The history of this peripatetic song transcends many borders, making stops in several countries and getting sung in several different languages. In doing so, it provides an apt illustration of Simon Frith’s (1996b: 276) recognition that music may well be the cultural form best able to cross the boundaries that groups erect around themselves, given the ways that “sounds carry across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races, and nations.” It also illustrates how musical meanings can be appropriated in serial fashion across different cultural groups, as members of one group take “bits and pieces that appeal” from another group’s musical practices and “incorporate them into the larger body of their own practices,” giving them new meanings in their own cultural context (Small 2011: xv–xvi). The fact that sounds can carry across a variety of natural and human-erected barriers does not mean, however, that the sounds that make perfect subjective sense to people on one side of such a barrier will immediately make sense to people on the other side of that barrier, unless members of the latter group put in a significant amount of effort. To adapt those sounds to their own purposes implies yet another round of effort. To interpret how this sense-making process has worked for “I Shall Not Be Moved” on its way to becoming “No nos moverán,” I turn to the anthropological concept of transculturation, a term intro-
duced into the scholarly literature in the mid–twentieth century by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz (1947).

The Transcultural Dimension

Like many scholarly concepts, the idea of the transcultural has been elaborated and employed in differing ways by different authors. In some cases, it has been applied in a quite literal way. For example, in an essay on ethnographic film, David MacDougall (2009: 47) asserts that transcultural refers to that which “transcends the limits of cultures” and that which “crosses cultural boundaries.” For this author, ethnographic film is transcultural not only because it crosses cultural boundaries (in the sense that those who watch it are from a different culture than those who appear in it) but also because it challenges cultural limitations, reminding viewers that “cultural difference . . . is a fragile concept, frequently undone by perceptions that are the product of sudden affinities between ourselves and those who are apparently so different from ourselves” (MacDougall 2009: 48). In this way, the transcultural “includes cultural change, movement, and exchange,” as members of one culture are placed face to face with members of another culture (MacDougall 2009: 67). Krys Verrall’s (2011: 56–57) approach to the transcultural is similar, with the added element that he refers explicitly to the potential of music to build communication al bridges between different cultural groups, using as examples the transcultural interaction that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Freedom Singers had with white, northern audiences in the United States and the cross-pollination that occurred between the songs of the labor movement, on the one hand, and those of the civil rights movement, on the other. The historians Matthew Graves and Elizabeth Rechniewski (2010: 3–4), for their part, highlight how the transcultural perspective refuses to grant analytical primacy to national boundaries, since cultures “take place” at all societal levels, including the national, infra-national, and supra-national. Most importantly, according to these authors, the term transcultural “draws our attention to the intersection and confrontation of cultures,” which permits new lines of historical inquiry (2010: 6). In the same vein, the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Investigación sobre las Américas (Interdisciplinary Group for Research on the Americas [n.d.]) emphasizes
that processes of transculturation always involve the imposition of borders, the transgression of borders, and/or cross-border interactions, while recognizing that borders need not be national but can also exist between different cultural groups, regardless of whether these groups reside within the same nation.¹

Without a doubt, the most widely discussed perspective in the social scientific and humanities literatures with regard to the transcultural is the one associated with the process of transculturation, the neologism that Ortiz introduced into the scholarly literature in the mid-twentieth century to aid in the interpretation of Cuban history and society, characterized by the mixing of European, African, and Caribbean indigenous elements.² Ortiz proposed the concept as an alternative to the concept of acculturation, whose use in the anthropological literature was on the rise at that time and which suffered from the bias of overemphasizing the unidirectional movement of the members of one cultural group toward another, with the concomitant abandonment of the cultural practices of their place of origin and their subsequent “de-culturalized” integration into the receiving culture. Ortiz observed that in Cuba and the rest of the Americas, there was abundant evidence that the contact between Europeans, Africans, and indigenous people did not result in one group coming to resemble another in cultural terms but rather consisted of the groups’ mutually influencing and transforming one another, even as one group oppressed and exploited another. He asserted that “the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them” (Ortiz 1947: 103). For Ortiz and his followers, transculturation is a dynamic process that never ends once and for all but rather is “the process of individuals and of societies changing themselves by integration of diverse lifeways into a new dynamic whole,” in which “subsequent interactions and transcultural lives will again change this new—and transitory—culture” (Hoerder 2006: 91). Of special interest for our consideration of the history of “No nos moverán,” Diana Taylor (1991: 91) reminds us that transculturation processes always have a political dimension that involves questions of power and resistance. For Taylor, such processes can promote “the consciousness of a society’s own historically specific, cultural manifestations in contact with
but differentiated from other societies.” Furthermore, the study of transculturation processes requires us to not only interpret meanings, as in what the same symbols might mean in different contexts, but also investigate how groups make use of symbols in their collective struggles for empowerment, investigating when and why certain “forms, symbols, or aspects of cultural identity” become salient to the advance or defense of a group’s own agenda in its confrontations with other groups.

Taylor’s observations lead us to consider another aspect of the transcultural: that the knowledge obtained by subaltern individuals and communities in their interactions with other cultures can serve as an important resource—*capital* in the sense that the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu gives to the term—in their struggles to defend and advance their interests in the sociopolitical realm. Here, we can reference the work of Anna Triandafyllidou (2009: 94), who speaks of *transcultural capital*, which consists of “the strategic use of knowledge, skills, and networks acquired by migrants through connections with their country and cultures of origin which are made active at their new places of residence.” Although she discusses the case of African immigrants in Europe and not the case of left-wing activists in diverse countries, it strikes me as reasonable to argue that the case that she discusses is analogous to that of people who acquire knowledge through their contact with other cultures and make use of it in their places of origin. Moreover, the concept of transcultural capital nicely complements the observations that Graves and Rechniewski (2010: 6) make concerning the relationship between the process of transculturation and the struggles among groups to valorize the symbolic capital of varying aspects of their history, as well as those of Dirk Hoerder (2006: 91), who speaks of the importance of “strategic transcultural competence” that permits “conceptualizations of life projects in multiple contexts and informed choice between cultural options.” And, finally, these observations lead us to Donald Cuccioletta (2002: 8), whose review of the concept of transculturation suggests to him that the phenomenon, being the fruit of the encounter and the mixing of different peoples and cultures, opens the possibility for people to recognize that their identities are multidimensional and can be defined and understood positively with regard to those of others.
The Contributions and Limitations of the Transcultural Perspective

Although it is evident that the evolution of the song “I Shall Not Be Moved/We Shall Not Be Moved/No serem moguts/No nos moverán” exhibits strong features of the process of transculturation described by Ortiz at certain liminal moments in its history, not all stages of its development have exhibited transcultural traits to the same extent and in the same way. In this section, I review the following moments of its evolution, reflecting on the extent to which a transcultural approach helps us understand how and why the song has played an important role in so many different places and movements: (1) its origins as a spiritual sung by African slaves following their conversion to Protestant Christianity, (2) its subsequent spread throughout the southeastern United States in the nineteenth century by Protestant churches, (3) its adoption by the U.S. labor movement, (4) its reinterpretation and appropriation by the African American civil rights movement, (5) its importation into Franco-ruled Spain and its use in Catalonia and Castile as a protest song, and (6) its embrace by left-wing Chilean singers during the years of the Allende government. In reviewing these moments in its history, I seek to add nuance to our understanding of not only how singing is put to work in social justice movements but also how we should conceptualize transcultural processes involved in the relationship between music and social justice movements around the world.

The origins of “I Shall Not Be Moved” in the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening are perhaps where we can best appreciate this song as the fruit of the kind of transculturation process that Ortiz describes in the case of Cuba. Here, we see very directly how the collision between West African and European Anglo Protestant cultures produced an unexpected and beautiful fruit: the spiritual song of Christianized African slaves. According to Arthur Jones (1993: 7), spirituals emerged as “a creative blend of African traditions and Christianity, creating a new, transformed religion different in form and substance from the religion of the slave holder.” This new genre of song retained African structural and expressive forms while at the same time incorporating a liberatory interpretation of the Christian gospel that white Protestants taught to their African slaves, each serv-
ing as a symbolic and communicative resource in slaves’ resistance to their oppression and persecution. As several authors have observed, the African musical legacy that slaves preserved in the New World consisted of such elements as the integration of singing into everyday life as a group activity (Epstein and Sands 2006: 36), repetitive choruses led by a “song leader,” a call-and-response structure (antiphony) in which the constant repetition for the response encourages all to participate (Burnim 2006: 54–55), and a strong and often syncopated rhythm (Walker 1979: 52–59). For their part, as noted in Chapter 2, Roger Abrahams and George Foss (1968: 57–58) suggest that these African influences are also reflected in a large number of traditional songs sung by whites. The simplicity of the camp-meeting songs owed to not only African influences contributed by slaves but also the physical conditions of these encounters, which often took place at night, lit by torches, and the fact that most of the participants were illiterate. In other words, in these circumstances, lyrical and melodic simplicity, the repetition of choruses, and catchy rhythms facilitated the rapid learning, memorization, and dissemination of the songs that provided the soundtrack for these passionately religious gatherings. “I Shall Not Be Moved” seems to have been taken up as much by white as by black Protestant congregations in their respective musical repertoires in the southern United States, with an evident stylistic and affective bifurcation between the two. At the same time, it should be noted that this bifurcation did not mean that African influences disappeared in the versions of the song sung by southern whites, given that their singing was often accompanied by the five-string banjo, another African contribution to American music.

The African characteristics of the jubilee spirituals described above and their emergence from the crucible of the camp meetings have played an indispensable role in the adoption of “I Shall Not Be Moved” in all the social, political, and linguistic contexts under consideration in this book. In this sense, the transculturation that took place between Africans and European Protestants that gave birth to the song in the southern United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century has been sustained in all the subsequent stages of its evolution, including in Chile. Lee Hays, the activist in the movement to unionize sharecroppers in the cotton fields of Arkansas in the 1930s and who later brought “We Shall Not Be Moved” with him
to New York, where he taught it to his bandmates in the Almanac Singers, was one of the first people to see the potential of these kinds of songs as a weapon to be used in labor struggles. In addition to their didactic and confrontational elements, these struggles contained a deep spiritual dimension that could be nourished by group singing. Furthermore, Hays was the person who nicknamed them zipper songs, owing to the way that new lyrics could be quickly and spontaneously inserted in such a way that the songs could be easily adapted to the diverse and changing circumstances that social movement activists confronted.

The adoption of “I Shall Not Be Moved” by the trade union movement in the United States was quite organic, given that it was a song already known by many black and white workers in the South and that the only changes needed were to substitute “We” for “I” and to insert new phrases related to labor struggles for it to serve perfectly well as a union “hymn” that could be adapted to any struggle with any business owner or corporation. Here, it could be said that transculturation did not play a particularly substantial role in the transfer and transformation of the song as it moved from the religious to the union realm.

Curiously, at the moment when African American civil rights activists reclaimed the song “I Shall Not Be Moved,” which had originated in the history of their own people during slavery, we observe a greater level of transcultural negotiation than in the case of the labor movement’s appropriation of the song for its struggles. To understand why this was the case, it is important to take into account the fact that in African American spirituals, the word “I” typically referred not so much to the individual but rather to U.S. Africans as a people, in such a way that the resistance of this “I” to racial oppression represented not the stance of a single individual who longed for her own liberation but rather the U.S. African people in their totality. Nevertheless, when U.S. African civil rights activists reworked “I Shall Not Be Moved” with white activists who were veterans of the labor movement, they had to be persuaded by these whites that it was necessary to change the “I” to “We” to emphasize that theirs was a collective rather than an individualist struggle, consistent with Bernice Johnson Reagon’s explanation discussed in Chapter 4.

One might think that transculturation played a more significant role in the translation of “We Shall Not Be Moved” to “No nos
moverán” than in the case of its move out of Protestant churches into the labor movement and from the largely white labor movement to the black civil rights movement, given that translating a song adequately from one language to another and from one singing style to another is no easy task. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that such was the case, at least the first two times the song was adapted into Spanish in the United States. In the first place, as has been discussed above, the song’s structure, melody, and lyrics are all decidedly simple and flexible. Second, the message communicated by the song—that of strength and endurance in the face of oppression—is also straightforward and readily transferable to innumerable situations of struggle for social justice. And third, the people who translated the song in the United States, both in the San Antonio, Texas, city jail in the 1930s and in the San Joaquín Valley in California in the 1960s, were union activists who made the decision to translate what had already been for them a U.S. union hymn and sing it in other union struggles in the same country. It might have implied a greater transcultural effort, for example, had Agustín Lira and Luis Valdez of Teatro Campesino sought to transform a religious song that had derived from the same psalm as “I Shall Not Be Moved,” given that if they were already recited or sung in Spanish, the lyrics would likely have been rendered as “Yo no vacilaré” (“I will not vacillate”), “No resbalaré” (“I will not slip”), or “No seré conmovido” (“I will not be moved [in my convictions, rather than in the physical sense]”), as the phrase variously appears in Christian bibles published in Spanish (see Sociedad Bíblica Americana 1926; Sociedades Bíblicas en América Latina 1960; and Vicaría de Pastoral n.d.) Moreover, the Anglo Protestant religious tradition was quite dissimilar to the Hispanic Catholicism that most Mexican American families practiced. In reality, Lira and Valdez did not face a very big challenge, given that they never thought that they were translating a biblical song but rather a song of labor and civil rights struggle. In addition, much of the music that the two were accustomed to hearing and playing in California, both Mexican and Anglo American, made use of the simple 4/4 rhythm that “We Shall Not Be Moved” uses, making the task of adapting it into Spanish even easier. In this sense, transforming “No serem moguts” into “No nos moverán” in Spain was similar: it consisted of a literal translation from one language to another within the same country and between
two wings of the same movement, in this case not a labor movement but rather the movement against the Franco dictatorship, a movement whose participants were mainly youthful students, who also shared a generational cultural element in common.

The case of the appropriation of “We Shall Not Be Moved” by the young Catalan singer Xesco Boix to sing in his own language in the movement against Franco in Catalonia might be regarded an intermediate case between the two poles of the transcultural that we have contemplated thus far. On the one hand, “No serem moguts” is definitively the fruit of the contact that Boix had with a culture very different from his own during his stay in the United States, not only linguistically but also politically and musically, as most notably indicated by his distinctive use of the five-string banjo, an instrument that had never before been heard in Catalan music and that was emblematic of his idol Pete Seeger, who to him represented music with social conscience and corresponding attitudes that were sorely lacking in his country. It is worth mentioning here that the young members of the Madrid collective Canción del Pueblo shared with Boix similar attitudes concerning the U.S. folk protest movement of the early years of the 1960s and that some of them made their own adaptations into Spanish of songs by such singers as Seeger, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan. Adolfo Celdrán, for example, recorded his own versions of two songs popularized by Seeger, “Kumbayah” and “Little Boxes.”

On the other hand, we observe that the adoption of “No nos moverán” by Boix and subsequently by the members of Canción del Pueblo and the Chilean group Tiemponuevo perhaps is less an example of transculturation than of the transmission of ideas and ways of expressing them musically among individuals and groups that even before sharing the same cultural object already shared certain values and leftist political projects to advance social justice. In this sense, we can see that the appropriation of “We Shall Not Be Moved” to express opposition to the Franco regime or to defend the Unidad Popular (UP) did not require much more transcultural processing than did the task of literal translation that Lira and Valdez undertook in California. At the same time, we might ask whether the transcultural process was any stronger in the case of Boix than it was in the case of the negotiation between African Americans and white participants in the U.S.
civil rights movement concerning the difference between “I” shall not be moved and “we” shall not be moved. Indeed, one might just as well say that the transfer of “We Shall Not Be Moved” to contexts in which it is sung in Spanish serves less as an example of transculturation processes and more as an example of how the characteristics of West African and camp-meeting singing that the song still retains—simplicity, rhythm, repetition, and antiphony—have facilitated its application to new situations in diverse cultural contexts. In other words, we might well conclude that the most important transcultural process in the history of the song took place long before its translation from English to Catalan and Spanish.

In this chapter, I have investigated how a traditional spiritual song from the southern United States has been repeatedly transformed as it moved through movements across multiple social, cultural, linguistic, and political contexts over the course of nearly two centuries. The interrelated concepts of transculturation and transculturalism help us better interpret the processes through which the serial transformations of “We Shall Not Be Moved” have taken place. At the same time, it has become clear that as much as the song has been repeatedly transformed, it has retained its essential structure, including its message of unswerving commitment to a strongly held ideal of egalitarian justice in the face of adversity and opposition. Moreover, it is evident that the people who have sung the song in so many different cultural contexts have shared certain moral and political commitments in spite of their different races, languages, and nationalities. In the book’s Conclusion, I consider how the shared moral and political commitments of activists living and engaging in a variety of social justice struggles in different national contexts might be best understood as elements of an underlying culture of the left that transcends other, more superficial cultural differences among them.