

from the nearly completed book by John W. Erwin, "VIRTUOSO CITIZENS: Mahlers Roosevelts Gandhis Mohammeds"

PROJECTING SYMBOLS OF GLOBAL REVOLUTION

συμβάλλω [symbollo] to throw or dash together ... to bring men together, match them to fight...At Athens σύμβολον [symbolon] was a ticket or cheque which the dicasts had given them on entering the court, and on presenting which they received their fee: also given on other occasions, as to persons who took part in a common meal.

Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford, 1871)

At the turning-point of World War II, two men of deep faith and loving respect for human diversity who became virtuoso projectors of postwar citizenship on the global stage met in Casablanca during an Allied summit aptly code-named SYMBOL. Because each was greatly interested in the welfare of his people, on the evening of 22 January 1943 they got on extremely well. Beginning in 1933, the fateful year when Adolf Hitler-- arch-enemy of spiritual, social and political development-- was democratically elected Chancellor of Germany, both the future Mohammed V and the paralyzed but world-traveling American President Franklin Roosevelt had established themselves as unifying symbolic embodiments, defenders, and animators of their countries' diverse communities and citizens. For ten years they had been leading their nations into the radically

interdependent modern world by articulating their own deep, even physical-- and warmly reciprocated-- feelings of bonding with their peoples.

Throughout that dangerous decade before they met in 1943, Sultan Mohammed ben Youssef and President Franklin Roosevelt had also been performing constructive modern variations upon a long and often troubled history of interaction among contrasting modes of Middle Eastern symbolism: orally transmitted agricultural traditions on the one hand, and, on the other, the text-driven urban innovation which was stimulated the three variously competing Abrahamic world religions of the Book—and in 1943 was already being radically modified by communications technologies.

Very soon the Berber child plays with rhythm. With the least encouragement, he makes himself rhythm and starts swaying, shifting from one foot to the other. At the least sound of a musical rhythm, he's hardly walking when he begins to dance. And as soon as he starts dancing with others, he spontaneously moves in a circle.

Jean Robichez, "Paroles berbères (Poèmes du Maroc Central)"

in *Paroles Berbères de la Résistance: Maroc Central, 1935-1940*, ed.

Bouazza Benachir (Paris, 2010)

Chant-accompanied dance, the haïdous is not only the favorite diversion of the Beraber, but above all their most complete and liveliest means of expression. It is danced on all feast-days and every evening in villages after the summer harvest.

The dancers form themselves into a circle, a semi-circle, or in two rows facing each other, men alone, women alone, or men and women alternating. Packed tightly together, shoulder to shoulder, they form a bloc. Tambourines and hand-clapping govern the rhythm. The movements are collective; it's a shuffling and shaking that spreads, intercut with great waves, wheat blown by wind. In their ease and precision they demonstrate a remarkable sense of rhythm. And yet, everyone making practically the same gesture at the same time, it is above all an ensemble made of juxtaposition that the haïdous presents. In this sense it is entirely characteristic of the Beraber [one of two Moroccan Berber groups].

Jean Robichez, *Maroc Central* (Grenoble, 1946)

The Empire-challenging 22 January 1943 conversation of Moroccan and American political symbolists briefly threw together their parallel deployments of oral-physical symbols to combat the savagery launched by Hitler and his minions, notably Vichy France-- which radically exaggerated the cruelty of centuries-old, text-legitimated British imperialism.

Globalization London-style had been successfully challenged a century and a half earlier by such virtuoso American theatrical improvisations as the Boston Tea Party. And just nine years earlier, in 1934 crowds of Berber farmers displaced to Fès by violent French "pacification" of the three ranges of the Atlas Mountains had proclaimed the young Sultan "Malek!" (king).

But Moroccan independence would only be achieved after Sidi Mohammed had for two further decades deployed constructively subversive arts of oral improvisation that he had learned during the Thirties from country as well as city people in the streets and souks.

The young prince had found a space in which he could be free: in the streets of Meknes and Fez he enjoyed playing with the children of simple people. That was his first contact with the Moroccan people, and he learned to know and love them. All his life he actively maintained this direct contact which had been so precious to him while growing up. He sincerely wanted to improve the lives of the humblest people, and was always concerned to keep in touch with Moroccans—often going to poor neighborhoods to shop in the markets and enjoy talking with the people, listening to them, and developing a personal understanding of their problems. And as Mohammed V, he set in motion changes to protect the common good.

Charles Saint-Prot, *Mohammed V ou la Monarchie Populaire* (Paris, 2011)

This was a match for what the paralyzed Hudson River tree farmer had learned by driving his hand-controlled Ford around Dutchess County, New York and rural Georgia, frequently stopping to exchange stories and jokes with auto mechanics and school-bus drivers, but above all with farmers-- black as well as white.

Roosevelt: “Why don’t you put a new roof on your house?”

Sharecropper: I tol de landlord if he buy de tin I put it on. He say de land don’t pay nuff so he afford to buy de tin. We jus move de table and de beds when it rains to dry spots.

Theo Lippman Jr., *The Squire of Warm Springs* [New York, 1977]

I got a letter the other day from a driver of a school bus up in Dutchess County, 52 years old, who wanted to do something. Well, he is taking kiddies to school every morning and taking them back every night. Somebody has to do it, and he is performing useful service at the present time, probably as useful as is possible for that fellow to do. He ought to be satisfied. He is really doing something. And the fellow who is running an automobile garage does a lot—another friend of mine up there. He wants to do something. He is performing a useful service to his community. He repairs automobiles and fills them with gas at the present time. ... In these communities there are a lot more things that can be done, and that is what we are studying. We are studying better health of the communities, better physical education for boys and girls and middle-aged people. You remember a few weeks ago I accused you all of being physically soft; you are soft. We may put in some kind of Swedish exercises out on the front lawn in front of the Executive Offices, and I will lead you—from a chair. (Laughter)

Franklin D. Roosevelt press conference, White House, 18 February 1941

The young Sultan's communications skills steadily increasing during the years after 1934, he continued to educate as well as mobilize his people with deftly improvised performances of the responsibilities as well as the power he had inherited. Ultimately he would refuse to continue maintaining the only links with Moroccan men and women that he had been allowed since he took the throne as Sultan in November 1927 by what the French called a Protectorate signing the impersonal laws of writ, *dahirs*-- prominently including provisions for applying Nazi measures against Moroccan Jews, which he had challenged in 1940 by mobilizing improvisatory oral theatrical skills that he learned from incognito conversations in the streets and souks.

The sultan refused to distinguish between his subjects, all, he said, 'loyal.' Angry to see his authority challenged by the French authorities, he decided to show publicly that he disowned the anti-Jewish measures. He waited for the Feast of the Throne to act. On that occasion, the sultan used to offer a great banquet to which were invited the French officials and high-ranking personalities in the native world. For the first time, the sultan invited to the banquet representatives of the Jewish community whom he seated prominently, in the best places, right next to the French officials. The sultan himself presented the Jewish guests. The French officials having shown their astonishment at the Jews' presence, the sultan said to them, 'I do not approve at all of the new anti-Semitic laws and I refuse to associate myself with a measure of which I disapprove. I must inform you that as in the past, they remain under my protection, and I will not allow any distinction to be made between my subjects.'

Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Quai d'Orsay, Paris: a telegram entitled "Dissidence," dated 24 May 1941 and sent to the Pétain government in Vichy by René Touraine of l'Agence Française de l'Information

And at Roosevelt's table on 22 January 1943, Mohammed ben Youssef joined his thirty-years-older but ebullient host-- from a still young nation that ancient Morocco had been the first to recognize in 1783-- in turning their similarly motivated and developed arts of subtle provocation against two by-the-book imperialists.

With the Sultan at Father's right and Churchill at his left, the dinner began... As the conversation proceeded, Churchill grew more and more disgruntled. What was the trouble? Father and the Sultan were animatedly chatting about the wealth of natural resources in French Morocco, and the rich possibilities for their development. They were having a delightful time, their French-- not Mr. Churchill's strongest language--easily encompassing the question of the elevation of the living standards of the Moroccans and--the point--of how this would of necessity entail an important part of the country's wealth being retained within its own boundaries.

The Sultan expressed a keen desire to obtain the greatest possible aid in securing for his land modern educational and health standards. Father pointed out that, to accomplish this, the Sultan should not permit outside interests to obtain concessions which would drain off the country's resources. Churchill

attempted to change the subject...Father suggested mildly that Moroccan engineers and scientists could of course be educated and retained under some sort of reciprocal educational program with, for instance, some of our leading universities in the United States... He mentioned that it might easily be practicable for the Sultan to engage firms-- American firms-- to carry out the development program he had in mind, on a fee or percentage basis. Such an arrangement, he urged would have the advantage of enabling the sovereign government of French Morocco to retain considerable control over its own resources, obtain the major part of any incomes flowing from such resources, and indeed, eventually take them over completely.

Elliott Roosevelt, *As He Saw It* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce 1946)

Roosevelt of course knew that Résident Général Noguès would be incensed by his opening of practical negotiations with the Sultan. But he was also continuing to goad the still far more powerful servant of empire to whom he had a year earlier enraged by twice proposing the post-1776 American rebels' Articles of Confederation as an interim model for development of constitutional self-rule by Gandhi's India.

I go back to the inception of the Government of the United States. During the Revolution, from 1775 to 1783, the British Colonies set themselves up as thirteen States, each one under a different form of government.

Therefore the thirteen sovereignties joined in the articles of Confederation, an obvious stopgap Government, to remain in effect only until such time as

experience and trial and error could bring about a permanent union. The thirteen sovereignties, from 1783 to 1789, proved, through lack of federal power, that they would soon fly apart into separate nations. In 1787 a Constitutional Convention was held with only twenty to twenty-five or thirty active participants, representing all of the States. They met, not as a parliament, but as a small group of sincere patriots, with the sole objective of establishing a Federal Government. The discussion was recorded but the meetings were not held before an audience. The present Constitution of the United States resulted and soon received the assent of two thirds of the States.

It is merely a thought of mine to suggest the setting up of what might be called a temporary Government in India, headed by a small representative group, covering different castes, occupations, religions, and geographies— this group to be recognized as a temporary Dominion Government. It would of course represent existing governments of the British Provinces and would also represent the Council of Princes.

But my principal thought is that it would be charged with setting up a body to consider a more permanent government for the whole country—the consideration to be extended over a period of five or six years or at least until a year after the end of the war.

Franklin D. Roosevelt to Winston Churchill, 10 March 1942

Only nominally a Christian, Winston Churchill was the Prime Minister of the threatened imperial island nation from which Americans had achieved their

independence by hurling not only canon balls but many further symbols of the peacefully tea-drinking citizenship that they sought. Demonstrating the close association of text-based symbolism and imperial rule during the 1943 Anfa conference, he had brought to Casablanca harbor a signal ship, *HMS Bulolo*, fully equipped with cipher and clerical staffs that enabled the British military team to overwhelm their American counterparts with memos and voluminous files meant to impose the British preference for restricting subsequent efforts against Hitler to the Mediterranean: a traditional focus of British imperial interests, as it controlled shipping through the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal to and from India and London's other Asian holdings.

As Eleanor Roosevelt would recall her husband telling her, when the Prime Minister asked the President why he was organizing a dinner at his villa for Sidi Mohammed he gave F.D.R. the chance to state what was obvious to him but certainly not to either Churchill any more than his French partner in Empire: "...because this is his country." Yet with unintentionally prophetic irony, the most passionate British spokesman for Empire had assigned to the wartime summit the open, generic code name SYMBOL.

And indeed ancient Athens' civic translations of military symbol-hurling were updated in the dinner discussion of postwar cooperation by the future Mohammed V and President Roosevelt: two leaders who embodied and tirelessly activated the potential for spiritual, social, and even geo-political reconstruction in

the deployment of symbols to make declarations of *interdependence* of many kinds-- not least between textual and oral literacy.

There is of course no guarantee that deployments of oral skill and activations of rural, agriculture-focused modes of telling time as well as stories will not be distorted into tyrannies more colossally destructive than the literate masters of the British or French empires could have imagined. Hitler himself was an under-educated and failed artist who launched his demonic parody of ancient unlettered fertility rituals-- summed up in the Nazi motto *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil) -- by hurling his own ranting voice, amplified and extended many millions of times over by radio and cinema technology. But the quiet and measured but free-flowing conversation over dinner by wise leaders who cared deeply about their peoples' welfare can continue to challenge empire written on paper, in stone, in bronze and in blood on countless bodies of victims. It was an opening of geopolitically inter-cultural dialogue which calls for—without at all *prescribing*-- further development. The post-imperial, mutually beneficial international partnerships which the Sultan and President discussed in their un-scripted informal exchange are still far from being fully realized. But you could hear their lively conversation as an unwritten scenario for innovative improvisations by grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the members of their respective bodies politic to whom Mohammed V and Franklin Roosevelt so attentively and actively listened.

Virtuoso Citizens will be about variations played on such ancient performances and projections of a counter-imperial geo-poetics as the Berber rounds by more highly evolved and self-conscious art grounded in personal and inter-personally composed bodies. It will look at and listen to cultural and political leaders who give palpable, urgently embodied, and indeed Orphic voice to the distinctive ways in which they and their people talk and walk, sing and dance, and can thus articulate and subtly re-configure potential and needs that they share with their constituencies. It will consider too more recent experiments-in-progress by the Stories Exchange Project in re-grounding communities in ancient oral traditions by Moroccan Berber-Arabs and Jews, as earlier by Czech Roma (“Gypsies”) and Jews. Whether initiated by individuals or communities, like Gustav Mahler’s symphonic projections of a post-imperial world, these inter-nationalist songs of the whole turning Earth are all dynamically grounded in the counter-pointing of competing rotations, revolutions, and circulations of living, growing and potentially articulate bodies.

Such vocally articulate respecters of local and global contexts as one-time Moroccan visitor Franklin Roosevelt and his guest of honor at the 22 January 1943 dinner in Casablanca, the future Mohammed V, could—and still can, I believe—hope to build and re-build models pro-vocative and thus energizing enough to convince us to work together to improve the conditions of life in our own and any other parts of the world. But they could and can only do so because they learned to keep their moral and imaginative balance in ways similar to the

Berber kids whom Robichez watched rhythmically pivoting on alternate feet before joining various doublings of inter-planetary and –stellar rounds.

Yet the join between one fundamentally and ultimately ungovernable high-spirited body and many others is not so easy to achieve, much less to sustain and develop. Robichez's illiterate mountain Berbers of the late Thirties did not willingly say what they thought. And to enable one Berber woman in the medina of Tangier to astonish her long-time neighbors and friends by beginning to share with them the power of her own painful experience, it would take the Stories Exchange Project bringing Robbie McCauley, an OBIE Award–winning African-American playwright and actor to work with the Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies in assembling a group of women living in the medina, preparing to develop a traveling theater-piece from stories that they would collect from their families and neighbors. It took such a high-charged, painstakingly composed and stage-managed context to enable her to share what she had been holding inside herself for decades. Suddenly she burst out, for the first time, she and everyone else said, with her own story: about being kidnapped as a child from her mountain village, forced to work as a servant in the city, and only many years later finding her rural family-- but also about how this long uprooting had gradually taught her to become, as she said, herself.

Which made us remember how, in 1996 when we were making the first of two video documentaries on the work of the Stories Exchange Project in the Czech

Republic, a sixteen year-old Czech Romani girl who had astonished us in New York by turning out to be able to speak English well told me on camera in Prague about what had happened to her in the project. Ethela Ferková had convinced her grandmother to tell stories that she had not told her family for half a century, and then Ethela had put her own body on their unwritten lines by playing her grandmother in an earlier theater-piece developed and directed by Robbie McCauley. That day she spoke much more slowly and deliberately than usual, carefully choosing English words which would enable her to describe what she in turn had refused to talk about in Czech.

When my mother told me that grandmother was in the camp, I went to grandmother. I said—

I want to know your story. Could you tell me about this? Grandmother, you have to tell me something about how it was in Plovič.

My grandmother told me.

We didn't know why they were taking us there. We slept one night and in the morning they put us into three lines: the women, the children and the men were separated. A German officer said, Women, you will work in the forest. And I hid myself behind the women like this. And then I cried.

They were very sad stories. That more people died. That there was nothing to eat.

It was very sad.

But there was in my mind... that I am Gypsy and I don't have to be *shy* that I am Gypsy. I can be proud that I am Gypsy. And I am.

Still.

It sounded like the little Berber kid turning round and round and then gradually learning to join larger and larger circles. And Ethela's re-rooting, energizing round dance had been choreographed by many other women and men having a go at putting global technologies to work-- and play-- in new, because very old, ways: mobilizing oral traditions more ancient than Czech, French, Arabic, or English to help build bodies politic that thrive on citizens actively remembering and sharing the pain as well as the joy of their differences.