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Institute of Current World Affairs

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By Raphael Soifer

Final report as delivered to the Members and Trustees meeting of the Institute of Current World Affairs, Edith Macy Center, June 6th, Briarcliff Manor, NY

People Are Hungry Solano Trindade

Dirty train from Leopoldina
Running running,
Seems to say:
People are hungry,
People are hungry,
People are hungry...

Pssiiiiiii!
Caxias Station
Again, it's running
Again, it's saying:
People are hungry
People are hungry
People are hungry

Vigário Geral
Lucas, Cordovil,
Braz de Pina
Penha Circular,

Penha Station,
Olaría, Ramos,
Bom Sucesso,
Carlos Chagas,
Triagem, Mauá,
Dirty train from Leopoldina
Running running
Seems to say:
People are hungry
People are hungry
People are hungry

*So many sad faces
Wanting to arrive
At some destination
In some place...*

Dirty train from Leopoldina

*Running running
Seems to say:
People are hungry,
People are hungry,
People are hungry.*

*Only in the stations,
When it comes to a stop,
Slowly,
Does it begins to say:
If people are hungry,
Give them something to eat
If people are hungry
Give them something to eat
But the air brake
All authoritative
Calls the train to silence:
Psssss....*

This poem, "People Are Hungry," was written by Solano Trindade in 1943. Trindade, a poet of African descent from Brazil's northeast, was imprisoned shortly after the poem was published. At the time, it was considered unpatriotic to point out that a large percentage of Brazil's population was living on the brink of starvation. The train journey that Trindade describes is through some of Rio de Janeiro's poorest neighborhoods, and the economic reality there hasn't changed much in the past 66 years. These days, residents of Duque de Caxias or Parada de Lucas aren't likely to starve to death, but many remain destitute, especially compared to the wealthy in Rio's prosperous South Zone. The death rates in the city's poor North Zone remain absurdly high, mostly due to the drug gangs, neighborhood militias, and violent cops that control or surround most of the city's favelas.

Solano Trindade talks about *literal* hunger in his poem. But modern violence, to my mind,

stems in large part from a kind of *cultural* hunger. Recent social and economic reforms have significantly lowered the number of Brazilians immediately at risk of starvation (although many Brazilians live in constant danger of going hungry, and malnutrition remains a serious problem nationwide, especially in rural areas). But the destitution that Solano Trindade brought to life as a literally grinding poverty — *tem gente com fome/tem gente com fome/tem gente com fome* — is still easily visible almost everywhere in Brazil. Since 1943, material conditions have undoubtedly improved for most the country's vast underclass, but the hunger for comfort, for status, for recognition and for security remains. There's a real sense, throughout the country, of a struggle for some intangible feeling called citizenship which isn't easily identifiable, but which poor folks are only now beginning to claim as theirs by right.

Citizenship, as I'm talking about it here, is



A Theatre of the Oppressed presentation by Marias do Brasil, a group of maids from the northeast (all named Maria) who have been making theatre in Rio de Janeiro for over ten years.

more than a national ID card, or even a national identity. It's an idea of being — and I'm choosing my words deliberately — an *actor* in a society. It's a sense of having an effect, an active participation, in your community and your country. It's a sense of being part of making changes and determining tradition, rather than simply receiving a social order from above.

This is where the arts come in, though it's not always where they work. In this sense, the arts have always played a vital role in Brazilian society, especially for poor folks. Most of Brazil's great cultural traditions — like samba; maracatu, which is a percussion and dance form with African origins; and capoeira, a combination martial art and dance form — began as marginal forms of cultural expression, created by the masses and shunned by the country's elite. (In capoeira's case, artistic expression was criminalized until 1932).

For at least a century, the arts have been a vehicle to a kind of citizenship in Brazil. The transition of these art forms from folk tradition to national culture brought some of their practitioners closer to social integration, bringing them into contact with the market and with official integrations. Usually, though, that sort of recognition and social mobility has been limited to the arts' most celebrated practitioners, and then only in rare cases. Even then, many of Brazil's most celebrated popular artists — especially those of African descent — passed through a brief period of recognition but never held the rights to their work, and died penniless.

These days, groups throughout the country — most of them unknown to the wider public — are using the arts to advance their members' standing in society. Their work ranges from traditional musical forms like samba and maracatu, to pirate ra-

dio stations to new genres like hip-hop. What unites them, though, is their use of artistic practice as a tool to claim their citizenship.

The explicit use of the arts as instruments of social change was what originally drew me to Brasil. As a high school student, I was interested in both theatre and social activism, and I was blown away when I first read the work of Augusto Boal, the founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal's technique, which I wrote about in a couple of ICWA newsletters, breaks down the barriers between actors and audience, and relies on audience involvement to address real-life oppressive situations. Boal, who died about a month ago, called it "a rehearsal for revolution." For participants throughout Brazil and across the world — myself included — the Theatre of the Oppressed and its emphasis on community cohesion and social reform was a vital tool for building an involved understanding of citizenship. Since traveling to Brazil for the first time seven years ago to intern at Boal's Centre for the Theatre of the Oppressed, my own understanding of my place as an artist, and as a citizen in a global community has grown tremendously. It wasn't Boal's work exclusively that got me hooked on Brazil, but he made the introduction. I'd like to dedicate this speech to him, since this fellowship would have been impossible without his example.

The cultural hunger that Boal helped awaken in so many — this social hunger, this hunger for citizenship — continues to be a difficult urge to satisfy in contemporary Brazil. It's especially hard because so many social mechanisms — government bureaucracy, schools, and especially law enforcement — are all too often stuck in configurations and logic that date back at least to the military dictatorship. The dictatorship lasted from 1964 to 1985, but there are plenty of situations where it seems not to have ended. I'd like to share another poem, this one written a few years ago by Serginho Poeta, a poet from São Paulo's poor and working-class South Zone.



Maracatu dancers in a pre-Carnaval procession in Olinda, Pernambuco.

Black Poet of the Corner

Serginho Poeta

Midnight in the ghetto
There's a black man stopped on the corner
Is he a thief, or a cocaine dealer?
Ask the crew members of the São Paulo "raft"
Who approach to investigate him,
Interrogate him and beat him
Not necessarily in that order, of course

The man stays motionless
Even so, he gets a punch in the face
Given with pleasure
While a second soldier
Of a higher rank
Knocks him flat with a kick.
There's no one on this night who doesn't hear
This modern slave whipping
But only one who sees the eternal blue of the night
sky...
Club, boot; club, boot!

For a moment
They stop the lynching and order him:
Talk, black guy, don't bullshit
What are you doing out on the street at this time of
night?

I come here to make poetry
I'm a poet of the moon
So I trade the night for day.
And it's sad: those who are inspired by the moon
Fall in love with her and become her lyre
But in spite of this passion locked in my chest
I can't touch her white orb with my hand.
I envy the astronauts:
Here I am, a distant poet
And they, mere soldiers, there they are up there
In the arms of my lover.
And on this straight path
I learned how to walk, how to fall, how to get back up
And to have respect...but never to fear!
This, sir, is what I have to tell you.
Now, I hope you'll leave me
To continue looking at the sky
Because a black man is a born poet
But also a born defendant.

Oh, but a black poet —
That's an affront! It's too much to take!

Midnight in the ghetto
There's a black man dead on the corner
Eyes open, body wounded
The whole sky reflected in the center of his retina.
He wasn't a thief or a cocaine dealer
He was simply a poet
With no school, with no home,
A poet of the corner.



Three generations of Solano Trindade's family —his daughter, Raquel; grandson, Vitor; and great-grandson Zinho (an underground hip-hop star in São Paulo)— receive an award from the Cooperifa poetry collective.

Serginho's poem is a sadly familiar story for most of my friends in São Paulo's periphery. Community members there estimate that police killed 600 people after downtown riots in 2005 led by the PCC, São Paulo's central drug cartel and crime syndicate. That kind of policing is specifically prohibited in Brazil's 1988 constitution, which was set up in large part as a response to the extreme institutional violence of the military dictatorship. But Brazilians are quick to note that there are two kinds of laws. There's *lei que pega* — a law that "takes" or "catches on," a law that society actually follows and respects, or at least obeys. And, of course, there's the *lei que não pega* — a law that doesn't take, that doesn't catch on. Laws that prohibit coercion and excessive force are usually laws that don't take, especially because coercion and excessive force are often what cause a given law to "take" in the first place.

The arts, obviously, have to go a different route in order to "take." The threat of violence works fine as something for the arts to work *against*, but community arts initiatives need to do a lot more than position themselves as anti-violence. This is where cultural hunger comes in; the violence that surrounds much of Brazil's population is, I would argue, a direct result of discrimination and of centuries of unjust exercises of power. If you look at the torture techniques used today by drug gangs in Rio, for example, you'll have a hard time finding anything that wasn't used first by the military dictatorship. So it's up to



A Boal-inspired warm-up game in the carceragem in Nova Iguaçu, Rio de Janeiro.



A Theatre of the Oppressed "image theatre" game in Boim, a small village in the interior of Pará state, in the Amazon.

artists who work on a community level to meet this hunger for a new social organization, and to create their own power dynamic to oppose — or at least stand in contrast to — the powerful groups that surround them.

When things went well over the course of my fellowship, I was able to be one of those artists. I don't think I ever managed to create a new power dynamic, but when things went really well, I was able to create some sort of final product with the folks I was working with. These pictures come from Boim, the village in the Amazon where I lived for a couple of months at the end of last year. While I was in Boim, I led theatre workshops four or five nights a week for village kids, and our work culminated in an Amazonian Christmas pageant that we created and performed for the community.

A lot of the workshop borrowed from Augusto Boal's work. It was relatively easy to get the kids excited about the theatre games that we played at the beginning of each rehearsal. The hard part was getting them to recognize that stories from their village — their personal memories, or folktales they'd heard growing up — were material that was worth putting on stage. Many of the villagers don't consider local culture to be especially important. Mostly, the kids wanted to talk to me about Christmas trees and



The cast Boim Christmas pageant sings "Jingle Bells" as the sun sets over the Tapajós River during our final rehearsal.

Gringo Que Fala (The Gringo Who Speaks)

Raphael Soifer

(Lines in italics are in English in the original rap)

That's how I am:
The gringo who speaks!

I am the States! I am the States!
The book is on the table and the check is in the mail.
I don't miss it – really –
Well, maybe, maybe not
But I've become a refugee by desire.

All right – let's go
Let's be off on our way
Now that everybody knows who I didn't vote for
What's important is color, but Bush doesn't have any
He kidnapped the world, we're all the hostages.
I escaped here, where I'm more chill
Where I like the people,
Like the way of living, coexisting, persisting,
And not needing to adopt
This very gringo way of forgetting.

I'm relocated where no one thought it made sense
To wage war through a lying invasion.
Yeah, life in Brazil is different:
I let the Portuguese language invade my mind.
I'm going to make an attempt
To write some rhymes
To animate the public
When I put up my fist.
I thank those who are in the room –

That's how I am:
The gringo who speaks!

There are gringos who mess with the lives of others
Gringos who rob what should be ours
There are corporations, which are faceless gringos
But here's another kind, in flesh and blood

I already know how to talk – I don't look back
I also know how to listen, which is worth much more
I left my country, I only look forward
But think carefully – no gringo is innocent

There's a gringo playing at being a gunman
Trying to "gringofy" the whole planet
He thinks he's a ten, but he just gets a zero
Much better would be the Brazilian being.

Now, I'm going to listen and learn
Gringo who speaks: now it's for real
I'm here – I'm not going away to pack my bags

That's how I am:
The gringo who speaks!

the lives of the saints. Luckily, I was able to tease out some folk stories outside of rehearsal that we slowly adapted into the process.

This next picture was taken a couple weeks ago, the day before I came back to the United States. It's from a workshop I led with a psychologist in Nova Iguaçu, just outside of Rio city limits, in a *carceragem*. A *carceragem* is sort of like a county jail: almost everybody who's locked up there is awaiting sentence. Since that can take well over a year, though, they spend a lot of time trying to accustom themselves to the conditions on the inside, which are far worse than most prisons in Rio de Janeiro. The group of prisoners I was working with lived in a cell about 15 feet by 15 feet with 60 people in it. It's physically impossible for everyone to lie down at the same time, even with about a dozen hammocks overhead and the entire floor covered with prisoners sleeping on their sides, crammed against each other. Ironically, the *carceragem* in Nova Iguaçu is one of the most desired places to be locked up in Rio, since it's well known that the police chief in charge doesn't allow torture. This picture is from our show about a *carceragem* where several of the inmates had lived before, where murders and torture were common, and where prisoners had to bribe guards for food and to receive visits.



Demonstrating living conditions in jail during a rehearsal at the carceragem.

Obviously, there are pretty major differences between a group of kids in a village on the Tapajós river and a classroom full of suspected murderers in Rio de Janeiro. The prisoners usually came in exhausted and physically spent, but they had none of the reticence of village kids in Boim. The problem for most of the guys in the *carceragem* — most of whom come from Rio's favelas — wasn't getting up the nerve to tell their stories; it was getting someone to listen. In both cases, though, the perspectives that ultimately came out in the final product are stories that don't show up in mainstream histories or in the mass media. In both Boim and Nova Iguaçu, the folks I was working with shared plenty of common factors: poverty; dark skin color; and in almost all cases, a lack of access to good education, healthcare, and other social services. I doubt that my work with either group *created*, in and of itself, any significant social changes. At the same time, though, I think it allowed many of the participants in both workshops to come out with a slightly different sense of their place within their community. It gave them a different sense of their own capabilities, and of the value of their own perspectives. That's not the same thing as a sense of citizenship, but I think it's an important step in that process.

I got to the *carceragem* almost as a fluke, through a conversation at a late-night poetry open mic with a well-connected cultural impresario. My connection to Boim, on the

other hand, was typical of how these things usually work: I came in through Saúde e Alegria, the health and happiness project, which is one of the largest and best-funded NGOs — non-governmental organizations — in the eastern Amazon. Since the end of the dictatorship in 1985, most community-based arts groups in Brazil have functioned as NGOs, the so-called third sector. In most cases, it seems like the only alternative, since the second sector — the market — has traditionally been basically inaccessible to most of the population for everything except basic necessities. Historically, the first sector — which is government — has taken more interest in skimming budgets or ensuring that the most hard-fisted laws “take.”

A few of these NGOs, like Saúde e Alegria, have been quite successful. A very select few — almost all of which are in Rio, where the bulk of the national media is concentrated — have become nationally known. On my flight from New York to São Paulo two years ago, the onboard magazine featured a long interview with Guti Fraga, the founder of Nós do Morro — “We of the Hill” — a theatre group in Vidigal, one of Rio's oldest and most populous favelas. Guti began the group in the mid-'80s, and came to recognition with the release of the movie *City of God*. Almost all of the child and adolescent actors in the film are his students. In the interview, Guti explained that kids started to come to Nós do

Morro out of necessity. “The city is so far gone,” he said, “that socio-cultural projects are the only links [that kids have] with the system.”

This is obviously a pretty major problem. It's not just a problem for “the system,” which in Guti's Fraga's usage encompasses things like education, security, and employment — in other words, the major aspects of both the first and second sectors. In fact, arts groups that work with poor and excluded populations like Nós do Morro are sometimes expected to make up for all of the system's shortcomings.

In São Paulo, I joined Cooperifa, the poetry and literature collective whose name stands for “Cultural Collective of the Periphery.” It's where I first came into contact with most of the poems I'm presenting today. Sérgio Vaz, the group's founder, is adamant that what he's founded is not an answer for his community's problems, or a substitute for engagement from the market or government sectors. I've heard Sérgio point out more than once that no one asks open mics in middle-class neighborhoods to be responsible for finding jobs for its participants or securing the streets. Although Cooperifa has turned into a major cultural reference point in São Paulo, Sérgio insists that the open mic that draws about 300 people every week is a

literary event, not a major social solution. In other words, arts groups like Nós do Morro and Cooperifa — and there are thousands throughout the country — can create a consciousness of citizenship and a demand for equality, but they can't and shouldn't be responsible for *satisfying* that consciousness. Part of the reason for that is that, when NGOs do try to take responsibility for that, they usually overstep their bounds.

I wish I could say that I've never seen major corruption within an NGO, but I have, and in more than one setting. I've observed and worked with plenty of NGOs throughout Brazil — like Nós do Morro and PSA — that get incredible work done and truly transform their communities. I've also witnessed plenty of abuses in action. But Brazilians' concerns with the "third sector" goes beyond the endemic corruption. During Cooperifa's Modern Art in the Periphery Week, Sérgio Vaz ripped into NGOs that promise professional-level artistic training. "Do the NGOs think they're going to change the country by turning everyone into a drummer?" he asked sarcastically. "We don't need a country full of drummers or a country full of dancers. What we need is a decent education system." Here's one of Sérgio's poems, just to drive the point home:

Flippers

Sérgio Vaz

*Bruno
killed his mom
killed his dad
his siblings
his grandparents
the neighbors.*

*He killed
everyone with longing
when he went off to college.*

Cooperifa is emphatically *not* an NGO — they're a cultural group. Through their open mic and their outspoken work to promote reading and literacy, they've made a lot of difference for residents in São Paulo's predominantly poor South Zone. But their best efforts can't make up for the often atrocious public schools in the area.

I was reminded of Sérgio's comments months later during a night out in Recife Antigo. That's the party district in downtown Recife where the city cleared out the brothels to make way for street-corner bars and rock-'n'-roll clubs. I was at a table full of penniless percussionists, many of whom had trained in local NGOs, or else through publicly-sponsored community arts groups. That night, though, I was talking to Jonas, a street theatre actor raised in a favela in Fortaleza, another major Northeastern capital. He was planning to follow the example of millions of other Northeasterners by moving to the country's southeast.

Jonas peppered me with questions about theatre in Rio

de Janeiro, but he couldn't keep himself from interrupting me with his own ruminations on Bertolt Brecht and Konstantin Stanislavski. Jonas admired these men, the two most important influences on modern theatre, but he thought that Brazilian street theatre borrowed too liberally from what he called their "old-fashioned" techniques.

"I'm not sure how it is in Europe," he kept saying. After a few minutes, I realized that he was prompting me for my response.

"I don't really know, either," I finally said. "I'm not from Europe."

"You're not?"

"No. I'm North American. I'm from the United States."

There was an awkward pause.

"That's not in Europe?" Jonas asked me.

"No."

"Oh," he said a bit dismissively. "I wouldn't know about that kind of thing."

It would be too cynical for me to use Jonas as metaphor for modern-day Brazil, to say that the country is accelerating into the future without compensating for past neglect, or eyeing sophistication while frequently overlooking the basics. Jonas is a single person, not a convenient representative of his country. Over the course of my fellowship, though, as I got to know arts groups and community initiatives throughout Brazil, I met dozens of people like Jonas - people whose heartfelt ideals and sophisticated reference points occasionally gave way to reveal what seemed like a stunning lack of fundamental knowledge.

Maybe I'm not in much of a position to complain. Jonas might consider rudimentary geography to be beyond him, but I feel pretty much the same way about physics and algebra, and that didn't stop me from graduating from college or even from winning a prestigious research fellowship. Still, when I met him a little more than a year ago, I was taken aback by Jonas's nonchalance. It had the same effect on me as the first-generation university stu-

*Gilberto Gil
in ministerial
mode,
announcing
new cultural
investments
in Olinda.*





Bloco A Parte – an impromptu ensemble of under-employed percussionists – takes to the streets in Olinda.

dents I met in cities in the northeast and the Amazon who told me about their siblings selling votes for 50 *reais* or for dental work. Contemporary Brazil is making incredible progress; even since 2002, when I first went to the country, the changes are significant and easily visible. But, as Americans are finding out up close as we approach the 150th day of a new administration, the remnants of past oppression and a political culture rife with abuses of power are not easy to overcome.

Still, it's impossible to ignore Brazil's improvements. For example, a recent UNESCO report said that 96% of the country's kids attend school, which would have been unimaginable a decade ago. Most Brazilians are farther from starvation than they've ever been; over 60 percent of the country now lives above the government-defined poverty line, and though most folks' would still be considered poor by first-world standards, discretionary spending is way up.

Many — if not most — of these reforms are due to Lula, the country's current president who's a former factory worker and union organizer. I'll go deeper into the reasons tomorrow; for now, I'd just like to focus on his arts policy. A few days into his first term, Lula appointed Gilberto Gil as Minister of Culture. Gil was a renowned musician and one of the founders of the counterculture Tropicalia movement, and he was imprisoned, tortured and then exiled in the 1960s. At the time, he was classified as a "subversive element." When Lula chose this famously eclectic musician — who, importantly, is a person of African descent — to form part of his cabinet, it was a major symbolic statement about the meaning of citizenship in twenty-first century Brazil.

Gil served a five-and-a-half year term as minister before he stepped down last summer to concentrate on his music. Those five and a half years had more than symbolic value. Brazil has long had a policy of designating certain traditional places or customs as part of its official "national

heritage," but Gil made the tradition stand for something. He used this policy to reach out to little-known folk practices at risk of extinction, like the *cavalo marinho*, a performance tradition from rural Pernambuco, which I profiled in one of my newsletters. Gil's ministry also initiated a program that designates sites across Brazil — ranging from samba schools in Rio de Janeiro to clubhouses in the northeastern interior — as Points of Culture. Points of Culture receive federal money to introduce community members — especially teenagers and children — to cultural traditions, and usually to run arts workshops, literacy initiatives, and job-training programs. Here are some examples of Points of Culture programs in action:

Now would be the perfect time for me to throw in a poem praising the current government. But, as it happens, I've never heard one. This may be because even the Brazilians who support Lula are so accustomed to unresponsive politicians. Or it may be because artists working toward a broader, more inclusive understanding of citizenship don't feel like spending time commending a reform process that they feel is still in its infancy, and which is by no means guaranteed to continue beyond the next presidential elections in 2010.

One of the things that's most defined Lula's presidency is his willingness to look beyond the examples of the First World, and not to assume that what works for the United States will work for Brazil. Jorge Aragão, one of Brazil's premiere living samba musicians, sings that "Not everything good comes from beyond," and Lula was one of the first political figures to get that. I'll talk more about this at the panel tomorrow, but by putting Brazilians first and prioritizing local models of leadership, Lula was finally incorporating into political practice something that Brazilian artists have been advocating for generations.

Brazil has long been a country that looks at itself disparagingly as the "periphery of the world." Augusto Boal, the founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed, was by no means the first artist to question that vision. He was one of the most tireless, though. Boal refused to buy into the suggestions — prevalent in the country's mass media, the academy, and the political sphere — that Brasil is irredeemably backwards, and that the only progress will come from aping the First World. He insisted on an artistic practice that depended on popular participation and on the voices of ordinary people.

This position is by no means a given in a country where Gilmar Mendes, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, recently scoffed at the idea of a judge listening to the opinions of "the guy on the corner." Boal — like my friends at Cooperifa in São Paulo, and like thousands of others across Brazil — was primarily interested in that unheard "guy on the corner," and in finding stories that might not show up on the prime-time *telenovela*, but that more closely represent the reality of most of their fellow citizens. I'm going to read a poem by José Neto, another

poet I met at the Cooperifa open mic.

I'm from the Periphery

José Neto

*I'm from the periphery — so what?
My hands, my eyes, my body
Have their history, have my roots.
I'm from the periphery — so what?
I have as my right the right to be happy
To come and go, to laugh and dream
To compose verses, to staunch the blood,
Clean the scars.*

*I'm from the periphery — so what?
I have open arms at the hour of weeping
Dividing my half of bread
I'm your brother if you need a lullabye.*

*I'm from the periphery — so what?
I'm the mother of the late night
I'm the son of the dance
I'm the black man, I'm the white man
I'm from the alley, I'm from the broken down
streets
I'm from the periphery — so what?*

Cooperifa is a collective of guys from the corner, of poets of the corner, and it's become a reference point throughout Brazil. Throughout the country, a new generation of artists is asking whether Brazil might not be better off if its vision of leadership were more focused on its own periphery, where a majority of its population lives. The periphery is beginning to make itself heard: folks who have traditionally been excluded from artistic creation and national dialogue, from both the market and the state are beginning to demand a full place in society, asking what a new, more complete vision of citizenship entails. It's a national question, but one with international ramifications. At a time when much of the established order is being called into question, it's one worth serious consideration.

I don't have much of a conclusion beyond that, because I really can't see my ICWA fellowship as the conclusion of my involvement with Brazil. Instead, I see it as an incomparable opportunity to better understand this country that first captivated me seven years ago. I am absolutely certain that my future work and involvement in Brazil will rely largely on what I

learned over the past couple of years. All of the connections I've made, the communities I've been able to enter, and the poems, songs, and shows I've begun building would have been impossible without this fellowship. It's been a hell of a ride, and I'm very grateful for the opportunity that the fellowship presented, and for the trust that the Institute gave me to follow my nose, to land where I landed, make my own mistakes, and keep going.

I'd like to thank Steve Butler for his careful edits, his curiosity, and his patience with having an occasionally flighty performance artist in the field. Thanks to my avuncles Carol Rose, Bryn Barnard, and Susan Sterner, whose careful and attentive comments helped me progress not only in the way I wrote about Brazil, but also in the way I worked while in the country. Anne Mische and Sharon Doorasamy also checked in on a couple newsletters, and I'm very thankful for their perspectives, which were as insightful as their last names are tricky to pronounce. My parents Marlene Booth and Avi Soifer were a tremendous support network at all times, whether helping to coach me through my first bewildering months in São Paulo, or keeping me connected to the outside world while I was in Boim. They called every Saturday at 2 p.m. sharp, since there are no outgoing calls from the Upper Tapajós region. My sister, Amira Booth-Soifer, may not have been much of a correspondent, but she was a great support when she did get in touch. Friends and comrades-in-arms Sophie Nimmannit and Gio Gaynor have been a tremendous help in the past couple of weeks both in helping me structure this performance/lecture, and in easing my culture shock with stir fries and good beer.



Taking the stage at the Cooperifa open mic.

I'd like to close on a poem of my own. It's in Portuguese, but there will be subtitles on the screen. Anyway, it's already had most of a newsletter dedicated to it. This is *Gringo Que Fala*, the Gringo Who Speaks, the rap that I premiered at Cooperifa in September, 2007. As a performer, I've learned that you should always leave an audience with your strongest material, and I'm proud to say that this was an audience favorite pretty much everywhere I took it in Brazil. Like my fellowship, it's not something that has a clear conclusion yet, but it's been a ground-breaking step in a process that I'm really looking forward to accompanying. □

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ICWA Letters (ISSN 1083-4303) are published by the Institute of Current World Affairs Inc., a 501(c)(3) exempt operating foundation incorporated in New York State with offices located at 4545 42nd Street NW, Suite 311, Washington, D.C. 20016. The letters are provided free of charge to members of ICWA and are available to libraries and professional researchers on our web site.

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