

## Forging a Honduran Identity: The People's Theatre of Teatro La Fragua

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Honduras, the second poorest country in the Western hemisphere, suffers from a long history of dependence and underdevelopment. According to Tom Barry and Kent Norsworthy, Honduras has 35% unemployment, 44% illiteracy (149) and other deeply rooted problems, including the "lack of a strong national identity" (5). For the past decade *campesino* theatre groups, inspired by the principles of Paolo Freire, have addressed this identity crisis. In 1982, the Comunidad Hondureña de Teatristas (COMHTE) formed so as to provide an artistic, cultural and political forum for popular theatre groups who sought social change. Unfortunately, COMHTE disbanded in 1988, and of the 26 groups in the organization, only four have survived into the 1990s. One continuing aspect of the *campesino* theatre movement is the Festival de Teatro por la Paz, founded by playwright and theorist Candelario Reyes, held every two years in Santa Bárbara, Honduras. Indicative of the rather lethargic state of Honduran theatre, nearly all the participants in the 1992 festival can be classified as "grupos festivaleros", for they are inactive save for the occasional festival. Deborah Cohen and Kent Stone relate that, "the peasant theatre movement normally operates in workshops conducted in *campesino* communities as consciousness-raising exercises in the oral tradition" (149). Reyes has stated that the theatre practitioners in the provinces do not view theatre as a profession, but rather as a useful cultural tool for working with *campesino* groups (111).

In contrast to the occasional nature of most *campesino* theatre in Honduras, Teatro La Fragua, under the direction of American Jesuit priest Jack Warner, constitutes a year-round, professional attempt to use theatre as a means of empowerment. Teatro La Fragua's goal is "to forge a national identity by means of the people's own expression" (qtd. in Stage 13). At the outset, one must acknowledge the paradox of an American leading a group that seeks to create a Honduran identity, but it should soon become clear that the context of Honduras, as much as Warner, has been the shaper of La Fragua's direction. What La

Fragua seeks to do—address socio-political issues, explore Honduran history, teach literacy, stimulate personal and group autonomy—is similar to what the other Honduran *campesino* groups seek to do. If being led by an American offers a less authentic expression of Honduran identity, it also offers opportunities not available to the other *campesino* groups. In particular, Warner's American and church connections provide financial stability that allows the La Fragua actors to work full-time on their craft while also allowing the theatre to perform on a regular basis for an audience that pays little or nothing.

Teatro La Fragua, headquartered in El Progreso, Honduras' third largest city, operates under the auspices of the Jesuits and under Warner's direction. The company currently consists of fourteen Hondurans who not only perform but also do the maintenance work, office work, and public relations. To address social issues and to achieve their mission of creating a Honduran national identity, La Fragua has adopted a three-prong attack: 1) the staging of secular drama, often featuring Latin American writers and including an annual festival in which groups from other parts of Honduras and Central America perform; 2) a gospel dramatization program called *¡El Evangelio En Vivo! (The Gospel—Live!)*; and 3) dramatic adaptations of Honduran stories, myths, and folklore, collectively entitled *Cuentos Hondureños*. By examining the stages of Teatro La Fragua's development, I hope to illuminate why these avenues have been chosen and how they contribute to altering the social climate of Honduras.

### I. The Formative Years (1979-1985)

In January of 1979, Warner, with an advanced degree in directing from Chicago's Goodman School of Drama, arrived in Honduras for the purpose of establishing a theatre company. As a missionary, Warner's initial goal was to "awaken the working class to its miserable status and the evils of the oppressors" (McClory, 1982). Early on, Warner formed a partnership with some union leaders in San Pedro Sula who wished to form a labor theatre, much like Luis Valdez' *El Teatro Campesino*. But before the enterprise began, labor strife set in, culminating in the army's killing of a few strikers and the imprisonment of the theatre-minded labor leaders. After this incident, Warner decided that it was neither the time nor the place for a labor theatre.

During these first few months, Warner came to believe that most Hondurans lacked a cultural heritage, lacked the cultural identity of creative expression, perhaps best exemplified by the fact that Honduras had no music of its own, only music borrowed from Mexico and the United States. In Warner's view: "This lack of expression of a cultural identity means that the person has no group with which to identify, no mirror by which to gauge his own situation and

development" (Gardner). So, Warner sought "to fill the cultural void by creating the Honduran theatre—a prototype that might develop in time into a source of national pride" (McClory). Using his church connections, Warner moved to Olanchito to start theatre activity with a parish youth group. In addition, he attracted banana workers and students to participate in his voluntary actor-training workshops. Coming from a Western theatrical tradition that relies heavily on language, Warner discovered that literature-centered theatre was not appropriate for a Honduran audience, many of whom were illiterate. So, Warner turned to Grotowski:

And his emphasis on the physical language of the actor and his de-emphasis on language as such . . . so we worked at first very strongly in very physical exercises based on Grotowski and also with Viola Spolin's improvisation techniques especially for beginning actors. (*¡Teatro!* 1987, 11)

Having begun the process of training and maintaining a troupe of actors, Teatro searched for an adequate style to reflect and express the Honduran reality.

To achieve this aim, Warner used Valdez's *El Teatro Campesino*, both as a model and as a source of material. As part of their July 19, 1979, debut, Teatro staged a translation/adaptation of Valdez's *Las Dos Caras del Patroncito* (*The Two Faces of the Boss*). The play explores the relationship of the boss to the *peón*, with the twist coming halfway through the play when the boss decides to let the *peón* take his place. The *peón* tastes power and becomes more oppressive than the original boss ever was. The piece communicated with the Honduran audience because, as Guillermo Fernández, who since 1981 has played the role of the *peón*, explains:

It's our Honduran curse. When we do get some money, we think we're better than those still down below. We forget where we came from . . . When we do this show in the villages, the *campesinos* say to us 'yes, this is what I felt, this is what I have seen, this is what our life is like.' (Interview)

Through the years *Las Dos Caras del Patroncito* has been a main staple of the La Fragua repertory, and though the play can be considered agit-prop theatre, Warner made a conscious decision to move away from overtly political theatre. He explains:

I'm more and more convinced that you don't convert anybody in the theatre. At least not directly by ideas. You can play to the already converted, you can hold a pep rally, but I don't think theatre is the forum that's really going to change anybody's mind. It's going to change people's feelings. (Interview)

While Warner eschews propagandistic theatre, he still views Teatro's theatre as political: "It's political in the sense of being from the point of view from which one sees the world. We're trying to create a theatre in which the point of view is precisely that of the dispossessed" (Interview). Teatro acts politically by giving Hondurans the opportunity to see themselves reflected on the stage, to hear their own idiom, to see their own gestures. In theoretical terms, theatrical representation empowers the people because it inherently states that they have worth as human beings.

As another avenue for making theatre a vital part of Honduran society, Teatro placed high emphasis on developing children's theatre. In their first year they staged *Historias Exactamente Así*, an adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*. While the artistic quality of the performances came nowhere near Warner's demanding standards, the adapted story, "How The First Letter Was Written," conveys the importance of learning to read and write, a theme that strikes a particularly resonant chord in a country where approximately half the population is illiterate. Overall, Warner's goal for the children's theatre program is to "provide the opportunity for the development of imagination in this most oppressed group of all . . . as well as do something to fill the gaps in the education system" (qtd. in Gardner).

While Teatro La Fragua has emphasized children's theatre, Warner realizes its limitations; still, he holds out hope for its possible benefits:

Theatre for children is never going to lower the infant mortality rate. It will not save that child dying of malnutrition, nor will it provide him shelter from the rain and mud. But it can fulfill another need perhaps as desperate: theatre can make a child laugh. Perhaps it can even give him a spark of hope. (*tlf news*, 1.2, 1981)

While some may question the validity of doing theatre in a country as poor and needy as Honduras, Warner's statement suggests the intangible benefits of theatre. Philosophically, Warner subscribes to Paolo Freire's belief that theatre can empower people. He also cites the influence of Nicaraguan poet, Ernesto Cardenal:

Cardenal once said, 'Man has four basic needs: food, shelter, music and prayer.' I interpret music as all the arts and that a people without an art form, a people without an expression is not a people (*¡Teatro!* 1987, 51).

Essentially, Warner views cultural poverty as deadly as material poverty.

To foster cultural enrichment, Teatro needed to get to the people, but Olanchito's isolation, particularly roads impassable during the rainy season, necessitated a change in location. In 1980, Teatro La Fragua moved to El Progreso. They took possession of a Jesuit-owned building that originally functioned as a dance hall and country club for executives of the United Fruit Company. After years of repair and renovation, La Fragua has a large, flexible space usually configured as a deep thrust with seating for approximately 250 people. Though Teatro possesses one of the few permanent theatres in Honduras, the majority of their performances now occur in found spaces in churches, schools, dance halls, and open-air venues, as they perform in villages throughout the country.

As their repertory developed, Teatro tried to create a Honduran children's mythology, with its base being the cultural heritage of the Mayans. Ironically, Teatro used British dramatist Robert Bolt's children's play, *The Thwarting of Baron Boligrew*, a play about Medieval knights and dragons, as a starting point. Warner and the actors adapted it to Honduran circumstances to arrive at a play entitled *Misión a la Isla Vacabeza* (1982). The knight of Bolt's play became Ixbalanque, the warrior-hero of the *Popol-Vuh*, the Mayan scriptural book. Bolt's oppressive Baron took on shades of the Spanish empire and the whole complex of colonialism. Since dragons exist in Mayan mythology, Teatro decided that rather than directly stating what the dragon represents, they would leave it up to their audience to decide. Warner reports: "People interpreted it various ways. The most common interpretation became that the dragon was the multinational corporations" (*¡Teatro!* 1987, 20). The dramatic action of *Misión* concludes with Ixbalanque uniting the people, killing the dragon, breaking the chains of slavery, and putting into place a government that represents the people. So, while the dramatic action occurs in Mayan times, the play speaks to the present situation facing Hondurans. Warner now prefers this style of expressing political sentiments indirectly, and this popular play has become a cornerstone of the La Fragua repertory.

While Teatro La Fragua seeks to create a national identity, one must admit that cultural identities, if they truly exist at all, emerge over centuries, and theatre is but one aspect of them. As a more immediate goal, Warner clings to the "conviction that art can change people's lives if it is relevant and done well"

(McClory). Warner believes "all theatre should be controversial. If it does not awaken controversy in people it is not doing its job" (*¡Teatro!* 1988, 6). While in 1982 Warner claimed that Teatro had stepped back from activism towards a more subtle approach (see McClory), La Fragua soon found itself involved in a volatile situation. In March of 1983, organized and financed by the leaders of a local union, they remounted *Las dos caras del patroncito* and Lope de Rueda's *Pincho* in preparation for an extensive tour of the banana camps in the Progreso area. At the same time, the government sought to neutralize popular leadership in the country, and so the Honduran military ambushed and killed the union leaders just days before the tour was to begin. While the murders were not due to the theatrical activity, the actors cancelled this tour. Still, Teatro did not back away from controversial material for their performance in November at the Third National Theatre Festival in Tegucigalpa, which at the time was under nightly military patrol. As the closing segment of *Juegos del destino* (*Games of Fate*), La Fragua adapted El Teatro Campesino's *El soldado raso* (*The Common Soldier*). Originally written against the Vietnam war, Teatro adapted it to the then current contra war, but kept its main theme: "War means that my brother dies" (Warner, *tlf news* Dec. 1983, 3). At the time, though not at war, Honduras had four armies conducting maneuvers on its soil, and was undergoing a major militarization. In May of the following year 100,000 people protested the U.S. military presence, and, though the U.S. Army did not leave, later in 1984 the Honduran government did halt the U.S. training of the El Salvador army in Honduras (Barry and Norsworthy 155). One can only speculate whether Teatro influenced this social situation, but clearly it did address the concerns of the citizenry.

At the end of their fifth season, having achieved some measure of critical and popular success at both the Second and Third National Theatre Festival, Warner wrote: "The first stage is completed, the foundation is laid, and it's time to begin the real work of building upon that" (*tlf news* Dec. 1983). To do this, Warner decided to go along the lines of *commedia dell'arte*.

Their most successful *commedia*-based work was a 1985 production of Moliere's *Scapino* with the setting moved to La Ceiba, Honduras's major port town. Warner saw it working in a Honduran context because "Moliere is really writing from the point of view of the servants . . . the relationship of servants to upper class is not all that far from the way the real relationships are here" (Interview). Warner tried to capture the spirit of Moliere, and included entertaining elements such as a break-dancing waiter, bizarre musical *intermezzi*, and a show-closing audience sing and dance along. While *Scapino* proved popular with audiences, the production forced Warner and principal actors Edy Barahona and Guillermo Fernández to rethink the direction of Teatro: "We were

doing very good theatre but it was theatre that to a great extent was still directed to the cities. . . . We hadn't gotten really to the core of the society" (*¡Teatro!* 1987, 25). Rather than be a theatre for the middle-class, for the urban audiences of Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, and El Progreso, Teatro decided to seek out more actively the *campesino* audience. To achieve this goal, Teatro had to follow the principle: "If people don't go to the theatre, then the theatre has to go to the people."

## II. Stage Two: ¡El Evangelio En Vivo!

While the first years of Teatro La Fragua focused on the search for a style and a structure that spoke to and expressed a disinherited, voiceless people, the second phase centered on how to build a theatrical tradition. Finding it difficult to change the routine of the people, they decided to bring theatre into an already existing routine; in other words, they decided that the best way to reach the people in the villages was through the church. Using medieval religious drama as a model, Teatro spent the next two and a half years working full time on developing their gospel dramatization program. The program possesses two branches: 1) the professional troupe's performance of religious-based plays centered around the Christmas and Easter seasons, and 2) workshops on dramatizing the Gospel.

Briefly, the workshops involve Teatro members visiting a village or barrio and teaching the people, usually youths, the techniques for taking a gospel event and dramatizing it for public performance. By the end of the three day workshop, the students should be equipped with the knowledge of how to do it themselves, with the hope that they will continue to conduct dramatizations on their own initiative. Customarily, Teatro offers a follow-up visit. The original goal was to bring Teatro La Fragua into the daily lives of a larger section of the people. In addition, by teaching acting techniques, they hoped to develop a potential pool of actors. At times, they have had up to 600 youths involved in the program. But beyond any artistic or religious effect, perhaps most striking has been the sociological impact of the workshops.

Similar to Paolo Freire's use of non-traditional pedagogical techniques, Teatro La Fragua has discovered that their theatre workshops serve first and foremost as workshops in literacy. Since a majority of Hondurans are illiterate or semi-literate, Warner sees these workshops as "probably the most important thing we're doing" (*¡Teatro!* 1987, 32). The workshops function as lessons in reading, both in how to read and in how to make sense of what has been read. The dramatization process involves taking a text, reading it, repeating it, memorizing it, and putting it on its feet until the words on the page have an

understandable meaning. Reading comprehension comes through enactment of the text.

The acquisition of other skills and abilities can also come from participation in these theatrical workshops. For example, in the workshop process, one sees people learning public speaking, discipline, concentration, cooperation, and self-respect. The final step of public performance provides a measure of dignity and an increased sense of self-worth. A North American may have difficulty understanding that all these vital, intangible values do not come naturally to most Hondurans. Oppression, unemployment, and a rudimentary education system often produce individuals lacking self-confidence. Actor and workshop director Guillermo Fernández relates: "When children do a dramatization they feel proud, they feel important. They realize that they can contribute something to their communities by doing the dramatizations" (*tlf news*, 19 July, 1989). The short duration of the workshops coupled with the lack of sustained follow-through are limitations of the program, but these workshops, as well as those by other *campesino* groups, offer the poor of Honduras an educational supplement and an outlet for creative expression.

A long range goal of the gospel dramatization program is to move "towards a cycle drama on the style of the medieval cycle dramas where each of these villages would have a part in the whole" (*¡Teatro!* 1987, 51-52). Through theatrical cooperation, Warner hopes to open up avenues of communication between villages, some of which still do not have a single telephone. While this goal of producing a large cycle play has not yet been successful, the La Fragua gospel dramatization techniques have been taught to church groups in Managua, Belize City, Guatemala City, and San Salvador thereby opening up avenues for intercultural exchange.

While Teatro offers these workshops intermittently throughout the year, since 1988 La Fragua has divided their professional season into six months of religious plays, centered around a Christmas cycle and a Passion play, and six months for secular works. Warner tries to downplay this distinction: "Our artistic approach to the religious pieces is the same as the secular ones; it's just that the content is different" (Warner, qtd. in Erdman 3). While some theatre practitioners may view religious drama as merely a mask for indoctrination, Warner shuns this emphasis on the Bible as dogma. Warner states: "To me, the Gospels are great art . . . they're also the most subversive document ever written" (qtd. in Stage 13). In contrast to the conservative nature of most North American churches, Warner can be counted among the Jesuits who identify with the progressive social forces in Latin America. Furthermore, Warner sees no contradiction between his roles as priest and as artistic director:



I've come to see that the concept of divine inspiration of the gospels and the concept of artistic inspiration aren't really that far apart. . . . I believe very firmly that any writer, any artist, is reaching for something beyond himself, beyond our littleness. Art is always, in some way, touching deep spiritual questions of who we are, what is our place in this world and what does life mean. (qtd. in Stage 13)

In an era when theorists and practitioners claim to be attempting to break down barriers, the interrelatedness of art and religion is rarely broached, and so Warner's perspective offers one insight on what may lie at the core of the religious and artistic quest.

Over the years both the Passion play and the Christmas cycle have evolved as they have incorporated a variety of dance and musical forms with almost yearly alterations to keep the show fresh. During the Christmas and Easter seasons Teatro tours the churches of the villages and barrios as they offer almost daily performances for a six week period. This daily change of venue necessitates a minimalist production style. In addition, the switch from secular drama to gospel dramatizations required an alteration in the style of presentation, and so once again Teatro La Fragua looked for models, notably Paul Stills' *Story Theatre*. In addition, Alec McCowen's *St. Mark's Gospel* taught them the power of the Gospels as story, while the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Nicholas Nickelby* provided an example of effective story-theatre techniques. The visual style of their cycle plays owes much to Medieval and Renaissance painting with the biggest impact being no attempt at creating a historic look, but rather situating the story in a contemporary Honduran village.

Though using religious-based material, Teatro La Fragua never forgets that effective drama must entertain. For example, the 1984 version of the Christmas cycle, modelled in part on the Coventry and Wakefield cycles, used guitar and percussion to accompany the telling. In this version of "Adam and Eve" a banana served as the forbidden fruit, a rather apt appropriation for the quintessential "banana republic." Genealogies were scat-sung and accompanied by break-dancing. When Herod animated his army with a speech to wipe out the subversive child, the contemporary parallels of an oppressive military regime were evident. To cap off the evening of theatre, the La Fragua show ended with everybody juggling for baby Jesus. Overall, "subversive" messages and carnival-like theatricality rippled through this "religious" drama.

The core of *¡El Evangelio En Vivo!* is the Passion. Teatro La Fragua's Passion Play exists in several variations, from a simple version, based on the St. John Passion from the Catholic Good Friday liturgy, that can be done by village groups to the much more polished version which the professional La Fragua

troupe presents through Lent and Easter time. This extended version covers from Christ's journey to Jerusalem through the Resurrection. In La Fragua's handling, Christ's opening entrance to Jerusalem has occurred amidst dancing and the characteristically Honduran sound of a Carib drum. A Salsa drum or a dance piece choreographed to a Mozart Adagio have also appeared in the La Fragua version.

Teatro bases its approach to the Passion as much on the idea of Bible as literature (and thus source of archetypes) as they do on Bible as religious document. While performing drama with religious content, Teatro La Fragua emphasizes the ritual nature of both religion and theatre. To do this, they employ some of Grotowski's poor theatre techniques, particularly his emphasis on the body as the primary performance vehicle. For example, in their crucifixion scene the Christ figure is held aloft, stretched out on a wooden bar held in the raised arms of two other actors, while a third actor thrusts a wooden rod against his throat. La Fragua's Passion play also employs a version of Augusto Boal's "Joker" technique, and thus actors continually melt in and out of different characters, which aids a Grotowski-like ritual, communal response. A spectator comments:

The technique . . . did not allow me to rest on any one character or assume that I was one specific person in the narrative. I was the narrator . . . I was the crowd . . . I was the soldier . . . I was Pilate. . . . I can't forget the crucifixion scenes in which the role of Jesus is shared by all the actors. I was never allowed the comfort of isolating Jesus on the cross, of relegating that "role" to one Christ. Would I too be called upon to climb that same cross? (Abert)

This spectator's reaction suggests the achievement of Grotowski's desired communal psychospiritual experience, but here it is embedded in the Christian paradigm of the crucifixion.

Despite my distancing the work of Teatro from religion, the influence of the church on Teatro's functioning and theatrical expression cannot be denied. Though much of the funding now comes from individuals, predominantly Americans, without church support Teatro La Fragua would not exist. A non-priest artistic director probably would not devote half the season to religious cycle plays or indeed ever have chosen medieval religious drama as a model. Yet these factors may have also allowed Teatro La Fragua to remain a theatre dedicated to the lower classes. Actor and director Edy Barahona comments on their other major influence:

In some ways we're modelled on Teatro Campesino. Somebody associated with it, though, saw our work and said we were doing the kind of work they used to do. Somewhere along the way, he said, they got off the track. They became a theatre for the middle class. (qtd. in Erdman 9)

If La Fragua had continued in the vein of *Scapino*, likely they too would have developed into a theatre for the middle class. In addition, the security of outside funding allows Teatro to keep their travelling performances free of charge, which is a necessity if they are to reach the *campesinos*. For Teatro La Fragua the gospel dramatizations offer a means of communicating with a poor, illiterate audience, not so much for the purpose of religious indoctrination, but rather as a means of addressing many of Honduras' social problems. Perhaps the most significant artistic and political effect of Warner's being a priest is that Teatro refrains from doing pieces critical of the church, while choosing pieces that reflect the values of Christian humanism.

### III. Looking Forward

When Teatro La Fragua resumed their "secular" season in 1988, one of their main avenues of expression were *Cuentos Hondureños*. Dramatizations of Honduran myths, folk tales and short stories, *Cuentos Hondureños* are Teatro's attempt to teach Honduran youths the cultural values contained in indigenous source material. Actor and director Edy Barahona states: "These works bring our people into direct contact with their past history, and we hope that they may serve as motivation and as instruments to construct a society more just and more democratic" (Interview). While works of Latin American writers are also performed, the *Cuentos* constitute a large proportion of La Fragua's current repertory of secular plays.

Now in 1993, with both *¡El Evangelio En Vivo!* and *Cuentos Hondureños* firmly established, Teatro seeks other developmental avenues. Like many of the "festival *campesino* groups" Teatro has begun to explore dramatic uses of Honduran history. According to *campesina* activist Elvia Alvarado, the Honduran education system does not teach the history of the Honduran people. Students do not learn about Morazán, Lempira, the Banana strike of 1954, or of the *campesino* organizations (Alvarado 61). The national heroes and the successes of the common people get buried by a system that largely seeks to keep its people ignorant and thereby controllable. Alvarado states: "A real education would give the children a sense of our history and a sense of what the present struggle is about" (61). Since Teatro concerns itself with the people's struggle

for justice and opportunity, the dramatization of Honduran history stands as an attractive avenue to pursue. As a trial step, in the fall of 1992, Teatro successfully premiered a work about Francisco Morazán, the liberator of Honduras who also sought to unify the Central American countries. The show, *Alta es la Noche*, was then revised and showcased at their 1993 Festival of Artistic Expression. Further use of Honduran history might hinge on Teatro's ability to attract the services of a university educated Honduran who would have the authority to treat the subject matter in a way that the American Warner cannot.

In the meantime, for 1994-95, La Fragua has plans for developing a dramatization of the *Popol-Vuh*, Gospel dramatizations that focus on the life and teachings of Christ, and an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* as the study of a Latin American revolution. In addition, the actors have begun to take a more active role in initiating and creating theatrical pieces.

Eventually Warner would like to step back and allow Teatro to be more fully Honduran, but for now he must remain the driving force. Indeed, in the long term the most challenging question facing Teatro La Fragua is whether they will be able to survive beyond the tenure of Warner, a test that might best gauge Teatro's success in forging a Honduran identity.

As Teatro continues their quest for social change, they look for outside models to gauge whether theatre constitutes a viable means. In a 1988 interview Warner responded with a view that he still holds:

In the current political context of Honduras, theatre is a particularly effective tool, because Hondurans have no access to mainstream media. But as exemplified by the Polish theatre, the powers that be will let a great deal go in theatre that they would not let go through mainstream media. As in Poland, the role of that grassroots, homegrown theatre is as an opposition to what outside powers are trying to impose on it. Theatre becomes really essential and important for forming that people. I think a great deal of what has happened in Poland in the last few years is due to the upsurge of Polish theatre. (*Teatro!* 1988, 8)

While Warner and the members of Teatro La Fragua often speak optimistically, perhaps idealistically, they are also aware of the harsh reality of the social conditions of Honduran life. In a 1992 interview, actor Edy Barahona offered a sobering reflection:

The truth is that with theatre we are not going to solve my country's problems. But I hope that Teatro can play a role in making people aware of and understanding of our problems, so that we can begin to look for solutions.

In the complexity of Latin America, the question of just how influential theatre can be in evoking social change remains open to debate. But the members of Teatro La Fragua can be sure that they have entertained many people, and that they have provided at least temporary relief from the pain of poverty. Attendance at a La Fragua show, chronicles of audience response (in *tlf news*) and conversations with spectators all suggest that La Fragua has communicated a message of hope as they have provided the opportunity for joy and laughter, and have in some measure raised the quality of life in Honduras.

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