the history of Inti-Illimani, its members’ many years of exile in Europe, their return to Chile in 1988 toward the end of their country’s military dictatorship, and, more broadly, the power of music in struggles for social justice. As I was getting ready to leave, Coulon told me that he had recently published a short book about his old comrade, Jara, that I should read.³ He didn’t have a copy at home, but he told me that I could certainly find

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one at the Andrés Bello bookstore located on one of the city's main avenues downtown near the port. I thanked him and walked over to one of the city's famed *ascensores* (cable car elevators) to descend to the city below.

Much to my chagrin, when I got to the bookstore, I discovered that it was sold out of copies of Coulon's book. I wandered around the bookstore, nonetheless, to see whether it had anything else of interest, especially something I might read on the bus ride back to Santiago, where I was renting an apartment. My eyes fell on a book titled *Cuando hicimos historia* (*When We Made History* [Pinto Vallejos 2005]), which I began to leaf through. It was a collection of essays about the experiences the authors had had as participants in Chile's experiment with democratic socialism in the early 1970s, the experiment that Jara had sung about in "Vientos del pueblo" and later gave his life defending. One of the last essays included a moving reference to a song I knew well. It was not one of Jara's songs; in fact, it was not even a Chilean song. Rather, it was a traditional song from the U.S. South. This was a moment much like the one more than thirty years ago when I first listened to the Inti-Illimani album that my friend had lent me. Something was going on here that I didn't understand—something important, something that I urgently needed to understand. And it was all contained in this brief mention of a song from my own country that thousands of Chileans had sung to defend justice and freedom in their land. The book you hold in your hands is the unforeseen fruit of that serendipitous moment.

"No nos moverán" is the name of the song that Chileans were singing in the early 1970s. In English, it is known as "We Shall Not Be Moved." The exact origins of the song are unknown, but it appears to have begun as a religious revival song sung by rural whites and African slaves in the early nineteenth century in the U.S. South. A century later, it was taken up by U.S. labor activists in their successful drives to unionize major industries. Subsequently, African Americans reclaimed it for the civil rights movement, where it became one of the best-known songs in that freedom struggle. Shortly after that, in Spanish, it became an emblematic song of the struggle for farm-worker rights in the United States, before it crossed the Atlantic to be used in the fight against the fascist dictatorship in Spain. From

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Spain, the song traveled back across the ocean to arrive in Chile at the end of the 1960s. In all these times and places, people sang this song to express their resolve in the face of adversity and to help them persevere in their struggles to build a better world.

A Note about Intended Readership and Scholarly Approach

I have written this book with a diverse readership in mind. First and foremost, I have written it for the benefit of activists in the various countries where “We Shall Not Be Moved” has been an important part of the repertoire of social justice movements. At the beginning of my research for this book, I was especially thinking of the Chilean activists and musicians who had sung this song but had little or no idea about where it came from, what its importance had been in other lands, or how it had arrived in their country. As I learned more of the twists and turns of the song’s history, I also wanted Spanish-speaking activists and musicians in the United States and Spain to hear how the song made its way into their movements. And, similarly, I believe the history will be of special interest to English-speaking singers and activists who are familiar with the song from movements in the United States but who have been unaware of the significance the song has acquired overseas.

I have also written this book for scholars and students in a number of academic disciplines, including anthropology, history, musicology, and sociology. Accordingly, the book is eclectic in its disciplinary approach. I intend for it to be read principally as a work of social history. In keeping with my own disciplinary training, I draw extensively from the conceptual repertoires of both anthropology and sociology in analyzing and interpreting the history of “We Shall Not Be Moved,” borrowing additional concepts and approaches developed by musicologists. With nonspecialist readers in mind, I have strived to keep the text free of disciplinary jargon without sacrificing the conceptual rigor expected in a scholarly work. Scholarly readers who are interested in the methods used in conducting the research that went into writing this history should consult the Appendix at the back of the book.

Song in the Service of Social Movements

In today's world of instantaneous electronic communication via social media, there would be nothing especially remarkable about the spread of any song to any part of the world, where it could be put to practically any use. The travels and transformations of this song, however, were quite astonishing, given that they took place long before the advent of such media and without being promoted by major commercial record companies or broadcast media. Rather, the song spread through its singing by members of social movements, often in the face of brutal state and corporate repression, who took it to other movements across multiple national and linguistic boundaries. The story of how “*I Shall Not Be Moved*” became “*We Shall Not Be Moved*” and then “*No nos moverán*” is worth telling not only because of the song's importance to struggles for social justice around the world but also because of the way it illustrates how songs can serve as an invaluable resource to participants in movements for social change.* While it is beyond the scope of this book to engage in the wider debate about the importance of music for social relations in general, it is worth considering, at least briefly, how music and singing can fulfill important functions for social movements and their struggles to achieve moral and political objectives in the face of adversity. Rather than use “*We Shall Not Be Moved*” as the occasion for a disquisition on broader theoretical issues concerning music and movements, in this Introduction I prefer to draw on concepts developed by other scholars to see how they can deepen our understanding of the ways this song in particular has served so many movements in so many different historical, cultural, and political contexts. In fact, I would like to narrow the focus even more and limit myself to a consideration not of how this song might have persuaded outsiders of the rightness of the various causes it has served or even how it may have helped movements to gain new adherents but rather of how it has helped meet the needs of people in the movements in which it has been sung.

*“*We Shall Not Be Moved*” is the default title of the song used in this book. I use “*I Shall Not Be Moved*,” “*No serem moguts*,” and “*No nos moverán*” to refer to variants of the song according to context.

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The message of “We Shall Not Be Moved” in all of its versions is one of conviction, resolve, and defiance, not one of exhortation, critique, or invitation to join hands in the struggle. It is an example of what Mark Mattern (1998: 25) has called the “confrontational form” of politically charged music in which “members of one community use musical practices to resist or oppose another community.” For this reason alone, it makes little sense to talk about the role the song may have played in persuading others outside movement participants. Moreover, this limitation is in keeping with Pete Seeger’s admonition in his song “Letter to Eve” not to have unrealistically high expectations about what performing any piece of music can accomplish on its own. In the song, Seeger announces that if music by itself could bring peace and freedom, he would need only be a musician instead of having to engage in other forms of political struggle as well.⁴ As we shall see, Seeger’s words are all the more poignant given that “We Shall Not Be Moved,” along with many other songs like it, has been sung as often in failed struggles—such as the one in which Víctor Jara died in Chile—as it has been in victorious ones.

The history of any song as ubiquitous as “We Shall Not Be Moved” has been in the English- and Spanish-speaking world is worth recounting for its own sake. Just as importantly, in the remainder of this Introduction, I suggest that the singing of this song in so many different cultural and political contexts stands as an example of how musical expressions can serve as a vital symbolic resource for social movement participants. Specifically, I argue that the singing of “We Shall Not Be Moved”—and many other songs like it—has served as a powerful form of ritual action that enables social movement participants to accomplish a number of things that are crucial to a movement’s success and survival. The first of these is that it has helped them forge their identities as protagonists of their own history in a variety of national contexts. A second is that, wherever it has been sung, it has helped movement participants forge solidarity and cohesion among themselves. In addition, “We Shall Not Be Moved” has, in numerous contexts, helped members of movements keep up their spirits and keep fear at bay in the face of adversity. It has also contributed to preserving the collective memory of movements many years after they have dissipated from the public view. And finally, its singing has facilitated the raising of otherwise mundane moments in the his-

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tory of movements to sacred or quasi-sacred levels. I illustrate these points more specifically in subsequent chapters of the book when discussing various moments of the history of this transnational social movement anthem.

Music as Social Action

Our starting point for understanding the importance of “We Shall Not Be Moved” in the various social movements in which it has played a part is that making music is at its root a form of social *action*. To emphasize that making music is something that people do together in social settings, the musicologist Christopher Small (1998: 9) has introduced the neologism *musicking* into the scholarly literature, based on the verb *to music*, which he defines as “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, [or] by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.” For Small, musicking is a fundamental “human encounter” whose meaning is determined by the social context in which it occurs. Moreover, he argues, musicking is a primal act of social *definition*, one of the ways that individuals collectively express and come to terms with who they are as a people (Small 1998: 133–134; see also Frith 1996a).

Following Small, sociologists Robert Rosenthal and Richard Flacks (2011: 94–95) write in their book *Playing for Change* that musicking has the power to create “the feeling that various ideas, ideals, and lifestyles go together” and that “listening to, talking about, and actively creating music serve as forms of ritual that help to define one’s identity in group terms.” For their part, social movement theorists Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (1998: 162) observe that singing combined with “exemplary action” can play an especially powerful role in forging new identities for movement participants, noting that by singing “We Shall Not Be Moved” together at a sit-in to integrate a lunch counter in Mississippi, civil rights activists transformed themselves into courageous “moral witnesses” who dared to practice non-violent civil disobedience in the face of violent racist oppression. Here, these authors illustrate a more general point concerning social movements—namely, that participation in collective action contributes

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powerfully to people's sense of themselves (i.e., to the production of their identities vis-à-vis other groups in society [Della Porta and Diani 1999]). In this sense, the singing of a song in a confrontational setting of civil disobedience becomes a badge of group identity for the members of the movement that clearly—and morally—distinguishes them from their adversaries. This is particularly so for “We Shall Not Be Moved,” insofar as its refrain asserts the unswerving commitment of its singers to the principles they are celebrating and that their collective actions have come to embody. The song thus represents, regardless of the particular historical or political context in which it is sung, a defiant statement by its singers that “we are not like you, and you are not going to make us change or give up.”

At the same time, both Small (1998) and music critic Simon Frith (1996b) recognize that the identities expressed by a group's musicking are often more aspirational than real. People use music, Frith (1996b: 274) argues, as a way of “participating in imagined forms of democracy and desire” in such a way that “musical identity is both fantastic—idealizing not just oneself but also the social world one inhabits—and real: it is enacted in activity.” Small (1998: 183–184), meanwhile, talks about musicking as a crucial way for people to communicate, celebrate, and explore their ideals for who they *want* to be and the types of relationships they *wish* to have with others. Like Frith, he makes it clear that the identities and relationships symbolically expressed through music are aspirational, insofar as people's lived experiences typically fall short of who they would *like* to be and how they would ideally behave:

Musicking is about relationships, not so much about those which actually exist in our lives as about those that we desire to exist and long to experience: relationships among people, as well as those between people and the rest of the cosmos, and also perhaps with ourselves and with our bodies and even with the supernatural, if our conceptual world has room for the supernatural. During a musical performance, any musical performance anywhere and at any time, desired relationships are brought into virtual existence so that those taking part are enabled to experience them as if they really did exist.⁵

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As we shall see later in the book, the point Small and Frith each make concerning music's role in expressing people's aspirational identities and ideal relationships is especially noteworthy in the case of those movements in which "We Shall Not Be Moved/No nos moverán" has been sung in the face of major setbacks or defeats, such as when student demonstrators in Spain sang it as they were chased down and beaten by police, years before their demands for an end to the fascist regime of General Francisco Franco would be heeded (see Chapter 6). The invoking of a song such as "No nos moverán" in the face of certain short-term defeat steadfastly affirms something fundamental about the type of people that those who sing it aspire to be and the type of society they aspire to live in. In such contexts, the content of the song is neither a lie nor wishful thinking. Rather, it is a statement on the part of movement participants that they will persist in their self-identification as the kind of people who believe in the ideals in which they believe, even if they are unable to achieve their aims for the time being. In a subsequent publication written shortly before his death, Small (2011: xi) speaks precisely to this point with regard to musicking: "In an act of musicking, those taking part are exploring, affirming, and celebrating their sense of who they are—or who they think they are, or who they would like to be, or even what they would like to be thought of as being." This calls to mind the insistence on the part of certain "movement" poets and singers in the Spanish-speaking world about the *razón de vivir* (reason for being) of the kinds of utopias so many activists have striven to create. "Ventana sobre la utopía" ("Window Overlooking Utopia"), a prose poem by the late Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, is a case in point. In it, he cites a conversation he had with the Argentinian filmmaker Fernando Birri, who said that utopia was always on the horizon and that although he was always walking toward it, it kept receding from him. "I walk ten steps," Birri said, "and the horizon runs ten steps further away. No matter how far I walk, I'm never going to reach it." This led Birri to wonder what utopia was good for if he was never going to get there. His conclusion: "It is good for walking" (Galeano 1993: 230; translation mine).

In hindsight, we now know that the utopias sought by the twentieth-century singers of "We Shall Not Be Moved" were never achieved. If history teaches us anything, perhaps it is that there never is a "once

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and for all” triumph in any social justice struggle. At the same time, even in the face of temporary setbacks, devastating defeats, violent repression, and rollbacks of hard-won gains, the message of this song—that its singers will not give up in their struggle for a better world—survives as a source of inspiration and strength for twenty-first-century activists.

Song as Sustenance for Activists

In *Playing for Change*, their comprehensive treatise on the role played by music and musicians in social movements in the United States, Rosenthal and Flacks (2011: 123) dedicate an entire chapter to how “musicking” serves movement participants by “helping activists honor a commitment they’ve already made.” This, they argue, involves more than just “preaching to the converted” but instead can be vital to the maintenance of group identity and solidarity within a movement, insofar as “musicking often represents those shared beliefs that allow ‘disparate strangers’ to feel they are indeed a band of brothers and sisters and reinforces those beliefs when much of the world is working to break them down” (Rosenthal and Flacks 2011: 124). Moreover, as these authors note, solidarity among movement members is never achieved once and for all but must constantly be reaffirmed.

As sociologists since Emile Durkheim’s time have noted, ritual plays an indispensable role in the maintenance of group identity and cohesion, including and especially for participants in social movements (Della Porta and Diani 1999: 98). Music and song have traditionally played an important role in the religious, national, and other institutional rituals of peoples around the world, including the rituals of social movements (Eyerman and Jamison 1998: 35–36; Rosenthal and Flacks 2011: 94–95). In addition to songs serving as an essential element of movement rituals, Rosenthal and Flacks (2011: 127) point out that songs in a movement’s repertoire are also carried with members in their everyday, nonmovement routines, providing “a bridge linking yesterday’s demonstration with today’s workday, a bridge between ‘making history’ and ‘making life.’” The musical and lyrical simplicity of the song “We Shall Not Be Moved”—as is discussed at various junctures later in this book—has offered the opportunity to

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even the nonmusical to sing it with others and to hum or sing it to themselves in their everyday activities.

Rosenthal and Flacks (2011: 127–128) also discuss the vital role that song can play to maintain the spirits of movement participants, especially in the face of hostility, repression, and violence. “Musicking,” they point out, can help “dissipate fear” and “raise collective courage.” The history of “We Shall Not Be Moved” offers many examples of the song’s contribution to movements in this regard. In these pages, I review numerous instances in the United States in which trade unionists, civil rights workers, and left-wing political activists intoned the words of this song as they confronted direct violence. Relatedly, Rosenthal and Flacks (2011: 178–179) argue that, to work on a sustained basis toward creating a better world, movement activists must participate in and be nourished by a shared culture that continues to bond and sustain them. As I repeatedly demonstrate throughout my review of the history of “We Shall Not Be Moved,” singing the same song or set of songs can contribute a significant element of such a shared culture.

As experienced by those participating in it, a shared culture has an important affective dimension that the social theorist Raymond Williams (1977: 132–133) has called “structures of feeling.” Eyerman and Jamison (1998: 161–162) draw on Williams’s work to argue that songs can play a vital role in this affective dimension of a social movement’s culture by embodying the thoughts and feelings of participants and serving as “channels of communication for activists” within and between movements and between movement generations. Moreover, musicking can contribute to the maintenance of a collective memory of social movements insofar as certain songs come to serve as a mental and emotional soundtrack for movement participants and a wider public that has witnessed their actions, which, even years later, brings back to life moments of shared commitment and purpose. In this sense, it is clear that “We Shall Not Be Moved” plays a significant role in triggering participants’ memories of practically every movement in which it has been sung. It is no accident, therefore, that the words “we shall not be moved” appear in so many titles of books and articles about the labor and civil rights movements in the United States and that the words “no nos moverán” call to mind the bravery of Mexican farmworkers fighting for their rights in the fields of California. Nor

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is it surprising that older Spanish activists feel nostalgic upon hearing hundreds chanting, “no nos moverán” in the central plaza of Madrid today, reminding them of the continuities between current popular struggles and their own efforts to bring an end to the Franco dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. Part of the power of these collective memories derives from another effect that can be achieved by movement singing: the transformation of a collective experience into a sacred moment. Echoing Durkheim’s classic observations about the social power unleashed by collective effervescence in religious rituals, the civil rights leader, music scholar, and singer Bernice Johnson Reagon (1998: 111), one of the main popularizers of “We Shall Not Be Moved” in the 1960s, recalls that in African Americans’ historical struggles for freedom, participants spiritually sanctified most gatherings by joining in song together. As we shall see, “We Shall Not Be Moved” sanctified many moments in the history of social movements, not only among black civil rights activists in the United States but among activists in various other popular movements around the world as well.

Organization of the Book

The book is divided into two parts, the first empirical and the second analytical. Part I details the history of “We Shall Not Be Moved” and the roles it has played in the various movements in which it has been sung in a straightforward and factual way. In keeping with how I came to research the song’s history, I begin with its singing in Chile in the early 1970s before tracing the song’s origins and the complex route it followed on its way to that South American country. Subsequent chapters address the song’s likely origins in the religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening in the U.S. South in the early nineteenth century; the significance of the song to the U.S. labor movement in the 1930s and 1940s; the song’s adoption by the African American civil rights movement in the early 1960s; the transformation of “We Shall Not Be Moved” into “No nos moverán” by Mexican American activists in the United States, first during the great pecan shellers’ strike of 1938 in San Antonio, Texas, and then (nearly three decades later) during farmworker unionization drives in California’s Central Valley under the leadership of César Chávez; and finally the song’s role as an anthem of resistance to the Franco

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dictatorship in Spain before it crossed back over the Atlantic to Chile at the end of the 1960s.

The two chapters of Part II are dedicated to an analysis and interpretation of the song's history. Drawing from the theoretical conceptualizations of infrastructure developed by the U.S. sociologist William Roy and the Mexican anthropologist Efrén Sandoval, Chapter 7 shows that the widespread dissemination of "We Shall Not Be Moved" relied on a networked *infrastructure* of social justice movements in several countries. Chapter 8 turns to the question of cultural and linguistic difference and how activists from different regions, nations, and language groups effectively adapted the song to advance their own particular movements in their own unique sociohistorical circumstances.

The Conclusion argues that the transmission and dissemination of "We Shall Not Be Moved" in the twentieth century was facilitated by not only a movement *infrastructure* of the left but also a shared cosmopolitan *culture* of the left that transcended languages and nations and valued contributions from all languages and cultures to an internationalist struggle for justice and equality.

The Conclusion is followed by a Coda, which includes a series of vignettes involving both Spanish and English versions of the song that illustrate connections among participants in this cosmopolitan culture of the left in various parts of the world.

In Chapter 1, I begin my review of the story of "We Shall Not Be Moved" with its dramatic radio broadcast in Santiago, Chile, on September 11, 1973, the day that country's experiment with democratic socialism came to a violent end in a military coup. Forty years later, I would travel to Chile to sing the song with people who remembered the song well but knew little of its history before it arrived in their country. One of them had survived torture in a basketball stadium at the hands of the military in the days following the coup. In the months leading up to the coup, he had been studying to be an engineer at the technical university in Santiago. He had also been a singer in a band of fellow students whose repertoire included "No nos moverán." One of the many other comrades he saw detained with him in the stadium was Víctor Jara.