The Nile Project: Creating Harmony Through Music In The Nile Basin Region

Kelly Mancini Becker

University of Vermont

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THE NILE PROJECT: CREATING HARMONY THROUGH MUSIC IN THE NILE BASIN REGION

A Dissertation Presented

by

Kelly Mancini Becker

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of

The University of Vermont

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Dissertation Examination Committee:

John Gennari, Ph.D., Chairperson
Juliet Halladay, Ph.D., Advisor
Cynthia Gerstl-Pepin, Ph.D.
Cynthia Reyes, Ph.D.
Cynthia J. Forehand, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College
ABSTRACT

The use of the arts as a tool for conflict transformation, or what has been called arts based peacebuilding, is a new and emerging field. Yet, there is sparse empirical evidence on its outcomes. The Nile Project, a musical collaborative from East Africa that brings together musicians from all of the countries that border the Nile River, is aimed at finding a solution to the dire water conflict and crisis in the region. This study aims to explore how their collaborative process of creating and performing music despite their linguistic, cultural, musical, and political differences, can illuminate how music can be used to address conflict. Using a combination of collaborative qualitative and arts-informed research methodologies, original members of the collective as well as the co-founder were interviewed. Observations were also done of the musicians’ rehearsals, performances, and classroom visits at a New England University. Findings suggest that an outcome of the Nile Project’s work is the development of relationships, deeper learning, particularly about other Africans, and that the process of making music with those from diverse musical traditions can act as a way to practice peacebuilding skills: creating unity, while honoring diversity. This study seeks to add to a limited amount of research documenting the arts in peacebuilding suggesting that music might be an effective tool for transforming conflict.
DEDICATION

To my Father who always set the bar high

To my mother who always knew I could do it and was amazed at even the smallest accomplishments

And to my daughters who cheered me on
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project could not have been accomplished without the support and encouragement from many people. I most especially want to thank my advisor, Juliet Halladay for her generosity of time and effort. Her steady guidance, her meticulous editing, and her kindness were instrumental in completing this dissertation. I also want to thank my committee for their flexibility, encouragement, and trust in me. They allowed me to follow my curiosity and pursue this research even though it took some last minute adjusting on their parts. They were all very supportive and kind, but also helpful in developing the focus of this study. I also want to thank Judith Aiken who also supported a change of dissertation topic in the final hours. The guidance she provided in her dissertation course was invaluable, and her positive feedback and encouragement were second to none.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank, from the bottom of my heart, the members of The Nile Project. They were my muses. Seeing them on stage and hearing their message inspired me to find out more about their work, the Nile water crisis, East Africa, and the various musical traditions included in their music. I am grateful for all that I have learned as a result of observing and working with this amazing group of people. Mina Girgis was incredibly generous with his time and knowledge. His depth of knowledge is extensive, and discussions with him were like a graduate course in itself. The musicians were also so incredibly generous with sharing their time and talents with me. The entire group

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welcomed me into the group like one I was one of the members. I have learned so much from the opportunity to have conversations with these musicians. I am forever grateful.
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CHAPTER 1: PRELUDE¹: AN INTRODUCTION

On the banks of the Nile River in Aswan Egypt, a group of musicians sit in a circle. They speak multiple different languages and are from eleven of the riparian countries located in East Africa. It is closing circle after a long day of rehearsals for their upcoming concert for the community. Closing circle ends each rehearsal day and gives the musicians an opportunity to talk about the day, to bring up areas of concern, to acknowledge each other, and to discuss any unfinished business. Today, Mina Girgis, who is facilitating this discussion, asks the musicians for their thoughts on the morning dialogue session on the crisis facing the Nile Basin area. He passes the talking stick, which is used to ensure that one person at a time is talking and that all attention is on the speaker. After most of the musicians have shared their thoughts, and the Egyptians have been verbose, Girgis requests that some of the Ethiopians speak, as none have offered their thoughts on the subject as of yet. After the Ethiopian musicians deny the talking stick again, Girgis rephrases the question, hoping to encourage one of the Ethiopians to speak. He then insists that at least one representative speak for the group. Finally, one of the Ethiopian musicians shares her thoughts. At the end of the meeting, Girgis reminds the musicians that it is important for all voices to be heard in their discussions and that it is imperative for everyone to participate in dialogue so that all sides of the issues are presented.

This exchange is significant for a number of reasons. First, this meeting is part of a music residency of The Nile Project, a musical collective formed to address the water

¹ A musical term to define the introduction to a piece of music.
The Nile Project is a non-profit music collective formed in 2011 to address the water crisis facing the Nile basin region. The collective intends not only to create music, through a collaborative process, which they will perform for audiences across Africa and abroad, but also seeks to teach musicians and the larger community about the dire issue facing their region. The performances are intended to raise awareness for this water crisis and model collaboration among the countries in conflict demonstrating that people from the Nile region can cooperate, even though those in power seem incapable of doing so. Through the process, The Nile Project hopes to encourage the musicians involved to practice effective listening and constructive dialogue with the intention of sending them
back to their communities as ambassadors and change agents. The Nile Project may model how music can be a tool for conflict transformation.\(^2\)

In a world where conflict persists between people and nations, how can music be used to resolve conflict that crosses cultural, geographic, and political borders? The world is facing complex and catastrophic issues such as climate change, global poverty, overpopulation, and water crises – issues that no single leader, nation, or organization can solve alone (Alperovitz & Speth, 2015; Scharmer, 2009). As Bill McKibben articulates about the current state of the world, “It’s a systems problem. It is all connected” (Alperovitz & Speth). If global issues are a systems problem, then we need new ways to build and create models of successful systems that offer creative ways to solve them. In a new book on contemporary conflict resolution, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miali (2011) argue that there is a need for a multidisciplinary approach. With conflict becoming more complex, they argue, conflict resolution must be multidisciplinary and encourage a variety of disciplines (including politics, psychology, and the arts) to work together to solve what they call “complex conflict systems” adequately (Ramsbotham et al., p. 57). Danny Glover, an artist and activist who supports the Next System Project\(^3\) believes we need a new model for systemic change. He poses the questions: “What is a system that

\(^2\) The term is also borrowed from Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miali (2011) who consider conflict transformation the deepest level of conflict resolution. Transformation goes beyond resolution in its desire to change the discourse, the institution or group, and the relationships of those involved.

\(^3\) The Next System Project is a multi-year initiative begun by leaders in fields including politics, economics, and climate change, along with university researchers to build on innovative ideas and practical experience to envision new ways to address systematic issues facing the US.
humanizes us? What is a system that opens up our imagination of new possibilities of cooperation?” (Alperovitz & Speth).

Perhaps the collaborative act of making music with people in conflict can model new systems for addressing conflict. As Urbain (2008) proposes, “With conflicts becoming more and more numerous and violent in our twenty-first century, it is to be hoped that (...) many more people [will] explore the potential of music for peaceful conflict transformation” (p. xiv). In a turbulent world, how might music help to encourage understanding and empathy, and ultimately help to address conflict and other complex issues? Johan Galtung (2015), a pioneer in peace studies, suggests that peace must include empathy, be non-violent, and creative. All three components, argues Galtung, are interdependent and essential for peace and can be enhanced by music. A creative approach may provide a new way to address systems problems like the one facing the Nile Basin region.

The arts have been shown to transform how people think and behave acting as a powerful tool for social change and conflict transformation (Lance, 2012; Riiser, 2010; Shank & Schirch, 2008). In their research on arts and peacebuilding, Shank & Schirch argue that since “the peacebuilding field requires tools that are as diverse and complicated as the human spirit, the arts emerge as a logical ally” (p. 218). Creativity, suggests Urbain (2015), is essential for conflict transformation, as often conflict involves stakeholders with incompatible goals, and creativity enables them to see the conflict in a

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4 Peacebuilding is defined as “a wide range of efforts to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms, at all levels of society, and in all stages of conflict” (Shank & Schirch, 2008) (for more explanation see “Key Terms” section on p. 14).
different way. In regards to music specifically, there are examples throughout history exemplifying how music can make positive changes in our world, from the freedom riders of the civil rights movement and the political protests of folk singers in the 1960s to modern performances like the 2015 Festival for Global Citizens that raised awareness for extreme poverty worldwide. Music making can act as a means towards transformation by challenging assumptions, changing perceptions, and increasing mutual understanding (Lance).

One such new systems model that uses music to address conflict is The Nile Project. Their organization may offer a new model for peacebuilding in their use of music to encourage cross-cultural conversations, learning, and collaboration in effort to respond to a complex social issue. Following a discussion of the water crisis facing the Nile Basin region, the mission of The Nile Project and how it is working to address this crisis through a creative means will be explored.

**The Water Crisis in the Nile Basin**

The Nile Basin area of East Africa is facing a water crisis. There is a limited supply of water and over 400 million people who depend on the water from the Nile River for their life and livelihood. Water is needed not only for drinking, but also for electricity, agriculture, and industry. Within the next 25 years, the population is expected to double in this region, creating a concern for the sufficiency of the water supply to serve all the inhabitants of the basin. Other mounting concerns are drought, growing agriculture and industry, and poverty, all of which are exacerbating and accelerating the issue (Kameri-Mbote, 2007).
The crisis in the Nile Basin is complex with no foreseeable solution. As the population increases, the limited water supply will become even more scarce. This limited supply needs to be shared among eleven countries: Burundi, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; however, Egypt currently has 100% of water rights due to policies and treaties established in 1929. This unequal distribution of power hinders a cooperative effort to find a more equitable way to share water rights (Kameri-Mbote, 2007).

Solutions are not surfacing quickly. The Nile Cooperative Framework Agreement (NCFA), an international treaty to govern water use, has been drafted, but it has yet to gain consensus (The Nile Project, 2014). The tensions and conflict escalated in 2013 when the Ethiopian government constructed a dam that diverted the Blue Nile, which Egypt feared would critically affect their water supply. This dire situation could lead not only to a humanitarian crisis, but to war. As Egyptian President Anwar Sadat said in 1979, “The only matter that could take Egypt to war again is water” (Kameri-Mbote, p. 1). Dialogue, negotiations, and collaboration among the nations of the Nile Basin are essential to finding a solution, but there is currently no means to accomplish this. Countries still harbor distrust and ill feelings since the treaty of 1929 that gave the sole rights of the water from the Nile River to Egypt. The Nile Project was formed to address this crisis (both the issue of supply and distribution between nations) in the hope that music can be a catalyst for change and solutions in East Africa.
The Nile Project

The Nile Project was formed to respond to these mounting and pressing concerns about water usage in the Nile Basin, hoping to offer a new approach to address this crisis. The founders seek to use the collaborative process of making music to spur curiosity and encourage discourse, learning, and understanding in the hopes of inspiring citizens to find innovative and alternative solutions to the water crisis in East Africa. As Mina Girgis, President and CEO, explained, “We wanted to find a way to have all 400 million inhabitants of the Nile Basin be a part of the solution, not the load” (personal communication, March 13, 2015). The co-founders developed the idea of The Nile Project to explore how music and a new form of collaboration could inspire people outside of government to consider “out of the box” solutions.

The Nile Project seeks to inspire action from citizens, starting with the musicians who participate in music residencies. These residencies allow musicians to engage with their fellow Africans as neighbors and colleagues rather than adversaries, learning from each other about their musical styles, languages, and cultures, and working together to make a unified sound. This synergy of collaboration, curiosity, and learning is intended to spread as musicians perform across Africa and the United States with the goal of inspiring a solution to the water crisis in the Nile Basin area. The Nile Project offers a new model for problem solving that aims to break down barriers and encourage listening, empathy, learning, dialogue, and cultural understanding through the act of making music (TheNileProject.org).
Music and Conflict Transformation

While there are a myriad of aims of The Nile Project, the focus of this research was on its use of music for conflict transformation. It is my belief that the conflict between the countries is at the heart of the issue, and it is unlikely that any solution for the water crisis will emerge until the people in the region are working together. Using music to help remedy and re-envision relationships between the people in the Nile Basin will be essential to transforming the conflict. As Girgis asserts, “(Our) goal is the sustainability of the Nile Basin, but it has to start with the people; it starts with the cultural sustainability of the relationships among the people of the Nile Basin and then we can talk about environmental sustainability” (The World, 2015). Age-old assumptions and feelings of distrust, in addition to seeing the people of the surrounding nations as “other” versus neighbors, may be inhibiting collaboration amongst people in the varied countries bordering the Nile, preventing them from finding a solution to the crisis. This study explored how The Nile Project is using music first amongst the musicians, and then on a larger scale, to encourage collaboration and ultimately conflict transformation.

The use of music in conflict transformation and peacebuilding is a new and emerging field (Lance, 2012; Urbain, 2015; Zelizer, 2003). As Peter van de Dungen (2015) argues in the forward to a new book on the use of music in peacebuilding, music is an untapped and often ignored instrument for resolving conflict. Van de Dungen suggests that music, of all the arts, is unique in its ability to affect people emotionally and inspire deep and elevated thoughts, “It can stir the emotions as nothing else, inspire people to the loftiest thoughts and sentiments, and bring them together in indissoluble
bounds” (p. xvi). There is ample empirical evidence that music therapy can help with the physical, mental, and spiritual ills in individuals and is showing positive results for small groups and families (Urbain, 2008). It may be effective in even larger settings (Urbain, 2015). While there is currently sparse empirical evidence of the successful use of music to transform conflict on a larger scale, some key studies have reported positive results.

Urbain’s (2015) collection of studies and essays offers a wide range of research on music and conflict transformation in various areas of the world. Lance’s master’s thesis is extensive in highlighting the use of music and dance to yield conflict transformation in Uganda, Northern Ireland, and the US. The writings of John Paul Lederach (2005), a prominent theorist in the field of peacebuilding, are intended to situate this study in the midst of other conflict transformation efforts. This literature and others that will be addressed in the review of literature may help to illuminate what we can learned from the work of The Nile Project in its effort to transform conflict in East Africa to resolve its water crisis.

The phenomenon of The Nile Project – with its growth and positive audience response, in addition to the sentiment of those involved – suggests it may provide a new systems model for conflict transformation and for rethinking how people work together to solve complex global issues. Through a collaborative case study, I explored The Nile Project’s use of music to transform conflict in East Africa by focusing on the musicians’ experiences (through interviews and observations) as well as the results from surveys given to students who attended workshops. In an effort to understand how the musicians
in The Nile Project came together to create and perform a unified sound (while honoring their own musical traditions), the following research questions were addressed:

1) How does The Nile Project encourage collaboration with a culturally, musically, linguistically, and politically diverse group of people to create and perform a unified sound despite their differences?

2) What can such collaboration teach us about the use of music to transform conflict?

**Concept Map**

The following concept map, as shown in Figure 1, is intended to help visualize the ways The Nile Project uses music to encourage conflict transformation.

*Figure 1. Concept Map of the Ways the Nile Project May be Using Music to Address Conflict*
The Nile Projects’ use of music may be providing a means for conflict transformation in three key ways. First, The Nile Project is providing an opportunity to connect a group of people that have a stake in the outcome of the water crisis in the region. Music in this instance appears to create a bridge that brings the musicians together and sets the stage for learning and dialogue. Music also appears to provide the musicians a chance to practice peacebuilding skills, as negotiating the collaborative process of music making demands such a process. Finally, the use of music may be acting to encourage the building of relationships, a process that includes learning and mutual understanding. This study aimed to investigate how music may have acted as an agent for conflict transformation.

**Overview of the Study**

This collaborative case study took place on a university campus in New England as well as the music residency in Aswan, Egypt. It was bounded by The Nile Projects’ tour visit to this university and a week of the residency. The tour included a community performance and six classroom visits. Observations were done of all classroom visits, performances, and rehearsals that week and in Aswan. Interviews were conducted with the co-founder/ executive director, as well as with three original members of the collective. The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol format to allow for flexibility of the discussion and the freedom for participants to take the lead in sharing their experiences with the program. In an effort to align with The Nile Project’s processes, which uses music at the core of its work, an arts-informed research method was also utilized. Prior to the interview, I played a song on the ukulele for the interview
participants, and then the participants were invited to share a song with me. This was followed by an attempt to combine our two songs together before any discussions were initiated. Our musical sharing was intended to mimic the same process that musicians underwent in the first residency with The Nile Project. In addition to these methods, a short survey was distributed at the end of all workshops to gain student perspectives of the visits.

**Purpose**

As a musician, artist, and educator dedicated to social justice issues, I was inspired by The Nile Project on multiple levels. Not only was I so moved and mesmerized by their musical performance that I attended their performance twice in two days, but my curiosity ultimately led me to Aswan, Egypt to see them collaborate in person. Their mission to use music to inspire a solution to a complex global issue also intrigued me. Their multi-disciplinary approach connecting politics, music, ecology, and social justice also captured my interest due to my years as an artist and teacher committed to interdisciplinary studies. Their focus on education, in their intentional performances on and near college campuses and their programs that seek to elicit dialogue with students, piqued my interest as an educator and educational researcher. I wanted to find out more about what this interesting organization could teach us. While I considered many aspects of the organization to investigate, their use of music to encourage dialogue and collaboration among a culturally, linguistically, musically, and politically diverse group of people became central to my inquiry.
The purpose of this study is to illuminate the collaborative process of music making done by The Nile Project in its aim to address a complex, multi-national, and cross-cultural problem; this process may model how music can be utilized to transform conflict. As van de Dungen (2008) elucidates, with global conflict and violence on the rise worldwide, and with a shortage of effective solutions available, it is important to investigate and explore a wide range of skills, tools, and mechanisms to address conflict. The arts may be an effective tool for conflict transformation, but are being “marginalized” in this arena (van de Dungen, p. xvi). More research, specifically documentation and analysis of the use of music in peacebuilding initiatives are needed to support ways in which the arts can be utilized to address conflict (Urbain & Opiyo, 2015).

Research on the use of the arts in peacebuilding has been identified as a need, but there is sparse empirical research available (Urbain, 2015). This study is intended to add to a small body of research in the use of music for conflict transformation (Bergh & Sloboda, 2010; Robertson, 2010; Urbain, 2015). Urbain (2008) recently set out a research agenda and states, “(This) book sends a clear and unified message that music does have an important role to play in conflict transformation, and that the research has only begun” (p. xiii). Additionally, the use of arts-informed research is intentional and is meant to contribute to a young and growing field of research that foregrounds the arts in research (Cole & Knowles, 2008).
CHAPTER 2: THE SCORE: A REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

In effort to understand what, if any, contribution The Nile Project can make to the use of music in conflict transformation, four areas of literature will be explored. First, a comprehensive articulation of the literature on music and conflict transformation and peacebuilding will be examined, identifying major themes as well as trends and gaps. The next section will introduce some of the key theorists that create both the foundation and framework for this study including: Margaret Wheatley, Paulo Freire, and John Paul Lederach. Next, some of the key concepts articulated as building blocks of the project will be extrapolated and expanded upon so as to understand some of the intentions of the project and how The Nile Project was organized to address the Nile Basin water conflict through the use of music. This section is intended to bridge findings from existing research and from this current study to better understand what The Nile Project may be accomplishing in their efforts. Finally, more detailed information on The Nile Project will be shared, including background on their residencies and how the organization was formulated and functions. This information is intended to provide some context for the findings.

Key Terms

In an effort to proceed, there are a few key terms that need to be defined.

Conflict: The term is used in a multitude of ways throughout the literature. In this paper, the term will be used as defined by Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T., & Miali, H. (2011) as “the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups” (p. 30) and will include a wider understanding of the term than armed conflict.
**Conflict Transformation:** The term is also borrowed from Ramsbotham et al., (2011) who consider it the deepest level of conflict resolution. Transformation goes beyond resolution in its desire to change the discourse, the institution or group, and the relationships of those involved.

**Peacebuilding:** The term was coined in 1976 by Johan Galtung, considered a leader in the field, and defined as “an associative approach that removes causes of wars and offers alternatives” (Urbain & Opiyo, 2015, p. 2). A more recent articulation by Shank & Schirch (2008), which will be used in this study, is “a wide range of efforts to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms, at all levels of society, and in all stages of conflict” (p. 218). The term is often used interchangeably with conflict transformation in the literature and will be used similarly in this paper (see Lederach, 2005 and Zelizer, 2003).

**Musicking:** The term was coined by Christopher Small (1998) as any participation in music be it listening, performing, practicing, composing, or even dancing (Laurence, 2008). In this paper it will refer to the active process of making music.

**Music and Conflict Transformation**

*Music and Peace - two of humanity’s most profound expressions which, when combined together, constitute a formidable force for good.*  
(van de Dungen, 2008, p. xvi)

*One of the difficulties that we’ve had here in our society is that when we’ve had difference, we’ve built up walls. Our job is to bring those walls down. Those walls can be physical walls or psychological walls or emotional walls; our job is to try and bring them down. And we use the “easy” and I put that in inverted commas, the “easy” option of art, music and cultural awareness to do that.*  
(Lance, 2010, interviewee of Music and Dance in Peacebuilding (MDPB) initiatives in Northern Ireland, p. 81)
The use of music as a tool for conflict transformation is a new area of research (Bergh & Sloboda, 2010; Robertson, 2010; Urbain, 2008). While music has been utilized throughout history for political means and propaganda, for example, the use of music by the Nazis to promote a new nationalism and to rally and mobilize resources, the notion of using music for peacemaking is a rather new focus (Bergh & Sloboda). This more expansive view of the use of the arts, argues Bergh & Sloboda, is a result of a newly adopted approach to conflict resolution that they call a “human security approach,” which considers the basic human need for safety and well-being as paramount. This more human focused approach has opened up opportunities for peacemakers to employ a variety of approaches including drama, music therapy, dialogue workshops and cultural music events (Bergh & Sloboda).

While there is only a small body of research on the subject, it appears that music may be a powerful tool for conflict transformation (Cohen, 2015; Lance, 2012; Shank & Schirch, 2008). Lance interviewed 19 practitioners who used dance or music in peacebuilding initiatives in the US, Uganda, and Northern Ireland. In each of these countries, there is an issue of racism, mistrust, and the divisions of people based on race, religion, or perceived ethnic traits. Her research revealed some changes in assumptions and perceptions as a result of bringing people together through music and dance, which Lance affirms is a necessary step towards peacebuilding:

When used in an exposure-based approach, music and dance are a means through which participants can meet, confront their fears and misperceptions about ‘the other,’ acknowledge their similarities, and possibly learn to appreciate their
differences. Changes in perceptions and attitudes through such initiatives can then lead to a change in behaviors or a sense of mutual understanding. (p. 90)

All of Lance’s participants felt that their initiatives contributed to conflict transformation in some way, and a majority believed that their work could create change on a larger scale.

Shank and Schirch (2008) argue that the arts are an excellent tool for peacebuilding because the arts are non-verbal (offering a varied approach to communication), are culturally ambidextrous (meaning that it can be used in a variety of contexts), and are elicitive, (encouraging peacemakers to work within the context, not bringing in an outside external intervention), all of which they argue are essential for peacebuilding. Cohen (2015) agrees that music making can be transformative in it its ability to promote healing, build bridges, and provide tools for non-violent change.

Some key themes that emerged from the limited research available on the use of music in conflict transformation include its ability to bring people together (Tan, 2014; Urbain & Opiyo, 2015), elicit emotions (Brooks, 2010; Lance, 2012; Urbain & Opiyo, 2015), and encourage discourse (Jordanger, 2008; Riiser, 2010; Shank & Schirch, 2008). Additionally, the ability of music to encourage collective emoting and dialogue can lead to the fostering of new or transformed relationships (Lance), to the development of identity both individually and collectively (Brooks, 2010, 2005; Robertson, 2010), and to understanding (Zelizer, 2003) and potentially a reframing of the issue (Brooks; Shank & Schirch). Each of these themes will be explored in greater detail in the next section.
Music as a Bridge or “Binding Agent”

Multiple studies endorse music as a means of bringing people together, even with people from opposing sides of a conflict (Brooks, 2010; Cohen, 2005; Lance, 2012; Tan, 2014). Berg and Sloboda (2010) argue that the arts, particularly music, is often engaged in an effort to “build bridges” between those on opposing sides of a conflict (p. 6). In a case study of the music education program *Breaking Down the Walls* in Indonesia, a program that brought Muslim and Christian students together to study music in an effort to spur a more peaceful future in this area, Tan described the effect of music as a “binding factor” (p. 248). After Christian students shared a song they wrote especially for the event, a “musical conversation” began (Tan). The program resulted in a group of Muslim and Christian students from both schools forming a band, writing songs, and later creating an album of peace together (Brooks).

Similarly, Cohen (2005) shares a successful musical intervention done by Nicholas Djanie at the Sangwe Festival in Burundi in 2002, which brought students together with drumming. The project started a drum circle to create an opportunity for Hutu, Tutsi and Twa boys to connect. The results were positive as articulated by one of the participants:

Within two days the group was transformed - from individual boys playing on individual drums to their own internal rhythms… to a drum ‘orchestra’ who played to one common rhythm. Along the way, they learned to listen to each other; to respect each other’s various levels of drumming skills; and to respond to each other using the language of music. (Cohen, p. 13)
Lance (2010) also found that a “core reason” that the peacebuilders in her study used music was for its potential for “transcending barriers and creating links between participants” (p. 79). Additionally, Lance reported that many interviewees were amazed at the short amount of time it took for music or dance to help establish connections between participants. As one peacebuilder noted: “What amazes me again [is] it doesn’t take ten minutes, it doesn’t take one year, it takes not even five minutes, it takes the amount of time for someone to be open enough to try it” (Lance, p. 79). Not only did such interventions encourage bonding to happen quickly, but they also often resulted in “increased emotional awareness and expression” (Lance, p. 97).

**Music and Emotions**

Many of the studies revealed an emotional response that music elicits in people, which makes the use of music in conflict transformation a valuable tool (Brooks, 2010; Lance, 2012; Urbain & Opiyo, 2015; van de Dungen, 2008). Music is known for touching the emotional levels of humans (van de Dungen). Lance suggests that the use of music and dance allowed for the expression of emotions by participants, and an increase in what she calls “emotional awareness,” which she defines as an opportunity to express anger and other emotions in healthy ways (e.g., through break dancing). Such expression, Lance affirms, could act to minimize expressions of violence. Shank and Schirch (2008) also suggest the arts in general are an excellent tool for expressing emotions. They suggest the arts allow for the sharing of people’s feelings, emotional levels, and thoughts. Urbain & Opiyo, in their introduction to a special issue on the use of arts in peacebuilding in Africa, affirm that although there are a variety of arts, the commonality
is their ability to “provoke introspection on the human condition and to convey and appeal to emotions” (p. 3).

Brooks’ (2010) study evaluated four decades of public sing-alongs done at times of conflict and suggests that one of the most powerful outcomes of group singing is the emotions it elicits in the group. Sing-alongs are the act of singing songs in public with large masses of people – i.e., during the American civil rights movement and during Vietnam War protests. Brooks argues that sing-alongs have a positive effect on peace movement activities. The emotions they elicit in the group, suggests Brooks, are an important aspect of motivating agency. Sing-alongs act to unify people, to help forge a sense of group consciousness, and to give the group strength to act (Brooks).

In a study on the use of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) in Crimea, Jordanger’s (2008) findings demonstrates the power of music to elicit emotions in participants, what he calls “collective vulnerability” (p. 129). In 2004, 13 students and young professionals took part in a peacebuilding workshop. After a challenging session on identity, the facilitator decided to lead the participants through a GIM, or musical journey experience. Before the music was played (a purposefully designed mix of music from various cultures and styles with a particularly “emotionally charged” song by Deva Premal) (p. 134), the facilitator asked the participants to engage in a moment of silence for all the lives lost in a recent act of violence. During the experience, the facilitator noted that the “emotional temperature indeed became high,” (p. 136) and there was a display of

Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) is a technique inspired by music therapy, originated by Helen Bonny, which uses a combination of music listening to inspire altered states of consciousness. The technique has also been used to encourage dialogue (Bruscia & Grocke, 2002).
emotion by participants. There was not a desire by the facilitator to go too deep into emotions, so after the playing of the very emotional Premal piece, a more uplifting piece by Bach was played. Jordanger noted what he described as a heightened awareness in the group. The listening of music put all the participants in a similar mental state, where they were able to emote, and share a common experience. Jordanger summarizes his main thesis:

GIM may create conditions for the experience of a music journey allowing for a “now we are all in the same boat” feeling; a state of “collective vulnerability” where negative emotions, particularly unacknowledged shame and anxiety, may be transformed into positive emotions and possibly a state of flow in the group. (p. 137)

Jordanger argues that the collective experience of listening to and sharing thoughts on music gave these participants a chance to release their emotions in a non-threatening way, allowing them to see connections between them, encouraging them to open up in an effort to pave the way for productive dialogue. The musical journey, affirms Jordanger, created in participants a “collective vulnerability,” which encouraged them to talk first about the music and what they experienced and later about more challenging topics about conflict.

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6 This term originally comes from the Hungarian psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi who defines it as a create energy or zone that ensues when a participant is “swept” up in the energy of creating.
Dialogue

A variety of studies note the power of music making to elicit dialogue amongst people previously in conflict (Jordanger, 2008; Lance, 2012; Riiser, 2010; Urbain & Opiyo, 2015). Shank & Schirch argue that the arts (including music) have “enormous potential” for “dialogical interaction” (p. 232). Urbain and Opiyo share a multitude of initiatives that use the arts to effect peacebuilding in Africa, noting their ability to inspire dialogue: “The arts have the potential to open channels of communication between conflict parties (...) and to break down walls between ethnic groups” (p. 11). In the Breaking Down the Walls program, Tan (2014) found that “music and song became a catalyst for discourse and dialogue between two diverse communities” of Muslim and Christian teens (p. 248). Riiser noted discussions on many levels, both musical and political, as a result of bringing together musicians from a variety of Middle-Eastern countries. Jordanger showed that collectively experiencing music through GIM helped to encourage positive discussions between Chechen and Russian participants.

Open and honest dialogue is a necessary step towards addressing issues and conflict, and yet dialogue among opposing sides is often thwarted by fixed contrary positions that are emotionally charged (Jordanger, 2008). Jordanger found that music is an effective tool for encouraging dialogue where conventional methods that are verbal and merely cognitive often fail. If communities are hesitant to share some of their cultural knowledge and talk openly through traditional means, the arts allow for an alternative way to do so. One example of this is the work done by City Lore, an organization in New York City that brought diverse young artists together in a project called Poetry
Dialogues. The program encouraged students to create contemporary and traditional poetry forms (including rap, spoken word, African *jali*, praise poetry, Muslim prayer-calling, and Filipino *balagtasan*) on the conflicts and issues in their communities shortly after the attacks on September 11, 2001 (Assaf, 2005). Intergenerational teams were created with African American, Asian American, Latino/a, and Muslim American students. In a case study examining the project, Assaf acknowledges “the potential of poetry to create indelible images, to extend the reach of language, and to express complex ideas and feelings through metaphor [which] makes it a powerful force for illuminating community issues and concerns” (p.1). Students engaged in constant dialogue confronting issues such as racism, identity, religious freedom, and what it meant to be “the other,” particularly poignant in a time of turmoil post 9/11 (Assaf, p. 7). As Stevel Zeitlin, leader of the project remarked: “Bringing out the articulateness of the students in both poetry and dialogue was one of the achievements of the project. It gave audience a way to relate to these young people and to engage them in meaningful discussion” (Assaf, p. 9). Noted outcomes of the project were personal transformation of youth participants and the artist facilitators/mentors, as well as significant impact in the communities who engaged in dialogue with the artists post performance.

Similarly, the music of Yair Dalal who identifies as an “Arab Israeli Jew” and plays music in both Jewish and Arab musical traditions has been noted to encourage dialogue among Jews and Arabs who are brought together with his music. He often uses the oud or violin, which is often identified with the Jewish musical tradition, to play Arabic music. By combining these two musical traditions, Dalal attracts both Jewish and
Arab people together which Urbain (2008) concludes contributes to “meaningful dialogue” and even friendships. Ultimately, this act contributes in some small way to peaceful transformation in the Middle East (p. 211).

Lance’s (2012) thesis on conflict transformation in the US, Northern Ireland, and Uganda also found that music and dance paved the way for open dialogue. Many of her participants suggested that their work set the stage for audiences to discuss issues. Lance identifies a connection between the stages of dialogue and the stages of Music and Dance Based Initiatives (MDBI) (see Figure 2). Both begin with challenging assumptions, move through changing attitudes, and arrive at mutual understanding. This notion is articulated in Lance’s definition of dialogue: “a conversation or exchange of ideas that seeks mutual understanding through the sharing [of] perspectives” (p. 134). Lance defines dialogue as a means toward mutual understanding, a necessary step in the Music and Dance based Peace Building (MDPB) process (see Figure 3).

![Figure 2: Similarities in Lance’s (2012) Stages of Dialogue with Arts Based Peacebuilding](image-url)
Challenging Assumptions

While there is sparse empirical evidence in the literature regarding documented changes of perception due to musical collaborations amongst diverse groups, there are a few notable studies. In Lance’s (2012) study on the use of music and dance in peacebuilding (MDBP) in the US, Uganda, and Northern Ireland, she identified “challenging assumptions” and “changing perceptions” as notable outcome of MDBP, which she noted as “most often witnessed” (Lance’s words) (p. 86). The interviewees from her study believed that bringing people together was the first step in challenging assumptions. For example, one of the MDBP facilitators who used hip hop to bring people together from northern and southern Uganda suggested that even though they brought negative assumptions about the other to the session, having the common interest in hip-hop gave them an opportunity and platform to talk and challenge previously held assumptions. Another interviewee affirmed this notion and claimed:

When I go to Kampala and say I live in Gulu, people are so shocked and they’ll say, ‘Oh, those people up there are aggressive and violent and they’re fighters and they’re uncivilized.’ So of course when you have all those stereotypes going
around, then the only way to tackle that is to put people in a situation where they’re confronted with people from different areas. (Lance, p. 86)

In a case study done on a musical exchange between Muslim and Christian students, Tan (2014) also found that the music program helped students to challenge their assumptions. At the end of the workshop day where the two groups collaborated, students exchanged contact information. As Tan shares, “Perceptions of the ‘other’ had undergone a change” (p. 248). Tan goes on to share a direct quote from a Muslim student, “Well I thought they would be insensitive and proud. But it turns out they are really kind.” And one Christian student claimed: “People are more friendly than I thought they would be” (Tan, p. 248). The event, noted Tan, helped students dissolve a wall that existed between the two groups paving the way for new relationships.

**Building Relationships**

One of the strongest findings in the peacebuilding literature on the use of music for conflict transformation is the aptitude music appears to have for creating and transforming relationships even amongst people that previously saw themselves as enemies (Bergh & Sloboda, 2010; Lance, 2012; Riiser, 2010; Shank & Schirch, 2008). Berg and Sloboda, in their extensive literature review on the subject, consider relationship building the main benefit of musicking. They suggest that when music is used, long lasting relationships can be formed where none were before. Shank and Schirch name transforming relationships as one of four main contributions that the arts have on peacebuilding and a final step towards the prevention of conflict (see Figure 4).
They argue that the arts help people overcome trauma, which can act to renew previously shattered relationships and key to transforming conflict.

![Diagram of Peacebuilding & Conflict Stages © 2005 Michael Shank](image)

**Figure 4:** Shank & Schirch’s (2008) Diagram of the Stages of Conflict and Peacebuilding

Min-On, a music non-profit organization located in Japan that has been supporting the use of music to encourage peace since 1963, is considered one of the largest private promoters of the performing arts in the world (Min-on.org). One of their key goals is to help develop relationships among people worldwide: “To deepen mutual understanding and friendship among all countries by promoting music and cultural exchanges that transcend differences of nationality, race and language” (Min-on.org). In the half century since its inception, the organization has hosted nearly 80,000 cultural performances for more than 110 million concertgoers, and created a network of cultural exchange with 105 countries. In 2014, they established the Music Research Institute to
further research on the use of music to make a better world and to measure the impact of their program on the development of relationships.

Transforming relationships is at the core of peacebuilding. As Shank and Schirch (2008) state, “Peacebuilding is about social change, transforming people’s perception of the world around them, their own identity, and their relationships with others” (p. 237). Lederach (2005), a leader in the field of peacebuilding, suggests that a core component of the peacebuilding process is a web of human relationships, so finding a way to sustain relationships is key in peacebuilding. Lance’s (2012) research on the use of music and dance to address conflict in the US, Uganda, and Northern Ireland, found that a creative approach to addressing conflict led to the building of relationships. In a project done by Cohen (2015), which brought Portuguese and African American members of a school community together after a violent murder to create a quilt and a song depicting various stories of everyday life in their cultures, music helped students understand each other. The project accomplished greater understanding among the students by offering participants the opportunity to hear each other’s stories, find similarities and differences, and develop “relationships around their experience” (p. 32).

Risser’s (2010) study on the Divan Orchestra also noted relationship building as a positive effect of using music to address conflict. The Divan Orchestra is a program that brought young musicians together from various countries in the Middle East to play music together. The conductor and founder, Daniel Barenboim, created the program to provide an opportunity for young people from diverse cultures who have traditionally been enemies to come together and work side by side to create something positive. Riiser
found that this opportunity provided an avenue for sharing of stories, self-expression, and listening, which led to greater understanding of the “other;” a necessary step towards resolving conflict. As Riiser shares, from the work of Barenboim and Said (2002): “Once you have agreed on how to play a note together you can no longer look at each other in the same way again, because you then have shared the same experience” (Riiser, p. 24). This common experience, and the forming of new relationships, argues Riiser, encourages the establishment of a common identity.

**Identity**

Another consistent theme that emerged from the literature is the use of music making to develop identity both on the individual and collective levels (Brooks, 2010; Lance, 2012; Riiser, 2010; Robertson, 2010). There were a few studies that noted this outcome in projects such as Most Dusa choir in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Divan orchestra in the Middle East, and MDPB interventions in the US, Northern Ireland, and Uganda.

Most Dusa, a choir in Sarajevo, brings together singers from all of the dominant religious groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Muslim, Catholic, and Jewish), to encourage conflict transformation in the war-torn area of Bosnia (from here on will be called Bosnia as it is often referred) (Robertson, 2010). The group performs religious music from each tradition for the public in places most affected by the war. Most notably, the choir performs this diverse religious repertoire in all the various houses of worship (mosques, temples, and churches), despite the fact that religious intolerance has been at the heart of the conflict. Their repertoire has equally angered and moved audiences, from “death-threats to tears of joy” (Robertson, p. 43). Most Dusa’s mission is to create a “symphony
of religious music, a musical vision of the relationship between religions that would help to heal the wounds of the people of Bosnia and the entire region, restore damaged trust, and promote peace and reconciliation” (Robertson, p.48). Most Dusa is highly regarded worldwide and has performed in such esteemed events as UNESCO in Paris and the World Council of Churches Inter-religious Conference in Geneva. In 2004, they received a Common Ground Reconciliation though the Arts Award.

One of the outcomes noted by researchers of Most Dusa is their contribution to both individual and collective identity development (Bergh & Sloboda, 2010; Robertson, 2010). The choir members who were interviewed felt that in the choir they had a specific place or musical identity rather than being identified or divided along religious or political lines. For example, they were placed in specific musical sections based on voice type such as soprano, alto, bass, which offered members a new identity that was positive, and not associated with past biases (Robertson).

The Divan Orchestra noted a similar effect on identity development. The main finding from research done by Riiser (2010) is that the orchestra provided an opportunity for a shared identity as musicking demands a level of negotiating that leads to the creation of a shared identity: “Through playing the same piece of music, everyone participates in and negotiates the creation of a more complex and nuanced narrative they can have in common, and having done that, the orchestra may have set the stage for conflict transformation amongst themselves” (p. 25).

Lance (2012), in her study on peacemaking activists who used music and dance in the US, Uganda, and Northern Ireland, found that all practitioners noted an increased
sense of identity (both personal and collective) after their interventions. The sense of identity was explained as a shift in self-perception from a negative one to a positive one. For example, students were able to define themselves as a “break-dancer” instead of a “child of war,” which was a result of building both skills and confidence through the programming. The experience helped them identify with a community, a group of musicians, dancers, and hip-hop artists that was separate from ethnicity or religion. The programs also connected participants to a heritage that was lost or overshadowed by war and conflict. This experience allowed participants to connect to a more positive collective identity, which ultimately led them to feel more empowered both as individuals and members of a community (Lance).

**Mutual Understanding and Learning**

Lance (2012) argues that arriving at mutual understanding is a direct result of arts-based peacebuilding strategies (see Figure 2, p. 25). In her study, she found that the opportunity to bring people together with a mutual interest (e.g., hip hop or breakdancing for instance) encouraged participants to challenge previous held assumptions about the “other” and to develop relationships that led to greater understanding. As Lance reports in the findings of her study:

> When used in an exposure-based approach, music and dance are a means through which participants can meet, confront their fears and misperceptions about ‘the other,’ acknowledge their similarities, and possibly learn to appreciate their differences. Changes in perceptions and attitudes through such initiatives can then lead to a change in behaviors or a sense of mutual understanding. (p. 90)
Mutual understanding was also a key goal of the Divan orchestra, which began with the hope of attaining mutual understanding on a larger scale in the Middle East (Riiser, 2010). The creation of an orchestra of musicians from all over the Middle East allowed for dialogue and the opportunity to hear narratives between people considered enemies. Additionally, Zelizer (2003) studied arts-based peacebuilding practices in Bosnia and argues that the arts have great potential for “facilitating increased understanding” among groups in conflict due to their “non-linear and creative methods of expression” (p. 63). Zelizer’s study included interviews with 64 practitioners of arts-based peacebuilding, pre and post war, and found that the arts could be used as a tool for repairing relationships and deepening understanding.

A study conducted on the Azra project, a conflict transformation initiative using music, also found mutual understanding to be an outcome of the project (Pettan, 2010). The project was initiated to help in the transition of 11,000 Bosnian refugees who were relocated to Norway in the 1990’s due to the war. A goal of the project was to encourage “cross cultural communication” in effort to counter misunderstandings on several levels between the two communities (Pettan, 2010a, p. 91). A musical ensemble was created that performed both Bosnian and Norwegian music which “acknowledged a respect for the host community, building a bridge of understanding and compassion between Bosnian refugees and Norwegian citizens” (Pettan, 2010b, p. 183). The music series also included lectures and discussions with performances at universities as well as refugee centers. The intention of the project was collective learning. According to Pettan, “The message of the ensemble, seen as a symbolic representation of the social context, was
clear: we respect and appreciate each other, there is much we can learn from each other, and we enjoy being together” (p. 183). Research findings obtained from interviews and questionnaires, after six months of the program, showed “some positive movement” towards mutual understanding between the two cultures as a result of the musical intervention (p. 183). One important way that musicking may help to contribute to new understanding and learning is through its use of the imagination, which can lead to the reframing of the issue.

**Re-framing an Issue: Imagining a New Reality Beyond the Conflict**

“Peacebuilding is about social change, transforming people’s perception of the world around them, their own identity, and their relationships with others. The arts can help to transform people’s worldviews.”

(Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 237)

As Shank and Schirch (2008) argue, in their review of multiple studies on the use of arts in conflict transformation, the arts can help to reframe an issue or offer a chance to interpret a problem differently. Brooks (2010) argues that actively working towards reframing an issue, what they call “deciding how to present a narrative about the issue in question to the public” (p. 59), can be a highly effective mobilizing strategy. In some cases, this reframing involves envisioning a new reality, one beyond the conflict:

Art can create a frame around an issue or relationship that offers new perspectives and the possibility of transformation; acting like a prism that allows us to view the world through a new lens. Rather than solving problems by negotiating the best solution, the arts can offer a new frame for interpreting the problem and the world around it. (Shank & Schirch, 2008, p. 237)
Founders of the Heartbeat program, that brings Israeli and Palestinian youth together for dialogue and musical creation, suggest that their music “is the language through which we explore, question, and challenge the way things are, and imagine how things could be” (Heartbeat, 2015). Lance (2012) had a similar finding. She noted that the peacebuilders she interviewed named the ability of participants to “dream big,” (p. 107) or envision something bigger outside their current situation, as an outcome of their interventions.

The notion of a envisioning a new reality was one of the strongest findings in an ethnographic study done by Robertson (2010) on the Most Dusa choir in Bosnia. He found that participating in the choir offered the participants an opportunity to reconstruct the past in effort to “create a new future” (p. 49). When the choir sings and performs together despite political and ethnic lines in houses of worship that are varied, singers recall a past before war, when such an act was possible. In addition, singing together helps audiences envision a way that people in this area could get along to create something positive, without conflict and with better cooperation. Audiences seeing people from all religious backgrounds divided by musical abilities verses by ethnic and religious lines, as well as orderly, successful, and peaceful co-operation, provided an exemplar for audiences. Most Dusa seemed to model for audiences what was possible.

A member of the UN orchestra, offered a similar sentiment: “In a way the orchestra is a little bit like a microcosm of how the UN should operate when it’s working well; people playing with the same goals in mind, and playing in harmony rather than fighting each other. That’s why I like playing in the orchestra” (Concerto for Uniting
Nations, 2015). Yair Dalal, a world-renowned musician from the Middle East who calls himself the “Arab Israeli Jew,” is helping those in the Middle East to envision a new reality in that area in his combining of Jewish and Arab music, and by challenging cultural and political division (Urbain, 2008).

Despite positive outcomes of such programs, not all responses were positive. Yair Dalal’s combining of Jewish and Arab music often challenged and anger audiences. Negative responses to the performance of Most Dusa choir in Bosnia that performed music from conflicting religious backgrounds were also reported. The organization Heartbeat, which brings together Jewish and Arab children to make music, has had their share of criticism. How might such musical collaborations be realized? A conducive environment may be needed to support successful initiatives.

**Use of Music to Create a Conducive Atmosphere**

A variety of studies share evidence of the use of music to encourage a conducive environment for dialogue and collaboration in peacebuilding. In Lance’s (2010) study, she found that music aided in the creation of what she called a “safe space” (p. 135). As one interviewee shared, “You’re releasing their inhibitions, musical alcohol in a way (…) and then all of a sudden they’re relaxed and happy, asking questions: ‘Why does your culture do this?’; ‘What does that mean?’ Once they do that, then you’re starting to earn their interest and you get them hooked” (Lance, 2010, p. 80). Palieri (2015), in his essay on the use of folk music to dispel violence, affirms that music has the power to create a calming atmosphere. Playing music, sharing stories, and singing together can calm people and crowds, often diverting what might have been violent outpourings.
Jordanger’s (2008) use of GIM can also be viewed as a means to create a calming and conducive environment. Jordanger explains that the playing of certain music in the midst of a potentially hostile or tense situation can act to calm the group, elicit emotions, and bind them in what he calls “collective vulnerability”: “I resolutely picked the Bach CD and played the Allegro. An abrupt change of group mood followed the harmony of Bach’s Allegro. Relief came and a high-energetic calmness filled the shared space accompanied by a joyful mode of curiosity and flow” (p. 135). This musical interlude encouraged open dialogue and creative expression among the attending members.

**New Organizations that are using Music for Conflict Transformation**

The number of new organizations that are using music to address conflict may be some indication of its effectiveness. While researching The Nile Project, a number of new organizations were discovered that also use music to address conflict.

**OneBeat.** OneBeat, founded in 2013, is an initiative of the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in collaboration with the internationally recognized music organization *Bang on a Can* and *Found Sound Nation* as an “incubator for music-based social entrepreneurship” (1beat.org). Its mission is to bring talented musicians together from around the world, particularly from developing countries and the US, to create collaborative musical works that will be presented in a variety of engagements across the US in conjunction with lectures and panel discussions. OneBeat endeavors to be the nexus of a new way of thinking about how music can help us collectively build healthy communities, prosperous societies, and a more peaceful world (1beat.org).
The act of musical co-creation is intended to encourage cross-cultural learning, understanding, and collaboration among people from drastically different cultures, musical traditions, training, and aesthetics as well as political differences. The organization is based on the belief that music and the creation of high quality music is an ideal vehicle for negotiating differences and encouraging connection:

At OneBeat, we encourage musicians to listen deeply to each other’s musical voices, and to create work that values the complexity and idiosyncrasies of each tradition, creating risky, wholly unique musical works. This type of egalitarian, cross-cultural interaction continues in our discussions of social issues, as we find ways to use music to catalyze positive change in our communities and internationally.” (1beat.org)

Each year the program begins with a residency in the US, where the musicians come together for two weeks to mingle, make music, and learn from each other. They create new works of music and develop a plan for new projects that support arts-based social engagement in their home countries. All fellows become part of a large network of people, projects, and countries that work toward a common goal of using music to promote a better world.

Heartbeat. Heartbeat is an organization that brings together Palestinian and Jewish teens to create music together in an effort to “build critical understanding, develop creative nonviolent tools for social change, and amplify their voices to influence the world around them” (heartbeat.org). The weekly program that foregrounds both musical creation and dialogue gives voice to young people about the conflicts they experience in
their communities and a platform to share their feelings. Meeting in both Haifa and Jerusalem, the program literally helps students break down walls between them. Students also perform locally and internationally and present workshops and discussions, spreading their mission of creative solutions to conflict.

**United Nations’ Orchestra.** Even the UN is getting in the act! Started in 2010, the program brings together people who work at the UN to play in an orchestra to make music, to perform, and to raise money for humanitarian issues. As one participant Randy Rydell shared: “In a way, the orchestra is a little bit like a microcosm of how the UN should operate when it’s working well. People playing with the same goals in mind, and playing in harmony rather than fighting each other” (Concerto for Uniting Nations, 2015).

**Foundational Theorists and Theoretical Frameworks**

There are a few theorists that are foundational to this study whose work and key arguments are essential to understanding this research. The work of John Paul Lederach (one of the foremost peacebuilders today), Margaret Wheatley (a systems thinker whose work is a thread throughout all sections of this literature review), and Paulo Freire (who helps position myself as a researcher) will be explored to help frame some of the underpinnings of this study.

**John Paul Lederach.** No current research on conflict transformation or peacebuilding would be complete without referencing the work of John Paul Lederach, who is considered “one of the most esteemed global mediators in the world today” (Tippett, 2012). Lederach is a Professor of International Peacebuilding at the University
of Notre Dame’s Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. He is the author of several books on the subject including *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (2005) and *When Blood and Bones Cry Out: Journeys Through the Soundscape of Healing and Reconciliation* (2010) and numerous publications (Tippett). Not only are his works foundational to peacebuilding studies and initiatives, but his work is also particularly significant in this study due to his focus on the use of creativity in the transforming of conflict. Additionally, his understanding of peacebuilding and conflict transformation will be used throughout the study. There are a few central themes of Lederach’s work that will be introduced in this section: his notion of the moral imagination (the key to sustainable peacebuilding initiatives), his belief in the power of transformation at the local level, and his foregrounding of peacebuilding as a creative process.

John Paul Lederach is dedicated to non-violent transformation of conflict worldwide. His distinction between transformation and resolution (which had been the goal of many mediators previously) is intentional. Lederach argues that a *resolution* to conflict may dispel violence at that time or solve the current dispute, but is not ultimately enough to sustain peace (Tippett, 2012). His work aims for transformation addressing the roots of the issue, so that peace is sustainable. Lederach often utilizes the word peacebuilding in his literature, which he uses synonymously with conflict transformation.

Lederach has identified what he considers the essential elements of effective conflict transformation: the *moral imagination*. The moral imagination is “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth
to that which does not yet exist” (Lederach, 2005, p. ix). Lederach articulates what he calls the four “essences” of peacebuilding: the centrality of relationships, the practice of paradoxical curiosity, the willingness to take risks, and the providing of space for the creative act.

Lederach considers relationships as central to effective peacebuilding. True peace, according to Lederach (2005), requires people to understand their interdependence and that ultimately: “The quality of [their] life is dependent on the quality of the life of others” (p. 35). Most importantly, those in conflict can imagine being in a relationship with their enemies. As Lederach explained in an interview: “How we have been doing it is to try to create more people who think like we do, instead it’s more effective to create quality relationships between people who don’t think alike” (Tippet, 2012).

Paradoxical curiosity, another essential aspect of peacebuilding according to Lederach, is the notion that solutions to problems do not have to be binary. Curiosity leads to seeing “opportunities and unexpected potentialities that surpass, replace, and break the shackles of historic and current relationship patterns of repeated violence” (Lederach, 2005, p. 37). What Lederach means by this is that people in conflict must allow themselves to be curious and open to envisioning a complex solution. This solution may be a paradox, allowing opposite sides to coexist. Solutions may not have a one wins - one loses end result. Embodying paradoxical curiosity encourages those involved to embrace the ambiguity allowing for a solution that is not “or”, but possibly “and” (Tippett, 2012). Lederach believes that local agencies are far more advanced in this goal,
compared to governments that too often rely on either or, win, lose, who gets what, binary “solutions” (Tippet).

The willingness to take risks is also a central element of effective peacebuilding for Lederach (2005): “The willingness to (…) step into the unknown without any guarantee of success or even safety” (p. 39). This notion is made clear in one of Lederach’s other main beliefs, that one must be in the violence to solve the violence. Meaning that conflict transformation must be done within the community, not from afar. Lederach argues that you must be both connected “to reality and transcendent,” (p. 25) which requires risk.

Lederach also believes that peacebuilding must be creative, which he defines as moving beyond “what exists towards something new and unexpected, while rising from and speaking to the everyday” (Lederach, 2005, p. 38). Lederach sees the process of conflict transformation as a creative one, in its attempt to create something new that has not existed before. Encouraging creativity in the process helps the practitioner to move beyond “techniques” and rely on some intuition. Moreover, the arts help to accomplish what Lederach defined as a need (the paradoxical curiosity), because the arts embrace ambiguity. The creative process allows for multiple outcomes, often outcomes that are unexpected. In following this creative process, peacebuilders must “embrace the possibility that there exists untold possibilities capable at any movement to move beyond the narrow parameters of what is commonly accepted and perceived as the narrow and rigid defined range of choices” (p. 38). Additionally, the process of conflict transformation, like the artistic process, is often non-linear (Lederach & Lederach, 2010).
Not only does Lederach see peacebuilding as a creative process, and the peacebuilder as an artist, but he also embraces the use of the arts in the peacebuilding process. His recent work, written with his daughter, is on the use of metaphor in the peacebuilding process, including both music and poetry. For Lederach, Haiku embraces and models what he considers one of the most important facets of peacebuilding: “finding the simplicity on the other side of complexity” (Tippett, 2012). Music has the power to transport us, argues Lederach, and thus it is an important tool for working with people in conflict, especially in the healing and reconciliation process when violence has been present.

One of Lederach’s beliefs, also foundational to this study, is that there is more hope of transformation when the work is done on the local level. He believes that the people within the context are able to more easily see new and complex solutions to problems, unlike governments who tend to see binary solutions and “who gets what” outcomes. Lederach’s belief in the power of the people within the conflict to create transformation is closely linked to Paulo Freire’s work. Lederach strongly connects to Freire’s concept of “conscientization,” which acknowledges the capacity of the people involved to find their own solutions (Freire, 1970, p. 124).

**Paulo Freire.** This study was influenced by the work of Paulo Freire on two levels. His articulation of transformation, the belief in the power of human agency, and the importance of dialogue, in addition to his attention to power dynamics, is central to this study. These notions influenced many of the theorists who are foundational to this research as well as the key terms. Additionally, his work is vital to my positionality as a
researcher, particularly in my attention to power dynamics and culture, being an outsider to the various cultural representations in The Nile Project.

Freire’s work to empower illiterate peasants in Brazil to free themselves from oppression through education underpins any discussion of transformation (DeMarrais, 1999). His belief that those within the system are capable of transforming their own reality is key to this study. As Freire (2000) articulates: “Men and women develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation” (p. 83). It is clear that the work of Lederach, who creates the theoretical framework for this study, is influenced and aligns with Freire’s notion of agency for those in the midst of the conflict.

Freire’s belief in education and the power of dialogue as a vehicle for learning is also significant. As Freire is quoted in Macedo (2000):

I engage in dialogue not necessarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing. (p.17)

Dialogue as a means towards understanding, according to Freire, is not enough. It must be utilized to transform society. This understanding of dialogue as a means towards transformation is central to the work of The Nile Project and the theorists who inform this study. Freire’s attention to power dynamics is also central as Freire reminds us in his
work to be aware that power is at play in dialogue and those involved must be critical and aware in effort to not repeat forms of oppression in the process.

*As we leave behind our machine models and look more deeply into the dynamics of living systems, we begin to glimpse an entirely new way of understanding fluctuations, disorder, and change.*

*(Wheatley, 1992, p. 11)*

**Margaret Wheatley.** The work of Margaret Wheatley is deeply imbedded in the mind and work of the executive director of The Nile Project. Therefore, the next section of the review of literature will share major concepts from her key works that may illuminate some of the foundational principals upon which The Nile Project was built. Her belief that change on any level can happen through simple conversations with people who care about the same issues is central to this study *(Wheatley, 2002)*. Margaret Wheatley is trained in systems thinking, and her work, is based on new scientific discoveries that foreground complex systems at work in the world, in effort to model how organizations should function. Her belief that nature should be our guide, demonstrating a better and more simple way to structure ourselves, our organizations, and our world, greatly influenced the founders of The Nile Project *(Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996)*. In the next section of this review of literature the work of Wheatley will be expanded upon in the discussion of systems theory.

**DNA of The Nile Project: Founding Principles**

So as to understand The Nile Project as an organization and what their work has to teach us, the third section of this review of literature will address the founding principles upon which The Nile Project was built. As the executive director shared in his interview, there are certain concepts that are the “DNA of the program” and essential to
understanding The Nile Project and what they seek to achieve (MG, personal communication, April 16, 2016). These concepts are: systems theory, chaos theory, the U-Process, notions of hospitality, and Zambaleta.

**Systems theory.** One of the founding principles of The Nile Project is systems theory, which is key to understanding how The Nile Project sought to organize itself and function. Systems theory acknowledges that all objects, events, and experiences of them are systems and parts of a larger whole (Ackoff, 1974; Meadows, 2008). A system is defined as any set of two or more interrelated elements of any kind that function as one: a forest, a school, our bodies, a family, an organization (Ackoff). Donella Meadows, a leader in systems theory, suggests:

> A system is a set of things- people, cells, molecules, or whatever- interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time. The system may be buffeted, constricted, triggered, or driven by outside forces. But the systems’ response to these forces is characteristic of itself, and the response is seldom simple in the real world. (p. 2)

The key idea is that almost everything is part of a system and all systems are interrelated. Therefore, in effort to understand how a system works and thrives, you must consider the whole, not just the parts. This new understanding of the world began to emerge in the 1940’s and was a clear break from old notions of “reductionism.” This new focus was on “expansionism,” which is not interested so much in the parts, but on the whole, and how the parts are interrelated (Ackoff).
Russell Ackoff (1974), a pioneer in the field, identifies some key concepts that are essential to understanding systems theory and how all things in a system function:

- **Systems are made up of parts and all parts affect the whole:** All parts of a system can affect the overall performance of that system.

- **Parts in a system are interdependent:** While each of the parts of a system can affect the functioning of the whole system, it does not have an independent effect on the whole. Parts of the whole are affected by and affect at least one other part of the system. Since all parts of a system are interrelated, if one part is “broken,” addressing that part will not affect the whole unless other parts are also considered.

- **“Membership in the system either increases or decreases the capabilities of each element”** (p. 422). Since all elements of a system are interdependent. How one element functions, therefore, affects other elements of the system.

Why is it important to have a systems thinking vision of the world, particularly in the 21st century? As the world is changing more rapidly than ever and problems are more complex and interrelated, new ways of looking at the world and addressing problems are needed (Alperovitz & Speth, 2015; Meadows, 2008). Meadows suggests that systems theory helps us to better understand parts of systems, to see interconnections, to more readily think about future behaviors of systems, and be more creative and fearless in redesigning systems. Following a systems theory model helps us reinvigorate our intuitions making our lives and our world better (Meadows).
A new science. Systems thinking and organizational theory often look to science as the driving force for our understanding of the world and how we structure our organizations. In alignment with other systems’ thinkers, Wheatley (1992; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996) argues that we can no longer structure our organizations on past sciences based on Newton and Darwin that offer a “mechanical” understanding of how the world works, that is reductionist, and breaks things down into parts. The work of Darwin, and the notion of survival of the fittest, caused us to be reactionary and fearful, and suggests that there is only one way to survive (Wheatley, 1992). Additionally, basing our organizations and worldview on Newton foregrounds a dominant belief in cause and effect, determinism and predictability, and that numbers can provide all the answers. Newtonian thought convinced us that we could understand the whole by breaking things down into its parts, and encouraging separatism. In contrast, Wheatley encourages us to look towards the new sciences of chaos theory and quantum physics that present a new reality that promotes diversity, non-leaner solutions, and multiple pathways to survival: what she calls “survival of the fit” (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, p. 16). The old sciences and the way we adhere to them, she argues, are not going to serve us in our new world that is ever changing and unpredictable (Wheatley). Instead, Wheatley encourages us to consider more recent discoveries in science and what they have to teach us about existing and thriving in our current world. Newer understandings of science suggest there is no single answer, but many, and that life finds what works. Wheatley affirms that this is demonstrated in how nature sustains and regenerates itself as demonstrated in quantum mechanics and chaos theory.
**Quantum mechanics and chaos theory.** Wheatley (1992) articulates how the scientific discoveries in the beginning of the 20th century offer new ways of seeing and understanding the world. These new sciences do not discount the laws defined by Newton or Darwin, but demonstrate that there are things that cannot be explained by these theories. Quantum physics, defined by Niels Bohr and built on the work of Otto Stern and Walter Gerlach (who discovered that light could be either waves or particles at random), identifies the unpredictability of how particles behave on the subatomic level. The elemental principals of quantum physics that baffled and mystified physicists was that the matter of things were indeterminate until measured. As Lindley (1996) explains, in classical physics, physical properties were believed to have definite values that could be measured. In quantum physics, this can no longer be assumed. Just considering for example, the magnetic orientation of atoms that do not have a “reliable reality” or a definite property until it is measured (Lindley, p. 14). Danah Zohar, a prominent speaker on physics, philosophy, and complexity and management depicts quantum mechanics as “a vast porridge of being where nothing is fixed or measurable (...) somewhat ghostly and just beyond our grasp” (Wheatley, p. 32). This new vision of the world did not follow any of the earlier beliefs of how matter and properties worked. Until this discovery, the world was seen as predictable, like clockwork, like a machine.

Chaos theory, a new science that emerged in the 1970’s with scientists and mathematicians such as Mitchell Feigenbaum and Stephen Hawking, sought to explain all the mysteries in the world that did not follow the natural law of physics, what appeared as random and unpredictable behavior. Such chaotic behaviors can be seen in weather, cars
clustering on the highway, or an airplane in flight (Gleick, 2011). Chaos theory demonstrates how systems are affected by the environment, and are often in a state of disorder and change, but ultimately seek order (Wheatley, 1992). As Gleick explains: “To some physicists chaos is a science of process rather than state, of becoming rather than being” (p. 3). This notion asserts that all life systems seek order, but often follow unpredictable and turbulent paths to achieve it.

These new and radically different ways of seeing the world can be frightening, as if the world is not what it seems. However, asserts Wheatley (1992), this unsettling feeling calls us to “embrace our despair as a step on the road to wisdom, encouraging us to sit in the unfamiliar seat of not knowing and open ourselves to radically new ideas” (p. 5). In this new world order, where objective reality is suspect, where things are ever changing and unpredictable, and where there are more ways to understand how things work than simply cause and effect, the way we organize ourselves in the world must also be radically different. Rather than looking at things as parts, there is a need for a more holistic view. Understanding the world as systems foregrounds relationships as central. There is also a need for flexibility, adaptability, and change (Wheatley).

How might we organize ourselves according to this new way of seeing the world? What are some structures or ways organizations can do this? What notions gleaned from the work of Wheatley, systems theory, and the new sciences may be driving the organizational model of The Nile Project? Three main concepts will be reviewed that may offer some insights into how The Nile Project has chosen to organize itself: self-organization, tinkering, and relationships.
Self-organization. Another theme that reveals itself in chaos theory, and is foregrounded in the work of Wheatley (1992), is the notion that the universe is a living, open system that responds to its environment. This living system is in constant process, using change and instability to grow and adapt, moving towards self-organization and order. There is a constant process between chaos and order: “To stay viable, open systems maintain a state of non-equilibrium keeping the system off balance so that it can change and grow. They participate in an active exchange with their world, using what is there for their own renewal. Every organism in nature, including us, behaves in this way” (Wheatley, p. 78). Ilya Prigogine’s research on non-linear chemistry and physics was key to advancing our understanding of how complex systems use disequilibrium to adapt and change. His concept of “dissipative structures” explains the exchange of matter and energy that occurs between systems and its environment in effort to recreate them into new forms of order (http://www.osti.gov/accomplishments/prigogine.html).

How does this notion apply to organizations? As Wheatley (1992) affirms, too often organizations move towards equilibrium and structure, believing this is what connotes a healthy organization, and that disorder and chaos are to be avoided. However, if we look at nature and what is revealed in chaos theory, equilibrium brings “death” or the end of an organism. Disorder and disequilibrium bring change, renewal, and growth. Organizations that survive must respond to the changing environment. Too much structure prevents flexibility and adaptability. Wheatley affirms that this lack of structure does not make it “spineless,” (p. 92) but rather fluid and more able to efficiently and effectively respond to its environment. This organizational model is not completely
without structure, but it is a more flexible structure that allows it to develop as a system and protect it from constant flux.

This basic understanding of how an organization must exist is atypical of what we might see in organizations around us today. It calls for less structure, more flexibility, and constant change. Most importantly, it calls for less control, allowing for responding more quickly to the environment and challenges that are presented. How might an organization exist in this way with less structure and less control? Wheatley (1992) suggests that tinkering, playing and creating is the means for developing an organization that is able to adapt, change, and grow as an organization.

**Tinkering.** Wheatley (1992) asks us to see the world not as Darwin did, as one of survival, where each plant and living thing is fighting its way to existence. Instead, she calls us to see the world as a creative and playful place where organisms try new things and use the diversity around them to find new solutions to sustainability. In an effort for living things to continue to exist it must be creative, constantly exploring in effort to adapt:

> Everything is in a constant process of discovery and creating. Everything is changing all the time: individuals, systems, environments, the rules, the processes of evolution. Even change changes. Every organism reinterprets the rules, creates exceptions for itself, and creates new rules. (Wheatley, p. 13)

Tinkering is a playful way to explore and to find what works (Wheatley, 1992). It suggests a reality where there is no definitive plan and open to new possibilities. Tinkering uses failure and messes to find order, knowing that systems all follow this
process. Tinkering allows for new discoveries and not just solutions based on what we already know from the past. This suggests Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996) is what nature does to adapt and survive and is what is needed in organizations as well.

Life is attracted to order- order gained through wandering explorations into new relationships and new possibilities.
(Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996, p. 6)

Relationships. All this playfulness and messy tinkering, asserts Wheatley (1992) creates relationships. As organizations explore possibilities, they are led to search for new and different partners and more support: “Who we become together will always be different than who we were alone. Our range of creative expression increases as we join with others” (p. 18). What we see in nature is that support, relationships, and diversity in ecosystems is what leads to survival and adaptation. The importance of relationships is also found in the new sciences and the subatomic world where matter is only discernable in relation to other matter and changes as it comes in contact with other matter. As Wheatley (1992) writes: “In the quantum world, relationships are not just interesting; to many physicists, they are all there is to reality” (p. 32). In the subatomic world illuminated by quantum theory, nothing is what it seems. Matter can act as waves or particles depending on how they come in contact with other particles, how they are viewed and/or measured, and their interactions with other energy sources (Wheatley, 1992). Therefore, relationships are key.

If organizations in this new world-view, such as The Nile Project, follow these new sciences, they will no longer resemble ones of the past with a top down structure and a single leader at the top, but rather a web of relationships and shared leadership.
Wheatley suggests this is how we will solve complex issues, working together creatively, and starting with simple conversations. We were not meant to be alone – we were meant to live and work and co-exist. How do we build these relationships? Simple conversations about what we care about (Wheatley, 2002).

**Conversations.** For Margaret Wheatley (2002), conversations are the vehicle by which we will solve the world’s most challenging problems:

I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversations. Not mediation, negotiation, problem-solving, debate, or public meetings. Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well. (p. 3)

Conversations are foundational to supporting existing relationships and helping make change happen in people, organizations, communities, and the world. They are an opportunity for what Wheatley, calls “thinking together”. Wheatley believes in the power of bringing people together who have a common interest and passion to talk about what they care about suggesting we need time to talk, to get to know each other, and see multiple perspectives on issues (Wheatley). Conversations offer people a chance to share their stories, to ask questions, and challenge their assumptions.

**Curiosity.** At the heart of good conversations, says Wheatley (2002), is curiosity. It is one of the behaviors that she identifies for taking conversations to a “deeper realm” (p. 29). Curiosity works in both the listening and the speaking. If we are generally curious about another, we will listen more closely. Additionally, it is easier to share our stories, thoughts, and fears if we think the person we are speaking to is curious about us.
Wheatley suggests that behaving as if everyone we speak with has something to teach us will help maintain curiosity.

**Finding the leverage point in a system/ a paradigm shift.** The notion of “leverage points” is a key aspect of systems analysis (Meadows, 1999). A leverage point is an area in a complex system that if it changes, it can affect the whole system (Meadows). Finding the leverage point is difficult, and as Meadows claims, even if it is found, often those in the system do not believe it, or if they do, they often push the leverage point in the wrong direction. Meadows suggests a variety of places to intervene in a system to affect change. One of the most effective ways to intervene in a system, however, is in “the mindset or paradigm out of which the system – its goals, structures, rules, delays, parameters – arises” (Meadows, p. 3).

In making changes to a system, Meadows (1999) identifies a shift in mindsets or paradigms as highly influential. As she explains, even if you have rules or laws, people have a way of adjusting the rules as they see fit (breaking, averting, minimizing), thereby lessening the effects of the shift. Paradigms are the unspoken assumptions that people in a system or around a system have. They are central in systems and drive behaviors, goals, and the flow of information in systems (Meadows). Therefore, changing mindsets of those involved and creating new narratives or paradigms that drive behaviors is paramount in changing a system: “People who have managed to intervene in systems at the level of paradigm have hit the leverage point that totally transforms systems” (Meadows, p. 18).
So how do you change paradigms? Meadows, based on the work of Thomas Kuhn, suggests that you: (1) keep voicing the failure of the current paradigm; (2) support the new paradigm by speaking out, loudly and often; (3) “insert people with the new paradigm in places of public visibility and power” and “work with active change agents and with the vast middle ground of people who are open-minded” (Meadows, 1999, p.18). In an effort to do so, one has to take people outside the current paradigm and envision something new.

**Theory U: The U-Process.** One of the foundational concepts that drove the creation of The Nile Project was Theory U and the U-process, which was developed by Otto Scharmer (2009) and built on the work of other leading systems thinkers like Edgar Schein and Peter Senge. The U-process is intended to help organizations make significant and lasting change and to move towards a new more desirable future. There are three basic tenets of the process: the importance of learning, deeper listening, and “presencing,” a word Scharmer invented to mean tuning in with greater attention. These themes or some form of them also emerged from the literature on arts and conflict transformation and may provide the connection between ABPB (arts based peacebuilding) and systems theory to help us understand what is at play with the work of The Nile Project.

Otto Scharmer (2009) shares a similar worldview as Wheatley and McKibben and some of the other systems’ thinkers discussed, in that the world is changing at a rapid pace and that there are dire and complex problems that need to be addressed in our world that will take extensive collaboration and a new approach to solve. Peter Senge (2009)
argues that we cannot continue on our path of “take, make, waste” based on the industrial model (p. xii). The U-process is intended to find a new way to inhabit the world. It was developed by Scharmer to help leaders (be it one person at the top, or all members of an organization, as both are considered leaders) and organizations pave new ways to move into an unknown future, be sustainable, make positive changes, and make a better world. The U-process is based on research from MIT and tested out with a variety of organizations from grassroots movements to global companies such as Nissan, Shell Oil, and Federal Express (Scharmer). The essence of the theory is that to make change, there has to be a change in the “I” (the individual) and the “we” (the collective) to allow the larger system to change. Additionally, organizations and leaders must be open and attentive to the future as it emerges, not looking to the past: “This process pulls us into an emerging possibility and allows us to operate from that altered state rather than simply reflecting on and reacting to past experiences” (Scharmer, p. 5). This can happen when we have a deeper level of attention or what Scharmer calls “presencing” (p. 39).

**Presencing.** The term was formed by Scharmer using the words “presence” and “sensing” and signifies a heightened sense of attending at the level that drives social action for both individuals and groups. Often people and organizations have “blind spots” (Scharmer, p. 22), which are deep held assumptions and beliefs that often go unnoticed, unacknowledged, and unchallenged. Scharmer suggests that the central issue of our time is facing and eradicating our blind spots across all system levels. The greatest leverage point, suggests Scharmer is “collectively becoming aware of our inner places from which we operate in real time” (p.10). Presencing also means to be attuned to the future, one
that we cannot even imagine yet. Scharmer argues that we (people and organizations) are too busy reacting to the world as it presents itself, rather than envisioning a new reality. To envision this new reality, we have to awaken the art of intuition in ourselves and our collective, “tuning in” so as to learn from a future that has yet to emerge. How might we accomplish presencing and facing our blind spots on the individual and collective level? Scharmer suggests we shift the quality of our attention through deeper forms of listening.

**Shifting our attention through new levels of listening.** At the heart of the U-process is a deeper attention or what Scharmer (2009) calls listening on a variety of levels. Scharmer suggests that there are four levels of listening that drive social action. The first level is called “downloading,” which is listening that confirms what you already know. The second type of listening is hearing something that you do not know yet. These two levels are on the level of quick fixes, and reactionary; they are not going to produce lasting change. The second two levels go deeper. Level three is listening with empathy, hearing something new and beginning to envision a new world-view. The last and deepest form of listening is one where there is profound change; you are changed (Scharmer). Scharmer describes this attending as open minds, open hearts, and open will. It is only as we open our will that leaders, organizations, and people can enact real change and begin to learn from each other, essential to collaboration and collective action.

*When people living inside a shifting reality begin to ‘see’ what was previously unseen and see their own part in maintaining the old and inhabiting or denying the new, the dam starts to break.*  
(Senge, 2009, p. xv)
Learning through co-sensing, dialogue, and sharing stories. The main question that Scharmer (2009) sought to address was: what is required to learn and act from the future as it comes into being? Scharmer suggests that we too often look to the past for answers, which is a typical way that people and organizations learn. Learning from the future is rarely done. Few examples were given like Steve Jobs and Apple computers where intuition, creativity, and imagining a future were accomplished. However, the later type of learning, learning from the future, is what Scharmer affirms will solve the complex issues we face today. How do we do learn from the future? Being attune, attending to a type of knowing that is rarely acknowledged, the type that artists use when they create a new work. Artists are reflective and then act. Creating group learning is essential to organizational change and this is done through co-sensing, creating a space for listening, deeper forms of attention, and talking and listening to stories.

Scharmer (2009) affirms that one key way to accomplish change is to allow for constructive dialogue. In his experience, when small groups of people come together to talk and listen (from a deeper level of empathy and open will) and create networks, a shift occurs which encourages a higher quality of thinking, dialogue, and collective action.

One example of how the U-process works was with a Munich-based health care start up in Germany, which was caught in a stalemate situation between physicians and patients on the current state of the healthcare system. In the early stages, they were getting nowhere, only assigning blame, concerned only with the self, and not actively listening to the other side. Then Scharmer took them through a stage of the U-process by which they identified where they each thought they were with the situation and where
they hoped the health care system could be. Once both sides saw that they had something in common, and saw some things the same way, they were able to re-focus their attention. Instead of blaming each other for the problems, they began to open up and attend on a deeper level to each other. This is what Scharmer (2009) calls “co-sensing.” Participants then shared stories about personal experiences and hardships and were able to listen, experience empathy, ultimately improving the level of dialogue. Once this happened, participants felt a deeper sense of connection. This paved the way for collective learning, growth, and problem solving. There appears to be a similar route taken by both the U-process and ARPB (see Table 1). Seeing the parallel processes may elucidate the workings of The Nile Project.

Stages of this process:

1. Found the commonality – what they both cared about
2. Shared personal stories/experiences
3. Open dialogue – more thoughtful questions, deeper listening
4. Empathy/understanding
5. Deeper connection.

Table 1

A Comparison of the U process and Arts Based Peacebuilding (ABPB)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U-Process with the Healthcare stalemate</th>
<th>Creative Process of ABPB- e.g.: GIM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Found the Commonality: what each side cared about that was similar</td>
<td>Using GIM and musical journey to get participants in the same mental space, use of story and a moment of silence to bring their attention to the same issue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared personal stories &amp; experiences</td>
<td>Shared stories and personal experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentive listening, listening with empathy</td>
<td>Attentive listening, listening with empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opened up a new level of dialogue</td>
<td>Opened up a new level of dialogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creating a conducive environment. Creating a conducive environment where participants become attentive listeners on a deeper level (what he calls co-sensing) is essential for effective engagement in the U-process (Scharmer, 2009). Scharmer suggests some key aspects that are essential for creating such an environment. The physical space must be empty, free of clutter and basically a blank slate. Use of time is important too. Not only allowing for enough time, but being sure to have an “energy” in the flow of time. Making some connection with the participants before the meetings is also important, beginning the important step of building relationships. Being sure to be transparent about the process and why it is being done is also essential. This consideration of the importance of the environment in the process of change and open dialogue will be important to consider in looking at the work of The Nile Project.

Table 2

Drawing a Connection Between Presencing, ABPB initiatives and the U process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarity of levels that move towards learning</th>
<th>Arts Based Peacebuilding Initiatives</th>
<th>U-Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status quo: operating on existing habits and reactions</td>
<td>No intervention</td>
<td>Reacting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging the underlying structure</td>
<td>Challenging Assumptions</td>
<td>Redesigning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing the underlining pattern of thought</td>
<td>Changing attitudes</td>
<td>Reframing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeper learning and understanding</td>
<td>Mutual Understanding/Learning</td>
<td>Presencing; level of learning from the future as it emerges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Art of Hosting/hospitality. Another essential DNA for The Nile Project is the concept of hospitality, or more specifically the “art of hosting” which is rooted in the work of systems thinkers such as Margaret Wheatley, Peter Senge, and Otto Scharmer. The art of hosting is a new approach to leadership that uses a systemic view to problem solve through dialogue, participation, co-creation, and facilitation (artofhosting.org). It is not a top down model, but a participatory leadership model that encourages all members of the community or group to act as leaders, and the assigned “leader” (if there is one already in place) to act as a host. The notion of a “host” is based on the image of a welcoming or generous person who provides a comfortable space ensuring that the guests have everything they need to enjoy their stay. The role of the host is similar in this realm, providing a safe space and time to welcome the community of problem solvers to come together for constructive dialogue through listening and the encouraging of diverse viewpoints. The host acts to maximize participation and the collective intelligence of the group in effort to transform the conflict into “creative cooperation” (artofhosting.org). The most important role of the “host” is to identify not just good, but great questions, which opens up the opportunity for meaningful dialogue (Wheatley & Frieze, 2011). The host provides time, space, and support, but not answers, control, and plans (Wheatley & Frieze). The art of hosting relies on the groups’ creativity and is not about getting the group to feel good or even like each other. At the heart of this hosting approach to problem solving or conflict transformation is supporting conversations amongst the group, as those who support this approach believe bringing people together to have constructive conversations about what they care about paves the way for solutions.
Hosting conversations is about encouraging the group to become engaged, active activists, committed and generous, and to take risks in effort to make lasting change (Wheatley & Frieze). Using methods such as appreciative inquiry, world café, collective story telling (what they call harvesting) and circles, groups are encouraged to creatively approach problems in a constructive and active way.

**Zambaleta.** The type of environment that one of the co-founders identified as a goal of The Nile Project is a zambaleta. There is currently no published information on zambaleta, which can best be described as an Egyptian street party (MG, personal communication, April 16, 2015). In this section of the literature review, what is known about a zambaleta will be shared in an effort to understand what type of environment The Nile Project seeks.

The co-founder defined zambaleta as “spontaneous cacophony” (MG, personal communication, April 16, 2015). He described zambaleta, which is an Egyptian word, as a kind of a street party, where one or more people make some noise, start a call and response, or make music that is so noisy that people from the periphery begin to come closer to the event to see what is going on. As Girgis explained, there is a source (the noise), and people on the periphery. These people have a choice to either walk away or to come closer. If they are curious and want to know what is causing the noise, they will move from the periphery to the center. As they enter the center, they become involved. They may even take part in the event or take on a leadership role. There is noise, be it

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7 The circle (or council) is based on an ancient form of meetings that used a circle format. The process includes coming with intentions to the circle, welcoming, check-in’s, agreements, and check-outs to ensure that all members are heard (peerspirit.com).
chanting or calling and responding in singing and/or music making, but there is no set leader. One may start the noise, and another may jump in to take over as the “noise” maker.

Girgis offers the example of the soccer fans in Egypt who he claims began a zambaleta during the Egyptian revolution. A few rowdy fans were in the square starting a call and response chant and people began to be curious about the raucous and went to the square to see what it was about. As more and more people moved from the periphery to the center and became involved or began to lead, there reached what Girgis called a “tipping point” where the powers that be could no longer ignore the noise/party and had to address the crowd.

The connection of zambaleta and a conducive environment for conflict transformation and music making may not be obvious. However, one of the identified goals of The Nile Project work is to create the type of environment where citizens (not identified leaders) could spontaneously either “make noise” or “make music” to elicit others to join in or take part in the spontaneous cacophony themselves. In this type of environment, there are no set leaders or followers. There is learning amongst those involved. Curiosity is central as those who are curious go to the center and become involved. Once enough people join the center, a tipping point can occur. Considering this concept may help to elucidate the findings and help to understand what The Nile Project is accomplishing in their work.

The Nile Project’s use of performance goes beyond a typical musical group. They seek to “inspire, educate, and empower,” suggesting that “for many projects music is the
end result, for us it is just the beginning” (nileproject.org). This final section of the review of literature is intended to give a more comprehensive view of the workings of The Nile Project providing a better foundation with which to evaluate the findings section.

A Closer look at The Nile Project

The Nile Project was conceived and co-founded in 2011 by Mina Girgis, an Egyptian ethnomusicologist, and Meklit Hadero, an Ethiopian born Singer (Junod, 2015). Both are currently living and working in the US but are deeply tied to their African roots. They initiated the project, a collection of musicians from all the countries in the Nile basin region, with the aim of raising awareness of the water crises in East Africa and of inspiring a solution. The mission is to:

Transform the Nile conflict by inspiring, educating, and empowering an international network of university students to cultivate the sustainability of their ecosystem. The project’s model integrates programs in music, education, dialogue, leadership, and innovation to engage students across disciplines and geographies. (nileproject.org)

There are multiple levels of the project (see Figure 5). On one level, the project seeks to bring together excellent musicians from all over East Africa to make music, to prepare for a tour, and to encourage collaboration and dialogue on issues concerning the water crises. This is accomplished through residencies. The first residency took place in Aswan, Egypt in 2014. It was a 19-day residency that brought these musicians from all across East Africa to one locale. Musicians spent the first four days in workshops where
they participated in dialogue and activities with various leaders, innovators, and entrepreneurs with knowledge of the Nile River conflict (www.nileproject.org). The next two weeks were dedicated to musicians getting to know each other and working to collaborate on an album.

In a class visit with the co-founders of The Nile Project, Meklit Hadero articulated the process by which the music was created. First, the musicians began working in pairs or very small groups, and then switched to other groups to generate more musical ideas (MH, personal communication, March 30, 2015). Later they moved into larger groups based on interest in a particular sound. Once something began to take shape the musicians shared their work with the entire group and a collaborative process began as other musical elements were added or taken away (MJ, personal communication, April 14, 2015).

*Figure 5:* The three levels at which The Nile Project is working.
The second level of The Nile Project’s mission is to educate and inspire university students. Their tours are intentional; they target universities that have a dedication to sustainability and a mission for social justice. They perform for the public, and post performance, they visit classrooms on the university campus to conduct workshops and class visits to encourage dialogue, inquiry, and learning. Their intention is to inspire further inquiry with the hope that audience members and students will leave the theater and workshops curious and be driven to investigate the Nile basin area, the water crises facing East Africa, or water issues in their community. The end goal is to inspire these students to help find a solution.

The third level of The Nile Project’s work is to tour, presenting their music worldwide in the hopes of sparking the curiosity of audience members around the globe. Their first tour was in East Africa where they performed across the continent including countries in conflict, both Ethiopia and Egypt. Their goal is “to expose audiences to the cultures of their river neighbors. As artists from the 11 Nile countries showcase what they share among their diverse musical traditions, they demonstrate the creative potential of transboundary collaborations” (www.nileproject.org). Their second tour was to the US and included universities and their surrounding towns. A tour to Europe is in the works.

Gaps in the Literature

As previously articulated, research on music and conflict transformation is emerging, but there is still a dearth of empirical data to support its impact (Bergh & Sloboda, 2010; Lance, 2012; Opiyo, 2015). Berg and Sloboda in their extensive literature
review on the use of music in conflict transformation suggest that “strong” empirical
evidence is needed and that too much of the evidence is anecdotal. They also affirm that
too often research is on the organizers of events, and not with participants; the need is for
“direct interviews with [the] people who engage with the arts” (p. 8). Berg and Sloboda
suggest that, “More attention needs to be given to the nature and extent of engagement
that music interventions in conflict bring about or encourage in the participants that are
the targets of the intervention” (p. 11). They also caution that too often the research takes
an idealistic view, not showing the negative sides and ineffectiveness that sometimes
occur, which ultimately works against the effectiveness of music based peacebuilding
(MPB). Urbain (2015) sets out extensive research agenda, including the need for
understanding more specifically frameworks for the “structural relationships” within
music and musical works and events (p. xix). Urbain and Opiyo (2015) suggest there is a
need for more documentation and analysis of ABPB initiatives. Opiyo (2015) argues that
music is making an impact on conflict transformation in Africa due to the prominence
music holds in the culture there, and thus more research in other areas is needed. Opiyo
(2015) also asserts that measuring the impact and the levels of change are challenging,
but important to achieve. Considering more empirical research and documented affects of
the use of music and peacebuilding on participants of ABPB in other areas of Africa
seem apropos as an important next step.

**In Conclusion: Recognizing the Patterns**

While these sections of the literature review may seem disparate, there are some
common themes that emerge from all four sections that will help to inform this study.
Relationships are central, from the foundational theorists to the systems thinkers. Another predominant theme is the importance of dialogue and conversations as a means towards change. The notion of curiosity also reoccurs throughout the literature, as does the importance of learning. The importance of a conducive environment for this type of work is also a common thread in the literature. These main themes will be closely investigated in this study in effort to explore what The Nile Project can teach us about the use of music in conflict transformation.
CHAPTER 3: NOTATION: METHODS

*Arts based research can capture meaning that measurement cannot.*
(Eisner & Barone, 2012, p. 167)

*Bringing together the systematic and rigorous qualities of conventional qualitative methodologies with the artistic, discipline, and imaginative qualities of the arts acknowledges the power of art forms to reach diverse audiences and the importance of diverse languages for gaining insights into the complexities of the human condition.*
(Cole & Knowles, p. 59)

This qualitative, arts informed research study used a collaborative case study methodology (Gibson, 1985) to understand and explore how The Nile Project is using music to address the water crises in East Africa. The organization uses the collaborative process of musicking to break down cultural, linguistic, and political barriers in an effort to inspire learning, discourse, and action to solve a real world issue. Their work may provide insight into how music can be used to transform conflict.

**Review of the Research Questions**

As articulated in the introduction, the main research questions are:

1) How does The Nile Project encourage collaboration with a culturally, musically, linguistically, and politically diverse group of people to create and perform a unified sound despite their differences?

2) What can that teach us about the use of music to transform conflict?

**Methodology and Rationale**

This chapter will explore the methods chosen for this study and explain why they are best suited to answer the research questions.

**Qualitative methods.** At the heart of my research is the desire to hear stories from those most closely involved with The Nile Project, which can only be illuminated
through qualitative means (Glesne, 2011). The musicians’ stories about their experiences in the residencies, where they created the music, and their work on tour performing and leading discussion workshops was central to this study. Hearing stories from the co-founders about what they talked about in their first meeting at a coffee shop in San Francisco to the first day of rehearsal in Egypt was also pivotal. A qualitative methodology allowed for the opportunity to give voice to the participants themselves as well as a chance to see the musicians in their natural setting on and off the stage (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In-depth interviews and extended observations, the main forms of data collection in this study, were best addressed through qualitative means and allowed the researcher to gain a “holistic” view and “thick description” (Miles & Huberman, p.10).

**Arts informed research.** Situated within a qualitative paradigm, arts informed research (Cole & Knowles, 2008), which is one specific form of arts based research, was the driving methodology in this study. Arts based research engages art as a partner in qualitative research, and is an emerging and growing field offering a variety of new methods for conducting research in the humanities and social sciences (McNiff, 2008). As McNiff offers in the introduction to the only handbook for arts and qualitative studies, “The many fusions of the arts and qualitative inquiry are changing the face of social science research, opening possibilities for alternative perspectives, modes, media, and genres through which to understand and represent the human condition” (p. xii). Arts informed research was established at an American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference presentation in 2000 led by the researchers Cole and Knowles. Having become increasingly disillusioned and dissatisfied with the language of the
academy, and research that is “dry of life - emotion, of sensuality, of physicality,” the researchers sought a way to better communicate the complexity of the human spirit (Cole & Knowles, p.75). They wanted to conduct research that honored diverse forms of knowing, giving proper respect to both the participants in research and those who experience the final study. Reaching an audience beyond the academy is essential to the work of Cole and Knowles, whose ultimate goal is to make a difference with their research.

While there are a myriad of methodologies that partner the arts in qualitative research (see Knowles & Cole, 2008), arts informed research has some defining elements that characterize it as an onset of arts based research, which were honored in this study:

- **Commitment to a Particular Art Form:** This study not only aimed to understand an art form (the performing group The Nile Project), but it also engaged the arts in the research process. Music was the beat\(^8\) of this study used in the language of the written text, the data collection, and in the presentation of the dissertation defense. Musical ideas were considered in all aspects of the process as it was at the core of The Nile Project’s processes.

- **A Creative Inquiry Process:** Arts informed research must be open to the “expansive possibilities of the human imagination” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 61). Therefore, this research process needed to be even more flexible, be responsive to the natural flow of events, and acknowledge what could be learned from the artists about the process. I believe this study followed this ideal from the

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\(^8\) A steady rhythm that keeps the whole band together.
start of the project, which began with an attendance at the performance and the following of the band to its various workshops and an impromptu coffee with the co-founder. This last characteristic (acknowledge what was learned from the artists) is an essential aspect of this study and will be articulated later in my use of collaboration in the chosen method.

- **Researcher as Artist**: This notion goes beyond the idea of researcher as an instrument (an active participant in the process) to considering the creative and aesthetic sensibilities of the researcher in the process. It was my intention to value and foreground my creative nature throughout the study (see “researcher’s identity”, p. 76 for further explanation).

- **Reflexivity**: The notion of reflexivity is even stronger in this methodology than in a typical qualitative study as the qualities of the researcher is ever present in the process. In following this ideal, I brought both my musicality and my creative self to the research. My experience informs the writing and understanding of the issues to be addressed and was intended to be transparent.

- **The Importance of the Audience**: This is perhaps Cole and Knowles’ greatest concern for arts informed research. In many arts informed research studies, performance is an element of the presentation of the findings offering a varied approach than typically done in the academy. Therefore, a performance (a recording of a song written by the researcher about The Nile Project in collaboration with one of the musicians) will conclude the presentation of the findings. Cole and Knowles were also concerned with the dissemination of the
findings, and that results should reach a larger audience. Therefore, finding a way to make the results of this study more accessible to the larger public and to go beyond the academy will be intentional. There will be a slue of guests invited to the presentation of the findings that have never attended such an event, including classroom teachers, teaching artists, and local musicians. This will help to expand the findings beyond the academy. The writing of articles reporting the findings of this study for a wide range of journals will also support this aim.

Perhaps most important is that at the core of this research methodology is the honoring of the epistemological process of artistic knowing (McNiff, 2008), which will be articulated in both the collection and sharing of data.

**Epistemology.** The main rationale for using an arts informed methodology is that it acknowledges various ways of knowing (Eisner & Barone, 2012). Since music is considered by some as a language in its own right and has been deemed its own unique form of communication (Cohen, 2015), the research methodology for a study on musicking and musicians should reflect this understanding. Elliot Eisner (2002), a leading arts theorist, has written extensively about how the arts engender various ways of knowing that are not traditionally held in academia. Eisner suggests that using the arts in research “represent efforts to dethrone theoretical science as the only legitimate way to come to know” (p. 214) and that this “liberal conception of method is not merely a methodological expansion; it is an epistemological one. It represents a change in the way knowledge is conceptualized” (p. 215). In an attempt to acknowledge the essential role
that music plays in The Nile Project, as well as acknowledging the arts as a legitimate form of knowing, the arts were pervasive throughout the research process.

I also utilize an interpretivist paradigm. In doing so, I acknowledge that “reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (Glesne, 2011, p.8). Research, then becomes an act of understanding the various interpretations, perspectives and how those involved “make meaning” of a certain phenomenon.

A case study methodology. A case study methodology provides the framework for this study in an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of a single case. In this case, the unit of analysis is the organization, The Nile Project. The study is also bounded by space and time (one university/ one stop on the tour and one week of the music residency), which is a key aspect of a case study (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011). Interviews, observations, and the examination of documents were the main data collection methods, which further supports the use of a case study method (Creswell; Glesne).

A collaborative method. This case study was collaborative in order to include the artists and co-founder in the research and to be thoughtful of the nuances and complexity of cross-cultural reciprocity (Glesne, 2011). As a researcher, it is a privilege to be welcomed not only “back stage” into the rehearsals and concert halls of these artists, but also into a cultural world unfamiliar to my own. The majority of the musicians are from Africa, with a variety of cultural and linguistic traditions unknown to me. Therefore, it was important to acknowledge the cofounder and artists’ professionalism and knowledge by including their thoughts, actions, and insights into this study.
Additionally, I cannot assume to fully understand the nuances of the musicians’ cultures, and it was therefore vital to communicate regularly with the artists to ensure that I had captured their thoughts, cultures, and ideas properly. Finally, since the organization was founded on collaboration, it would be inappropriate to use any other method in the actualization of this study. It was important to make the research with the artists, not on them.

While there are few published collaborative case studies, it is a growing method in educational research (Goldstein, 2000; Hunsaker & Johnston, 1992). Collaborative research usually involves practitioners in the field and researchers (university faculty), which is apropos to this study. The musicians and organizational leaders are the practitioners, and I act in the role of the university researcher. Goldstein supports an active role for participants in research, be it planning, data collection, analysis, or writing. He suggests that such collaboration in the research process fosters colleagueship and communicates respect towards participants’ world and their experience (Goldstein). Additionally, a collaborative process is intended to insure that neither interest nor expertise (by participants or researcher) dominates the other (Hunsaker & Johnston). This study would not be as effectual without the CEO and President, Mina Girgis’ integral involvement. His expertise, experience, and knowledge were essential to understanding this organization.

**Researcher identity: Researcher as artist.** It was with great enthusiasm that I conducted a research study that involved music. While I participate in a multitude of artistic expressions from dance to theater, I am foremost a musician. My first introduction
to music was as a singer and piano player at the age of nine. My undergraduate degree is in musical theater, and I worked professionally as a musical performer. As a performer for the Department of Defense, I participated in three world tours through Europe, Asia, and Central America. This opportunity gave me an inside perspective into some of the processes and day-to-day experiences that The Nile Project musicians had on tour.

Music is an important aspect of my professional and personal life. I have been a music teacher, and I have learned and incorporated some African musical traditions into my teaching practice. As a graduate student, I began taking African dance, which I continued into my adulthood. I have also learned some African drumming and introduced this art form into my school. As an Arts Coordinator at an inner city school in Washington, DC, I hired an African drummer to teach all of our students how to play. We introduced a drum circle into our community meetings each week, and students were called to meeting by the djembe. I also use call and response methods in all my teaching, which is foundational in African music. I specifically use “Ago? Amee,” \(^9\) a call and response practice from Ghana as the main classroom management technique in my teaching. While I do not profess to be any type of expert in African music or culture, I have developed some appreciation for the music. I know that there are a wide variety of musical traditions from the continent of Africa, and that I have a lot to learn.

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\(^9\) In Ghana, if you want to visit someone in your community, you would call outside their door: “Ago?” which is translated to something like: “Are you here? Are you ready?” If they want to invite you in, they would answer “Amee”: (I am here and ready.) This activity has been incorporated into educational practices in schools and in my own classroom.
I also have a great appreciation for world music. When I travel, I try to bring back instruments or traditions from the countries I visit to share with my students. During a teaching fellowship to Chile, I studied the Cueca, the national dance, which was taught to me by Chilean 3rd and 4th graders. I have since taught this dance tradition to hundreds of children in America. Instruments have been added to my collection from Central America, Japan, South America, and Europe. These examples are shared to foreground the importance that musical curiosity plays in my identity and to explain why this musical group sparked my inquiry and imagination so profoundly.

I also seek ways to work with other artists and engage in the artistic process as often as possible, knowing that this is important to my well being and growth. This past summer I took part in a residency in Merida, Mexico with the Habla Institute. We not only learned new approaches to using the arts to teach, but we also engaged in the creative process ourselves. I danced, sang, played instruments, and created visual art works with a team of teachers from around the world. We collaborated on our own unique performance of The Odyssey, which we performed for the community at the end of the residency. Additionally, I worked with a group of New England teachers and artists at a recent conference where we collaborated on community art projects. It is with this lens that I move forward in both an academic and artistic way.

Subjectivity. It is this background, and experience in the arts, that I believe gives me a valuable lens with which to observe, evaluate, and articulate what The Nile Project is accomplishing in their project. This subjectivity is considered by some to not only be unavoidable, but helpful in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Glesne, 2011;
Peshkin makes the analogy that subjectivity is like “a garment that cannot be removed,” thus should not be avoided, but sought out (p. 17). Glesne, in agreement with Peshkin and poststructural scholars, argues that objectivity is not only impossible, but not desirable. Rather, subjectivity, or one’s self present in the research, could actually contribute positively to research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest subjectivity “is an important element of ethnographic research” and lists one of the essential dimensions as the researchers experience and “unique biography” (p. 248). I believe my “unique biography” as a musician and performer position me to observe more acutely the nuances that are occurring in the work of The Nile Project, which has music making at the core of their mission. As a musician, I am able to interpret some of these nuances, and I hope help those who read this study to better understand the various elements at play. However, as offered by Peshkin (1998) this subjectivity should not be worn as a “badge of honor” and should be monitored at all stages of the research process.

**Structural corroboration.** To address “validity,” I borrowed terminology from Eisner and Barone (2012) who suggest that in arts based research (research that includes the arts in any or all aspects of the process), one must seek “structural corroboration” (p. 162). Structural corroboration is the collection of enough evidence that supports some kind of findings. Structural corroboration requires “a set of questions that will have the effect of deepening one’s analysis of the situation” and the use of “many pieces of evidence that enable one to create a compelling whole” (Eisner & Barone, p. 162). The term appears to be similar to what has been defined as triangulation, which is often
employed in social science research (Glesne, 2011) in its intention to use a variety of sources and types of data to gain a complete picture.

In an effort to increase the “structural corroboration” of my study, I collected data from a variety of sources (co-founder, musicians, and students), employed a variety of methods (observations, conducting interviews, completing surveys), and reviewed documents (published articles, website mission, and press). I also utilized member checking. I gave transcriptions to participants to affirm that I was representing their meaning as intended. I also had a colleague conduct coding of interviews to verify my findings. This colleague coded the interviews twice, once with open coding, allowing themes to emerge without any preconceived notions, and a second time with the final set of codes to see how our findings aligned.

Reflexivity. While I acknowledge that subjectivity is at play in this research, I am an artist and a passionate champion of the arts, which could act to sway my findings. However, I feel confident that this project is distanced enough from my typical type of work (the use of arts to teach in k-12 education), that I did not influence the findings, but rather was open to any themes that emerged. However, to minimize any biases, I conducted memoing throughout the process so as to have a forum to evaluate my intentions and subjectivity. The executive director, due to his integration and collaboration with the group, had the potential to be biased. However, in our initial meeting, I found him to be open and welcoming of another perspective on the project, and I believe his potential bias did not hinder the structural corroboration of the research.
It will be important, however, to be mindful of this possible bias and be attentive to how my subjectivity could act to influence the findings.

**Context**

This study of The Nile Project took place at one stop on their U.S. tour at a prestigious university in the Northeast and during six days of their residency in Aswan Egypt. At the University, data was collected in a variety of classrooms, during informal and formal performances on campus, as well as a few venues off campus (a local high-school and arts center). Interviews were conducted in a local coffee shop and in the hotel lobby where the musicians were staying. Observations were also done at two community performances in another location a few hours away and during rehearsals and dialogue sessions in Aswan. The executive director gave me complete access to take part in all events that happened during their time at this university and in Aswan including meals and travel.

The tour was sponsored by an arts organization on campus that provides performances and workshops for the university and local community. The Nile Project was brought to the center as part of their *Visiting Artist Residencies*, in which the organization provides college students, staff, and community the opportunity to have discussions and personal contact with artists. This residency included a family, school, and community performance, panel discussions, school visits, and many class visits.

**Participants.** There are two sets of participants that helped to contribute to the understanding of The Nile Project. The first set of participants was composed of the co-founder of the organization and key members of the band. They were chosen through
purposeful sampling as they were essential to answering the research questions and understanding the processes the organization underwent to form their unique collaboration. Members of the band were selected based on a few criteria: that they spoke English (due to constraints of finding translators in a limited time), had been with the organization since the first residency, and had a special story to tell about the organization or their journey with The Nile Project. The CEO was able to offer direction for finding the appropriate band members to participate.

Three musicians, all original members, and the CEO were the main participants in the study (see Table 3 for “Participant Chart”). There was one male participant (age 40-50) who was born in Ethiopia and continues to live there today. One of the female participants (age 20-30) was born in Sudan, but now resides in the US. The other female musician (age 20-30) was born in Kenya and still resides there. The CEO (age 35-45) was born in Egypt, but is currently living in the US. Other musicians’ stories and comments were shared in the findings as needed, when they were observed in a classroom visit or quoted in public media.

Due to the need to investigate the impact that class visits may have had on the students and to include any observations done in these spaces, the second set of participants were made up of the university students who attended either the performance, workshops, or classroom visits.
Table 3

*Participant Chart*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
<th>Current Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mina Girgis, CEO</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kasiva, percussion</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorga, saxophone</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alsarah, vocalist</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Confidentiality.** All of the main participants (musicians and CEO) chose to be identified in this study. They were open and honest with their comments and wanted their names to be included in the dissemination of the findings. Other musicians were only identified when their identity was published in print or shared in a public forum. There was no concern that any of the information shared would do harm to any of the subjects and a strict adherence to the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) was followed. At the onset of each interview, participants were read the information sheet (see Appendix A) to inform them of their rights as a participant, which included making them aware they could end participation in the study at any time without consequences.

**Data Collection Methods**

**Observations.** Observations were conducted at performances and class visits/workshops as well as during some informal interactions before, after, or traveling to performances. In these instances, the researcher acted as “observer as participant” (Creswell, p.167). I watched the work and took notes, but did not get involved in any discussion or activities. Students and musicians did know of my presence as I was
introduced at the start of all class visits. Observations provided very useful data in helping to address the research question, as I was able to listen to musicians share their stories about their involvement with the program, their reasons for working with The Nile Project, and about their musical traditions. Observations also allowed for the hearing of discussions that often concluded class visits and workshops.

**Music making and interviews.** I had one formal one-on-one semi-structured interview with the CEO and another informal conversation. Each of the musicians participated in a one-on-one semi-structured interview that included a musical exchange prior to our discussion. To align with the work and the processes of the organization, where music making is used to inspire discourse and understanding, the session with the musicians began with music making. I showed the musicians my ukulele (some had not seen the instrument before) and played them a short song. I then asked if they were interested in playing a short song for me on their instrument. Afterward, we tried to combine the two to make one song. This is the same process that began the music sessions at the first residency of The Nile Project, which was intended to encourage openness, honesty, learning, and empathy.

My intention with this musical exchange was to create a similar environment in our interview and to accomplish a few specific objectives. First, this musical sharing was intended to make me vulnerable (potentially similar to the vulnerability felt by the interviewee), with the intention of minimizing the power dynamic between researcher and the participant. There was also the intention of lessening the impact on the interviewee as I was “put on the spot” too. I also hoped the process created a more
relaxed and fun atmosphere to encourage dialogue. Sharing my experience as a musician may have also helped the musicians build a level of trust with me as a researcher, witnessing that I had some knowledge of music from which to view their work.

Post musical exchange, the musicians engaged in a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B, “Interview Protocol”). This format provided some structure, but allowed the musicians to take the lead and share their stories as they were so compelled. The intention was to follow a musical form of improvisation\textsuperscript{10}. Although the interview may have begun in one place, there was flexibility to follow the lead taken by the musician or the researcher-artist to allow the interview to flow naturally without trying to control it.

**Review of documents.** In effort to gain as much insight as possible into the work and intention of The Nile Project, previously taped interviews with the musicians and founders, press, and a review of documents surrounding the water conflict, was also reviewed.

**Surveys.** The attending students completed a short survey at the end of each class visit. Before the survey was completed, the research project was introduced (see Appendix A, “Survey Participant Script” at the bottom of the information sheet). Students were informed of their rights, that participation in the research was voluntary, and that refusal to participate would have no bearing on their grade. The survey asked the participants a few questions about their experience during the visit (see Appendix C, “Study Survey”). More attention, however, was given to the short answer responses.

\textsuperscript{10} Improvisation is a musical term that means to create music on the spot (that has not been previously written and/or outlined). The music is created through a process by which the artists listen intently to each other, follow each other’s lead, and allow the music to emerge organically.
Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded using GarageBand and then transcribed using hyperTRANSCRIBE. Interviews were then coded using HyperRESEARCH. The coding process was extensive and was repeated often and through a variety of means throughout the analysis process. The process followed this pattern:

1. As suggested by Creswell (2013), I started the coding process with “lean” coding, 5 or 6 *a priori* codes that were developed based on information attained from an informal conversation with the co-founder and the first round of literature on the subject (see “Appendix D”, stage 1 coding manual).

2. Next, I coded the interviews, following a process similar to “open coding,” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As I worked through the text line by line, I had no codes in mind, but created a code that seemed to encapsulate the main idea of each section of the passages. This was intended to allow for the opportunity to see anything new that may not be present in the literature.

3. When some themes began to emerge, I returned to the literature and compared findings with other research. This granted me a second set of new codes and a new area to investigate in the interview texts.

4. The interviews were reviewed again with these more specific codes to see if these concepts could be identified in the passages.

5. After a few more readings of the interview texts, a few key themes emerged and a set of 11 codes (see “Appendix D: Stage 3 Coding”) were established and re-applied to the interviews.
6. Finally, I enlisted a colleague to conduct a member check. I asked her to first do the open coding process, to see what themes emerged for her (before any preconceived notions could be established) and then gave her my final codes to see if these themes emerged from her process.

The process of analyzing the data sought to mimic the listening and appreciation of music. I listened to the interviews over and over, allowing themes to surface as one might do when listening to a piece of music. By spending extensive time with the data, and using various ways to view and “hear” the data, perhaps using artistic means (Clark/Keefe, 2012), I hoped to gain a better understanding of The Nile Projects’ mission.
CHAPTER 4: THE PERFORMANCE: FINDINGS

_Hearing the Music_

The research questions that drove this study were as follows:

1) How does The Nile Project encourage collaboration with a culturally, musically, linguistically, and politically diverse group of people to create and perform a unified sound despite their differences?

2) What can it teach us about the use of music to transform conflict?

In an interview with Mina Girgis, the co-founder and current CEO, he articulated what he hoped The Nile Project will accomplish:

So the music of The Nile Project is operating on two different levels. There is this like very simple level, in order for these people of the Nile basin to even realize that they have anything in common, they need to become curious about each other. And if they’re curious about each other, they’re going to learn about each other. And if they learn about each other they’re going to start understanding each other. If they understand each other, they are going to become more empathetic to one another. And once they are empathetic to one another, they can have the hard-core conversations about water. (personal communication, April 16, 2015)

According to Girgis, the process by which people begin to pave the way for constructive dialogue that leads to change, in this case a solution to the water crisis, begins with curiosity. Once people have an opportunity to share their common interest, in this case music, and feed this curiosity, it can lead to learning and deeper understanding. This learning and new understanding, he suggests, leads to empathy and dialogue. Dialogue
may begin with conversations about music, but paves the way for more challenging conversations about politics such as the water crisis in East Africa (see Figure 6 for a visualization of this process).

**Figure 6**: The Process Girgis Foresees the Work of The Nile Project Accomplishing

**Reoccurring Themes**

Reviewing the data in multiple ways, listening often to the interview recordings and reading transcripts repeatedly, revealed some themes that mirrored the process proposed by Girgis and some that differed. Themes included curiosity and music as a binding agent, with curiosity as both a driving force and result of musical interactions. Learning on a variety of levels was also revealed as a result of engagement in The Nile Project. The data suggests that relationship building is a key outcome of the project, which in some cases included the confronting of assumptions. Perhaps most revealing was the notion that The Nile Project offered these musicians a rare opportunity to work with and learn about other Africans, which was not often available to them. This opportunity created a means to envision an African identity, a desire held by many of the participants. The data would also suggest that the act of musicking allowed these musicians to practice conflict transformation, which may act as a model for large-scale peacebuilding using music.
Curiosity. Riiser (2010) acknowledges the part that curiosity plays in conflict transformation. He argues that music is the musicians’ narrative, and making music encourages curiosity and the acceptance of the legitimacy of each other’s narrative. Curiosity is a theme that permeated the personal interviews: “In order for the people of the Nile basin to even realize that they have anything in common, they need to become curious about each other. And if they’re curious about each other, they’re going to learn about each other” (M. Girgis, personal communication, April 16, 2015). In a class visit, another musician from the collective shared that his involvement with The Nile Project encouraged curiosity: “I had no ideas about the different styles of music in Africa. It was an education for me – to learn more. Part of that experience [participating with The Nile Project] that made me more curious was leaving Egypt” (M. Abozekry, personal communication, field notes, April 14, 2015).

Throughout the interview with Kasiva, it was apparent that she was extremely curious about her fellow musicians’ musical styles and traditions. She shared accounts of how amazed she was with the various ways other African musicians played, especially the varied scales they used. She even critiqued her fellow Kenyans for not being curious enough:

I actually felt that we are not curious enough as a country. Because seriously, all we do with some of the instruments is tune it to the pentatonic scale and get comfortable in the pentatonic scale. For sure we’re going to find something unique with that instrument [if we get curious]. (personal communication, April 15, 2015)
As the discussion continued, Kasiva explained how curiosity, or being interested in other musicians’ traditions, offered an opportunity to learn how to do something new with their instruments: “This is the start of putting curiosity – and making us do things with our instruments, that are like ‘we’re not gonna do this.’ It will force you to do this. We’re going to get there.” It was evident that these musicians were curious about each other and each other’s instruments and traditions, a starting point to learning about one another.

Curiosity also reached beyond that of the musicians. As Girgis affirmed in a personal interview, when this group of musicians performed across Africa, it became a “platform for curiosity about the people that are not from your country” (personal communication, April 16, 2016). Touring had a direct effect on audiences: “Ethiopians become curious about the Egyptians when we’re playing in Ethiopia. But then the Egyptians become curious about the Ethiopians when we’re playing in Egypt. So it’s like the system kind of shifts” (M. Girgis, personal communication, April 16, 2015). For Girgis, this curiosity is the first step towards finding a solution to the water crisis. If people are curious about each other, they may seek to learn more about each other, and not see each other as so different. This is a logical stage toward collaboration. As a result of The Nile Project, music helped sparked curiosity in both musicians and Africans and acted as a way to bring people together.

Music as a Binding Agent. Margaret Wheatley (2002) argues that simple conversations between people about what they care about can be a catalyst for change:

There is no more powerful way to initiate significant change than to convene a conversation. When a community of people discovers that they share a concern,
change begins. There is no power equal to a community discovering what it cares about. (p. 22)

Once people know they have something in common, argues Wheatley, they can begin to see the “other” as not so different. This change of perception can open lines of communication.

Through interviews and observations of the participating musicians, it was evident that music was a unifier for the people involved in The Nile Project. A common love of music clearly brought these people together from the various eleven countries in East Africa. The intention of the program was to find a "connection": “We started with asking ourselves, do we have anything in common [the countries on the Nile]? The world has not taught us to think of the countries on the Nile as one region” (M. Girgis, personal communication, field notes, April 15, 2015). Music served as a unifier on many levels from the love for the music in the region and creating a sound of the region to a desire to make music and collaborate.

The first commonality found among these musicians was their instruments. The discovery that these musicians had similar instruments, albeit with different names and played in different ways, created an instant bond. Girgis, an ethnomusicologist, studies how instruments migrate from one place to another. He thought that teaching the musicians about the similarity of their instruments, and how instruments migrated and were adapted in different countries, would help connect them. One example of a common instrument that has migrated across the African continent is the lyre. Additionally, Girgis shared that the inanga, which found its way to Uganda, reminded him of an instrument
seen on the ancient walls in Egypt: “These instruments demonstrate a connection between people – how much we share that we don’t see because the world has not taught us to think that way” (personal communication, field notes, April 15, 2015).

Kasiva was amazed by the realization that many Africans played similar instruments. When she met another musician from the region that played an instrument almost identical to one from her country, but called it something different, it was a staggering revelation:

I didn’t even know that they were the same thing until I met and I was in The Nile Project. And then being in here and discovering … oh my god, these people have fiddles, lyres. (…) We literally share instruments. We have similar, almost the same instruments, you know, but we call them different names. And maybe they choose to put like a different skin over the top. We literally share instruments. The method of playing is very different and the method of tuning is sort of very different. I mean (…) it blew my mind. (personal communication, April 15, 2015)

For Kasiva, this commonality acted as a bridging agent. She began to see that she had similarities with other Africans that were previously unknown to her.

A love of music also appeared to unite these musicians. While the music is varied and the styles of playing different amongst the musicians in The Nile Project, a shared passion for music was evident in the observations, articles, and interviews of participants.

In an article on National Public Radio (NPR) about The Nile Project, the interviewer offered: “[The Nile Project is] trying to build a common language based on the love of
the regions’ music” (Caine, 2014). The article articulates that despite differences, when the musicians came together “under the tree” near the Nile River, they found a common sound and more:

The musicians speak many languages, which means ideas and instructions have to get translated multiple times. They use different rhythms, even different tonal systems. And they play many instruments - Sudanese harps, Kenyan kettledrums, Ethiopian violins, Burundian thumb pianos, Egyptian flutes. But under this tree, they're listening for what's shared - conflict that resolves into harmony. (Caine, 2014)

Girgis acknowledged that the project began with a shared love of music, “Sharing music is one of those things that we really feel strongly about. We started this project with being interested in each other’s music” (personal communication, field notes, April 14, 2015). Girgis considers the music as a “door opener” for communication and productive conversations about the conflict in the Nile Basin region, a commonality despite much diversity among them:

The way our audience rethinks our region, rethinks the Nile as one ecosystem, from watching all these musicians collaborate on stage asking the question what do all these people have in common. They come from all these different countries. There’s such a diversity, a musical diversity, a cultural diversity, a linguistic diversity on stage yet these people have something very clearly in common and from there it opened the room for questions, for conversations, for a lot of what we hope this concert unpacks. (The World, 2015)
This quote suggests that despite differences among the musicians, they share something in common. In taking the stage together, the musicians embody unity, which may help pave the way for other Africans to imagine the regions as one.

The musicians interviewed affirmed Girgis’ sentiment that their common love of music and the music of the region attracted them to the project. Alsarah, one of the vocalists, shared that for her, music was central, “I really believed in the project from the beginning and I still do. I think it’s a brilliant initiative and I believe that music is the ultimate way to educate people about each other” (personal communication, April 16th, 2015). Music also drew in one of the other female vocalists to the project. After hearing one of the other women in the group singing one morning, not knowing her identity, country of origin, or political views, she was immediately connected through music. Dina shared, “I came in very late, so I didn’t meet the musicians, and I woke up in the morning and I found a very beautiful woman singing. So I was like, oh who is this girl that is going to sing with us,” and she immediately began creating music with this singer (Eyre, 2015).

Jorga, the saxophonist, also suggested that music was the reason he got involved in the project, “So when they came and told me about it I was just – I told them that was my dream band, you know, and also like ..the energy behind the project” (personal communication, April 15, 2015). He goes further to say, “So for me, music is like, a very spiritual thing, and when musicians connect musically, it’s very powerful.” As the interview continued, Jorga affirmed the power of musicians being together:
So good music excites people to start with. So when you have good musicians living together for three weeks and you hear music, and it was like, you realize for example on percussion. When I hear Mohamed play, I realize I am hearing the best that there is on ute. When I hear them play, I know, they are the best. Everybody is the best. So it's like a great concert that doesn’t end. It has been a joyous thing.

Kasiva, a percussionist in the group, shared her reason for getting involved in the project. It is evident that making music, specifically the collaborative process, is what drove her to get involved:

The main reason why I applied is because, so – in short, he told me it was like a collaborative kind of space, (...) So being able to actually collaborate with other people and see what, sort of, the world has to offer was like – it was eye opening for me (...). So when Rock told me about The Nile Project and told me it was a collaborative space, instantly I was like excited. I had like stars in my eyes. I was like, another opportunity to have like this kind of feeling and this kind of experience. I really want this. (personal communication, April 15, 2015)

Kasiva ended the interview with a clear message that music is an ideal way to make a connection with people:

Songs as a means or a medium of exchange is sort of like the best way to relate these practical issues that we are facing along the Nile basin, and they’re the best way to actually connect people together because who doesn't love music?
**Opportunity for Africans to collaborate with other Africans.** It may not be a surprising revelation or new finding that professional musicians are drawn to music making opportunities and to other musicians. However, there is something unique about the collaborative process of making music in this project. The Nile Project offers African musicians the rare opportunity to work together with other Africans, something participants suggested was a need, but lacking. One musicians confirmed this idea in an interview on National Public Radio (NPR): “(I have) no chance in Egypt to cooperate with any other African musicians, usually we participate with European and American musicians” (Eyre, 2015). For Girgis this opportunity is essential to finding solutions to the crises: “[The project is] really a way to get people – a way to introduce all of these different people and different cultures – together in a part of the world that we need to talk together” (personal communication, April 13, 2015). Another musician shared how working with other African musicians was a new experience for him: (This excerpt was transcribed at a class visit and may not be verbatim.):

> In Egypt, we have a big problem. We have been divided socially and culturally – a lot of Arabic culture, than African. Certain peoples have been treated very badly. I didn’t know anything about my African Identity. [The Nile Project] is where I met African musicians; [the] first step to discovering my African identity, to meet other musicians. (M. Abozekry, personal communication, field notes, March 30, 2015)

The common interest in music enticed these musicians from all over East Africa to collaborate, offering them the rare opportunity to work with and learn about each
other. It also provided the musicians with an opportunity to engage in dialogue, another key goal of the project and a foundational step in the peacebuilding process (Jordanger, 2008; Lance, 2012).

**Dialogue.** Much of the research on the use of music and conflict transformation suggests that dialogue is essential for peacebuilding (Jordanger, 2008; Lance, 2012; Shank & Schirch, 2008). Dialogue is an essential goal of The Nile Project as expressed in an interview with the co-founders:

HADERO: We can be a kind of model for the world that we want to see and in the Nile basin that we'd like to see.

GIRGIS: Is it a music project? Is it an environment project? Is it a dialogue project? In reality, it's all of those things.

(Caine, 2014)

The importance of dialogue is also identified in the mission of The Nile Project: “The Projects’ model integrate[s] programs in music, education, dialogue, leadership, and innovation to engage students across disciplines and geographies” ([www.nileproject.org/about/](http://www.nileproject.org/about/)). It was evident in the observations of rehearsals, class visits, workshops, and panels that dialogue was an outcome of the project.

As introduced in the opening vignette, dialogue was a significant aspect of the musical residency in Aswan, Egypt. There were specific times designated to “dialogue sessions” when Girgis introduced the concerns regarding water in the region. What was noteworthy, however, was that while Girgis shared a great deal of information, the format was very conversational. He asked more questions then he answered. This appeared to
put the musicians at ease. They were able to access this information in a way that was non-threatening. It also foregrounded the notions that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers and that all ideas were welcome.

The residency day ended with closing circle, where each musician was encouraged to speak. They might follow-up on the dialogue session from the morning, talk about issues that arose in rehearsals, or offer gratitude towards a fellow musician. What was noteworthy about these sessions was the encouragement of open and honest dialogue and the emphasis on all voices heard. Girgis was careful not to share his opinions on certain aspects of the issue (for example his opinion on the building of the Renaissance Dam) so as to ensure all opinions were heard and validated.

Another central aspect of The Nile Projects’ mission is to conduct workshops, class visits, and panel discussions on college campuses, which are meant to help facilitate dialogue and learning beyond that of the musicians. There were multiple opportunities to witness the use of music to inspire dialogue during this study. In the following excerpt (which was transcribed during the workshop and may not be verbatim), the musical director’s introduction to the performance makes it clear that dialogue is integral to their work:

How many of you guys are musicians? Play in bands together? How does it go? So you get together and read the music out of the book? You get together and play – and don’t think about it too much. The point of asking these questions is, things happen depending on who you are with. What if you and your friend are trying to solve some big question – would it be even easier to
talk together about something (...) if you like the same kind of music? Kind of
greased the wheel. (...) So when it comes to difficult situations, then maybe it
might make those conversations easier. (...) If your friend is a farmer and one is
fisherman, you can find…different disciplines can help you have that
conversation. (M. Jay, personal communication, field notes, April 15, 2015)
The format of the class visits and workshops demonstrated The Nile Projects’
emphasis on dialogue. One class visit observed was particularly noteworthy. There was
no PowerPoint presentation or agenda. The class began with questions from the co-
founders about the students’ experience at the previous nights’ performance, and the
discussion proceeded from there. The discussion was driven by the interest of the
students. Other class visits followed a different format depending on the audience, but all
prioritized dialogue. Engaging the students and their questions was a priority.

One particularly poignant discussion took place after a performance at a local
high school, where students were encouraged to engage in a “real” discussion with the
musicians. The workshop included about 40 teens, 10 teachers and 4 Nile Project
musicians. The class began with superficial questions such as: What is the weather like in
Africa? How did you get your name? Then the discussion took a turn, when one brave
student asked about their perception of America. At this point, an opportunity was
created for open and honest dialogue. After answering, one of the musicians asked how
the students perceived Africa. The student was brave enough to truthfully report that she
had only heard bad things about Africa, about war, drought, disease, and starvation. The
musicians were able to dispel those myths as the only narrative of Africa.
These opportunities for open and honest dialogue were significant. Not only did the students learn something new, but it also gave the musicians a chance to expand their worldview. One musician expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to travel and learn. He commented, “If you don’t travel, you don’t go and learn other people’s cultures. Your mind will be small” (M. Bazibo, personal communication, field notes, April 15, 2015). The class visit ended with a teacher who spoke up to say, “That is why your work is so important” (personal communication, field notes, April 15, 2015). This was an expression of her gratitude for teaching this group of students about a different reality in Africa and for giving them a chance to have an honest dialogue with people from another place in the world. This experience created an exceptional opportunity for learning for all involved.

**An Opportunity for Discovery and Learning**

Learning on a variety of levels is an intention of The Nile Project. In the opening of one of the workshops on the university campus, the musical director emphasized this focus:

This opens up some of the themes we are going to talk about today – giving each other a chance to learn from each other. First, we are going to teach each other about their [the musicians] traditions; educating one another. (M. Jay, personal communication, field notes, April 14, 2015)

Learning was also a core focus of the residencies, which began with musicians learning about each other’s music, styles, traditions, and instruments. Tours through Africa and later in the US provided audiences with information on the Nile basin water crises,
African music, and Africa through concerts, panels, and discussion workshops on college campuses and in the communities.

In the residencies, The Nile Project offered musicians an opportunity to learn about each other’s musical styles. As a reporter makes clear: “Nile Project musicians from sub-Saharan Africa also share in this experience of discovery” (Eyre, 2015). Surprising, many of the musicians admitted to being very unfamiliar with other African musical traditions, and that The Nile Project offered them an invaluable opportunity to increase their knowledge in this area. Steven Sogo, one of the musicians, offered:

In Africa we have this problem. We don’t listen to each other. In my country we listen easily to American music, so when I met these guys, for the first time I heard Egyptian music and I was like wow. The Nile Project for me has been like a school. (Eyre, 2015)

Another musician supports this sentiment: “I had no ideas about the different styles of music in Africa. It was an education for me – to learn more” (M. Abozekry, personal communication, April 14, 2015).

**Learning about each other and African identity.** The process of learning about each other’s musical styles and traditions provided an opportunity for deeper understanding about each other. A prominent theme that emerged from the interviews was that The Nile Project gave musicians a chance to learn about their fellow Africans, essential to building collaboration amongst them (as musicians, and later Africans). Participants affirmed that they knew very little about each other. Alsarah admits, “Our
knowledge of each other is just really limited.” Girgis, in the introduction to a panel on water, affirms this notion:

We started at the place of musical curiosity, the realization that we don’t really get exposed to other cultures in Africa. I grew up in Egypt and never heard any Sudanese music, and only knew about 3 countries on the Nile before I started.

(personal communication, field notes, April 15, 2015)

Alsarah suggested that this lack of knowledge of each other is partly a result of the African continent being so divided due to colonization. She believes that the infrastructure on the continent makes it difficult to travel across Africa. For example, she explained, it is often cheaper to fly to the US from Africa than within the country. In her mind, this prevents Africans from knowing each other, an important step towards cooperation amongst them.

In an observation of a class visit, one of the musicians shared his lack of knowledge about other African musicians: “I had no understanding of any countries in the Nile basin” (N. Shaer, personal communication, field notes, March 30, 2015). Nadar explained that it was an opportunity for him to learn about all these different countries and cultures. He also expanded his knowledge musically. He admitted that he used to only play Egyptian music, but now he has learned lots of different musical styles from all of the other countries involved in the project. Alsarah made it clear that learning is an essential aspect of the project, “It’s like music, like languages. Every country has its own language and within that country every sub group has its own accents in its language and so learning all of that from each other, that's the point” (personal communication, April
As the interview continues, Alsarah shares, “I think it’s a brilliant initiative and I believe that music is the ultimate way to educate people about each other.” This is the goal that Girgis had in mind when he said, “So basically I want people – our hope is that this inspiration drives people to learn more about each other and better understand each other” (personal communication, April 16, 2015).

In some cases the learning led to an understanding of an African identity. As an interviewer shared on NPR, “The Nile Project has enlarged her [Dina’s] sense of what it means to be Egyptian and African." Dina affirms this when she said, “I started to love so much the African Identity” (Eyre, 2015). This learning about each other also helped to build relationships, especially when one musician takes the time to learn about other musicians, their language, and their musical traditions. The saxophone player (Ethiopian) shared in a class visit that he was so impressed that the flute player (Egyptian) took the time and effort not only to learn a lot of the Ethiopian words, but how to play like Ethiopian (Jorga, personal communication, March 30, 2015). For the Ethiopian saxophone player, this effort made a huge statement and paved the way for a deeper relationship between the two, and perhaps a change in perceptions about the “other”.

**Building Relationships**

As Girgis suggested in an interview, relationship building is essential to a resolution in the conflict:

[IT] starts with the sustainability of the Nile basin, but it has to start with the people; start[ing] with the cultural sustainability of the relationships among the
people of the Nile basin and then we can talk about environmental sustainability.

(The World, 2015)

Observing these musicians in a variety of settings including class visits, performances, rehearsals, and casually hanging out, it was clear that they have built strong relationships with each other as a result of the project. Jorga affirms: “We are like family” (personal communication, field notes, April 14, 2015). At an informal performance in a professors’ home, their enjoyment of each other was palpable. The way they looked at each other, smiled, and joked made it clear that they have formed a strong bond and truly enjoyed each other’s company. Considering the difficulty of working and touring together, this is noteworthy.

At a class visit, one of the musicians maintained that a special bond has been created between the musicians despite their political divide. (This excerpt was transcribed at the time of the class and may not be verbatim):

How can your community grow? I think that is a lot of the process that we’ve experienced. The grown sense of we and beyond that. The fact that when it comes to growing that musically. It is love; the collectiveness that we are reaching towards. Personally, that’s an on-going journey. The people on stage truly love each other – that kind of feeling of the cross-cultural experience. We have all learned a lot of different words from each other. (MH, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Another musician offers a similar sentiment:
We all got more than what we expected – having so much a neighbor and didn’t know it existed – great musicians – and it’s kind of like – I wish every Ethiopian could have the opportunity to meet – really knowing each other. (Jorga, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Alsarah supported the importance of “knowing each other” in this process. There is evidence in the following quote that the project allowed her to see people, who were previously seen as enemies, now as neighbors:

Change starts at home. Starts in you and being the kind of musicians that goes out to get to know fellow musicians from like my neighbors and my community. [Considering all people] on the Nile now as my neighbors and my country, neighbors and my region.

Girgis affirms the importance of knowing each other:

We have seen the most change in the countries – that people from this region (are) starting to see each other as neighbors. How can you start to have a conversation and collaboration if you don’t even know each other? If you don’t even understand that you are part of one region? (personal communication, March 30, 2015)

It appears that the format of the residencies encouraged the forming of new relationships, through what Alsarah called “cross pollination”: “This intentional cross pollination, is what I love best about this project. When every person brings something into it – I love it” (personal communication, April 14, 2015). The goal was to make music that combined musical traditions, required musicians to work together, learn about each
other, and find ways to collaborate. But it may not have been a natural process. At one of the class visits, a student asked about how the “mixing” happened in the residencies, and one of the co-founders shared that at first, there was not a lot of “mixing” of people. She admitted that in the beginning, for example, all the Ethiopians hung together. They did not, for example, see all the drummers or singers hanging out together (MH, personal communication, March 30, 2015). Through different processes encouraged by the project, musicians from other traditions were paired together and encouraged to collaborate musically, which led to new relationships. The residencies offered an opportunity to really listen to each other. As Hadero acknowledged: “The fact that folks from everywhere are in those places means that we can hear each other's music, we can grow beyond being strangers in a very everyday way” (Caine, 2014). As Girgis affirmed: “We didn’t know what the music was going to sound like- but what we saw on stage was relationships (…) a model of how we could solve problems – models the kind of relationships and partnerships we’d like to see in the Nile Basin.”

**Challenging assumptions and addressing biases.** For Lance (2012), a necessary step towards relationship building and an important contribution that music making provides in areas of conflict is the opportunity to challenge assumptions (see Figure 7). There was some evidence that the process of making music in the project encouraged the confronting of biases and the challenging of assumptions.
The interviews with musicians revealed some existing biases that were brought to the project, and some evidence that assumptions may have been confronted. Alsarah admitted that there were prejudices brought to the table:

We all come with our cultural baggage. I had my own prejudices that I had needed to get rid of. They had prejudices that they had to get rid of. But that’s part of it. That’s part of becoming a band.

The tensions that exist between the Sudanese and Egyptians, and prior feelings about each other, is made even more clear as Alsarah continued:

Egypt and Sudan were under the same colonial rule. So the border between Egypt and Sudan were open until like 1950 something. So Egypt thought of Sudan as belonging to them. So it’s a huge point of tension for me with Egyptians usually. But not with these guys, because they guys are more educated. Also because I check all them: ‘Ah...don't get aggressive.’

The defining of Egyptians as aggressive is a bias brought to the project, and the fact that “these guys” are more “educated” suggests that something was different about this group, or as a result of the project.
Jorga affirmed tensions that currently exist in Africa between the people living there: “In fact, like...everything is getting even more strained now across religious lines, ethnic lines, and so this concept of unity was something that was a seed, but you didn't know if it was going to grow or not” (personal communication, April 15, 2015). For Jorga, music is key to challenging and changing previous tensions: “So for me, music is like, a very spiritual thing, and when musicians connect musically, it’s very powerful.”

The challenging of beliefs began with the music. In one part of the interview, Kasiva admitted to assuming what an Arabic sound was like: “If I heard anything with Arabic, I would associate it to Egypt and I knew nothing about it” (personal communication, April 15, 2015). Over the course of the residencies, she learned a lot more about instruments and how the various musicians played, which led to a change in her perceptions: “I didn’t even know that they were the same thing until I met and I was in The Nile Project. And then being in here and discovering ...oh my god, these people have fiddles, lyres. We literally share instruments.”

This revelation led to some changes in behaviors and attitudes, which was evident in our discussion. Early in the conversation, Kasiva talked about the importance of creating a Kenyan sound. She was very firm in believing that they were not well represented in the scope of African music. For example, if you heard music on the radio it most often was South or West African:

Why are we so eager to go and borrow something from other areas of Africa and outside Africa, when we haven’t even exhausted what we have as a country? We don’t have a sound as Kenya. (…). We don’t really have a sound, and it’s because
we don’t focus on our traditional tunes enough to study them and come up with a sound, like a unique sound.

And yet, over the course of The Nile Project, the musicians melded their “sounds,” collaborating to make a new sound. Kasiva did not create a Kenyan sound (despite her deep desire to do so), but a regional sound. This fusion required some giving up on her part. This quote demonstrates a change in attitude:

I don’t even have words, to like measure how I really appreciate instruments fitting into traditions that they’re not really meant to be fitting into – really – it blows my mind. As much as I cannot play a melodic instrument, but seeing the inanga tuned to an Ethiopian scale is like – hell yeah – this is what we’re supposed to do. We’re going to do this until we find quarter tones in an instrument that has never played quarter tones. This is the start of discovering a new sound. This is the start of putting curiosity – and making us do things with our instruments, that are like “we’re not gonna do this” – it will force you to do this. We’re going to get there.

There is an energized impulse to discover, to do things differently, to explore a new way of doing things, which epitomizes a change in notions and behaviors, and may provide some insight into how the use of music can help people envision a new reality, perhaps a more collaborative, peaceful, and unified one.

**Musicking Models New Ways of Framing Conflict**

Shank and Schirch (2008) suggest that the arts have the power to be transformative as they offer a new framework and new perspectives for resolving
conflict: “The arts can help to transform people’s worldviews” (p. 237). Lederach (2005), a leader in the field of peacebuilding, also recommends creative means to addressing conflict, what he calls the moral imagination: “The capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges in the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist” (p. ix.).

There is evidence that The Nile Project does offer the musicians involved an opportunity to try things that have never been done before, which can lead to an expanded world-view. Alsarah acknowledged in her interview that The Nile Project helped her deepen her view of how music could be used for social change:

But being in The Nile Project has deepened my comprehension of that process [the use of music to address social issues]. It has also opened up my mind to the scopes and levels to which you can use it – music that is.

As was shared in the previous section, Kasiva’s experience of pushing the boundaries of musical creation, and learning new and different ways to play their instruments was an opportunity to alter the way something is “usually” or “always” done (as quoted above). Kasiva went on to suggest that changing mindsets could begin with changing stagnant perceptions of musicality:

But since there are the rules, and our minds are like – we’re wired to think in a specific way. That is why we feel as if we should tune the ukulele to a certain scale for it to actually play in a certain way. But if for instance, if it played like that, and you didn’t have any sort of way, for example, if you never had tuners in the world, we would always find a way to
play without tuners and you would come up with like a weird scale that doesn’t have a name right now, but you would work with that.

This notion of adapting and creating something anew, directly translated for Kasiva into “political” negotiations, and what is needed to adapt and change to collaborate on a larger scale.

Same applies to people. Because we are used to doing things in a certain way, we feel obliged to do them in that way. And we don’t give ourselves space or like – actually we don’t give ourselves space to start thinking of other ways of doing something.

As the conversation continued, Kasiva made a direct connection between exploring alternative ways of using instruments with considering creative solutions to problem solving in the Nile Basin:

It’s the exact same way as the instruments. As we are used to tuning the instruments in a certain way as if this is the way it should be. It’s the same way that people living along the Nile Basin think – for instance with like sharing. If you believe that this is the way we do certain things because we are fully dependent on this river and we’re not going to share this water – that is how it will become embedded in your head and you will never ever think like uh – what if we give out some water and then probably like go in a certain area or like channel a spring into this reservoir. We’ll still have water and we’ll still be able to give water. So the fact that we are actually wired to think like that – these are the ideologies that are bringing problems along the Nile Basin. Basically the people
there...this is why fights will never end – and misunderstandings because we are not allowing ourselves to start thinking in other creative ways to be able to coexist basically.

The Nile Project’s performances also help audiences envision a new reality, one where musicians across political divides can play music together peacefully. Jorga, who is an Ethiopian saxophone player, shared the magnitude of playing with a highly popular Egyptian singer on stage:

When musicians connect musically, it’s very powerful, because the people follow musicians. So like Dina in Egypt cannot walk down the street without being mobbed for photographs. So when Egyptians see an Ethiopian saxophone player on Dina’s album that makes really powerful statement.

The Nile Project’s concerts across Africa modeled new relationships between people in East Africa offering a new reality where people were united despite conflict. Not only did musicians from countries in conflict (Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt) play side by side, but they also combined musical styles. Since these musicians are some of the best and often famous in each of their respective countries, it made a very strong statement to have them play publically together, especially since musicians are often considered “role” models for young people. Their performances were well received and allowed for large crowds to witness this new collaborative reality in East Africa. As Caine (2014) shared, the performances were well received and played to large crowds, and the combining of musical traditions pleased audiences: “The song that brought down houses across the Nile Project's Africa tour mixes Arabic lyrics, Ugandan and Kenyan rhythms, Egyptian and
Ethiopian vocals and Sudanese, Rwandan and Burundian strings” (Caine). Audiences, therefore, enjoyed and celebrated this new reality, new sounds, and new vision.

**Overcoming Challenges of Making Music Mirrors Peacebuilding**

“The music has evolved as the musicians have.”

(M. Girgis, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings in the data is that the act of making music together despite cultural, linguistic, and even musical differences allowed these musicians a chance to practice peacebuilding. The desire for The Nile Project to be a model for social change was evident in this statement by the co-founder: “We wanted to find other ways than how our governments have organized ourselves” (MG, personal communication, 3-30-15). There is a myriad of examples from the data that demonstrated how music making (negotiating between people with different backgrounds and traditions to create one unified sound) became a tool for practicing conflict resolution, which mirrors some necessary steps in the peacebuilding process. This adds to the evidence provided by Riiser (2010) who notes a similar result in the Divan Orchestra in the Middle East:

Through playing the same piece of music, everyone participates in and negotiates the creation of a more complex and nuanced narrative they can have in common, and having done that, the orchestra may have set the stage for conflict transformation amongst themselves. (p. 25)

Sometimes the music created by the musicians from The Nile Project was literally an exploration of conflict resolution: “This is what I would suggest for this piece – that we
have a conflict, and then all of us will keep on adding flavors from different cultures, but maintaining the water that flows. “(Caine, 2014) As well as “But under this tree, they’re listening for what’s shared: conflict that resolves into harmony” speaking of their musical exploration (Caine, 2014).

In this excerpt from an interview with Alsarah, she exemplified how their act of fusion (melding musical traditions) was complex, emotional, and required compromise. Alsarah explained that negotiating happens as a result of the project, and that there are sacrifices and choices made. These choices can be frightening for some, as they might fear losing some of their musical identities:

So the idea that to learn something and to use it you must sacrifice something.

Something must bend. But things that are bent and things that you sacrifice and give up, they don’t have to be forgotten. They don’t need to be ignored. They just need to be not necessary for that very moment within that one particular part of the fusion. It can come in another part of the fusion. To me it’s like...are we creating a soup or are we creating a salad? (personal communication, April 16, 2015)

The notion of sacrifice, the giving something up, perhaps the loss of musical identity is particularly poignant. When some musical traditions are in the minority, in that they are not well known or represented across Africa, on the radio and such, the furthering of this musical style is even more important to the musicians. As Kasiva explains, Kenyan music is not often heard, and the development of the Kenyan sound was important to her.
Fusion required her to lose something of that Kenyan sound and marks a significant sacrifice:

Why are we borrowing stuff from S. Africa and we have 44 tribes with 44 or more, more than 44, as there are subdivisions of the tribes, with more than 500 traditions, musical traditions. Why are we so eager to go and borrow something from other areas of Africa and outside Africa, even, when we haven’t even exhausted what we have as a country? We don’t have a sound as Kenya… and it’s because we don’t focus on our traditional tunes enough to study them and come up with a sound, like a unique sound.

But despite this feeling of marginalization, Kasiva pursued a unified sound with the project:

So I was like, well let’s see if we can actually like get a sound of a region and this is like a region that was taken; this is the Nile region. It’s not necessarily east, west, north, south; it’s the Nile region.

This transformation of her feelings towards fusion may have occurred during the course of the project, but none the less, mark some change in attitude.

**Challenges of making music.** It is evident that the process of making music with The Nile Project was not an easy venture, which may support its use as a tool for conflict transformation. The following exchange between Alsarah and myself exemplifies the difficulty of making music together with musicians that have different styles and traditions:
Kelly: (Some may say) you can’t compare what The Nile Project does with music with solving world problems.

Alsarah: Yes you can. Have you ever been with a musician in a room? It’s just as personal. We can go to war over a wrong note.

The conversation continued to exemplify the challenges in fusing musical styles. The tensions between her as Sudanese (who have been in conflict with Egyptians) seem to mimic the political struggle:

Kelly: Like at that first residency, was there some opposition? Was there like...whoa...I don’t want to lose this Egyptian sound?

Alsarah: There definitely was. There was a lean to take it to a more Egyptian side. And it was something I really hated, something about it. I’m not interested in coming here to make an Egyptian project. That’s not why I came. I’m not interested in any one identity taking over. It’s something we have to be very careful with, especially as the numbers from one country are more than another country. I think that’s why it’s important to rotate musicians from the collective.

The project also required musicians to play in alternative ways, often learning entirely new scales. In an observation of a class visit, the musical director explained that some musicians had to completely change their style in an effort to work in the alternative scales (which would allow them to play together on one piece of music).
MJ: We asked them to re-tune his instrument in an Egyptian way – and I wanted to ask you – how did that feel?

MB: Imagine you play an instrument for 16 years, and then you have to play a different scale?

He went on to explain how difficult it was for him. He described it as actually “disturbing” and that he felt very limited at first – “could not find his flow” – “It’s totally different” (M. Bazibu, personal communication, April 14, 2015). However, as the conversation continued, it was evident that this change created new opportunities for them as musicians.

Musical conversations create space for new opportunities. For Jorga, the learning of new scales and styles offered him an opportunity to have a new conversation with his music: “I wanted to have this conversation between the Ethiopian and Egyptian scales” and he went on to explain that it was exciting for him to improvise from those two scales, offering something new for him (personal communication, April 14, 2015). This transformation, from a struggle to fuse towards an opportunity for the creation of something new, mimics the power of artistic approaches to peacebuilding (Lederach, 2005; Shank & Schirch, 2008). As Lederach argues, the arts allow for the vision of something entirely new. In a classroom visit observation, the musical director explains that when these two alternative scales are played together (ones used by Egyptians and Ethiopians), the musicians are not only encouraged to play in new ways, but there are “holes” created – and more space to go musically, which creates a different way of interpreting the music. As the musical director affirms: “If you engaged in the music of
Uganda – adding a line here (which he shows on the board) you’d be listening in a whole new way” (personal communication, April 14, 20015). The process required both musicians to “bend” and alter their styles, but in the end, something entirely new was created.

In a water panel discussion, Girgis explained the very intentional conflation of musical and political collaboration: (This is transcribed during the discussion and may not verbatim.)

Facilitator: I wonder how you use music as a language to translate this issue in music?

Girgis: For us we started from the point of view that Egypt has been the political power – (not just of the water, but culturally). We wanted to create a new paradigm so all the countries can be included. [To] translate these principals into our music. Participatory Leadership – does not make one musician higher or lower than others. We experimented with this idea. This participatory process – by giving each of the musicians (of each country) to be the leader of their piece. (MG, personal communication, 4-15-15)

Creating an Atmosphere

One finding that was revealed, but lacked a great amount of support, was the notion that The Nile Project was very intentional and possibly quite successful at creating a conducive environment, which encouraged creative collaborative work. Such an environment was noted as essential for peacebuilding (Jordanger, 2008, p. 129). Other
arts based peacebuilders also noted the importance of environment on successful conflict transformation, suggesting the arts helped create a “safe space” for peacebuilding (Lance, 2012; Shank & Schirch, 2008). Such an environment acts to encourages open and honest dialogue, a necessary step towards conflict transformation (Lance). Jordanger suggests that music has a unique ability to encourage a conducive environment by dissipating what he calls “disruptive emotional tensions” of people in conflict (p. 129).

It was apparent in the interview with Girgis that creating a conducive environment for creativity, collaboration, and participation (whether it be in dialogue or music making) was at the core of the project for him:

I’m interested in what you might call a grass roots experience design that allows for people to be themselves and to have an experience that they wouldn’t have had otherwise. And for me the hospitality is about facilitating that temporary sense of community in a space that would allow for these spontaneous experiences to happen naturally through music. So music facilitates a sense of community, intensive community, [which] facilitates better music.

Girgis, who was involved in hospitality prior to his work on The Nile Project, sees a direct connection between the two that is essential to the process:

So for me this is like the environment to allow for this to happen is like an art of itself and that’s my combination of hospitality and music. This is why I studied hospitality and music, and I consider my work now in The Nile Project and the music school to be hospitality. It’s not furniture and fabrics, so it’s designing experiences. In this case designing participatory and spontaneous experiences.
In Jorga’s interview, he made it very clear that The Nile Project did an amazing job setting the stage for a warm and welcoming environment, and how this affected their work:

It was like a family reunion – the place was set up – it was a big tent – it was on the banks of the Nile – it had a camp atmosphere – we met and we started partying – like there was music, dancing, food, all people partying. It was in the middle of the revolution at the same time. So it was crazy like – but it was like every musician had worked at his own game for a long time. So good music excites people to start with – so when you have good musicians living together for three weeks (…) It has been a joyous thing.

Being present at the first residency where the musicians not only first met, but initiated their collaboration would have allowed for more understanding of how environment was created and affected the music making and collaborative process, and begs further research.

Summary

The data would suggest that there were some outcomes as a result of participation in The Nile Project. Curiosity was present on multiple levels. There is some evidence that the project inspired curiosity in the musicians, which in some cases drove the musicians to learn more about each other and their musical traditions. It was evident that music acted as a binding agent among these musicians, a common interest that connected them and set the stage for dialogue, learning and relationships building. Most interesting was the revelation that the project offered these musicians the rare opportunity to collaborate
and get to know fellow Africans, which is essential to any problem solving in the region. Strong relationships appeared to be developed as a result of the project, and in some cases acted to help change previous held assumptions of the ‘other’. The data did show that the project required the musicians to make some significant alterations to their own practices, and gave them a chance to practice conflict transformation.

A Musical Representation of the Findings

The Nile Project: Let it Flow

Lyrics

Creating harmony in a land that’s wrought with toil
Born from the love of the Nile’s fertile soil
Inspired by each other, making music helps us see
Ways to deeply listen, it can teach us empathy

Chorus:
Let it flow, let it flow with a rippling effect
From the source to those who can change how they react
Let it flow like the force of the waters of the Nile
….Let it flow

Turning conflict to peace, making neighbors from foes
Challenging the way we see -models peaceful ways to go
When we really listen, follow curiosity
We can reach the center leave the safe periphery

Giving back to the waters that have always quenched their thirst
It doesn’t really matter who had the rights to the river first.
Finding a way to share it all should be the goal
Music shows us how we can attain what’s good for all

Sending messages through song to the powers that be
The people want solutions; its time the countries all agree
The project’s goal is simple- inspire solutions- make a plan
Show when we play together, we can face what lies ahead.
CHAPTER 5: REVERBERATIONS: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

To see The Nile Project on stage is to sense what is possible when people from different cultures actually listen to one another. But making beautiful music is one thing, confronting environmental issues along one of the world’s longest rivers is quite another. The Nile Project has a tough road ahead, but these musicians are making a stand, singing as one to conjure a better future for all. (Eyre, 2015)

In effort to understand what The Nile Project has to contribute to the use of music in conflict transformation, this final chapter will further examine and expand upon some of the themes identified in the findings. The chapter will begin with a discussion, drawing on the review of literature and other similar studies in an effort to consider these findings alongside existing research in this area. Implications for the study will be addressed next, followed by limitations. Suggestions for future research will also be made, ending with some concluding thoughts.

Discussion

There is no research as of yet to prove that the work done by The Nile Project has had any lasting effect on the conflict in the Nile basin region. The notion that music can be an effective means to address global issues and conflict did incite skepticism among the students who attended The Nile Project class visits. In one geography class, more than half of the students responded to the survey section, “Questions you still have” with some type of skepticism regarding the power of music to address conflict such as the water crisis in East Africa. Here are just a few of the responses, but they encapsulate the general consensus:

[Survey responses discussing skepticism regarding the power of music to address conflict]
• “How do people get involved and does The Nile Project have involvement beyond awareness [of the issue]?”

• “I’m still skeptical about the effect of the music; international water negotiations is complex.”

• “What impact can [music] really have on the conflict?”

• “How will music solve this issue?”

• “How effective is music in solving problems?”

In another class visit, one student asked very pointedly if the work of The Nile Project had contributed in any way to the resolution of this conflict, and Girgis replied: (This excerpt was notated at the time of the observation and may not be verbatim):

The water conflict has escalated; politically there have been a lot of ups and downs. We have seen the most change in the countries – that people from this region are starting to see each other as neighbors. How can you start to have a conversations and collaboration if you don’t even know each other; if you don’t even understand that you are part of one region? (personal communication, field notes, March 30, 2015)

As expressed here, Girgis believes that the work done by The Nile Project is having an impact. The project is helping to change the way people in the area see themselves, now as neighbors, and part of one region, which sets the stage for future collaboration.

It should be noted, however, that some major progress has occurred in the conflict during the time The Nile Project has been performing. In March of 2015 (one year to the date of The Nile Project’s tour across Africa), there was a remarkable
breakthrough. Egypt signed an agreement with both Sudan and Ethiopia that they would support the Grand Renaissance Dam Project, marking the first sign of cooperation between the three countries since Egypt was given sole water rights to the Nile river in 1929 (“Egypt sets concerns aside to sign Nile dam deal with Ethiopia and Sudan,” 2015).

Girgis responded with enthusiasm in response to this development:

   Today is a great day – presidents and prime ministers of Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia are actually agreeing on cooperating. I can’t say that The Nile Project inspired them, it certainly gave them a level of hope, seeing that citizens are after this kind of cooperation, strengthening these relationships, and stressing the social fabric of this region. (The World, 2015)

This turn of events may be serendipitous, but considering the fact that up until this point there had been no cooperation among these countries, it seems plausible that The Nile Project has had some effect on this conflict.

   The situation between the riparian countries has been intractable since the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1929 (Arsano, 2011). Then in May of 2013 things intensified. Ethiopia made a drastic move and began diverting the Blue Nile, a major source for the Nile River, despite the warnings and even threats of Egypt (Igunza, 2014). The Ethiopian government continued to move forward with their plan to build a dam that Egypt believed would put their water supply in serious jeopardy. Tensions have been mounting since this aggressive move, making the agreement reached in 2015 significant.

   This turn of events reifies the question: can music be an effective means for addressing world conflict? John Galtung (2015), a leader in the field of peacebuilding,
champions the arts as a mechanism for conflict transformation, even above “words.” He makes a distinct argument that the arts offer an opportunity for creating something new, without compromise or withdrawal. He explains, “The process of conflict transformation by positive transcendence, neither prevalence, or withdrawal from the whole performance, nor a stingy compromise unsatisfactory to all, but something new, beyond, transcending the conflict between them” (p. 58). Galtung offers a distinct example, one that mirrors the work of The Nile Project. Imagine, he offers, a group of four musicians presenting at a peace conference. They all play different instruments from different parts of the world. They must all play together for one hour. Since they all have egos and different styles, they might argue to each play a solo or divide the time up, but instead they play together as a quartet. In doing so they create something new, not compromising or withdrawing, but using creativity to embody a new reality. These musicians are modeling what is possible when those involved are open to the creative process. This example, argues Galtung, demonstrates the art of “being peace rather than just expressing and verbalizing peace” (p. 58).

As discussed in the review of literature, there is a small body of research that suggests that music can contribute to conflict transformation. The findings from this study add to this literature in a few ways. Music seems to help in the building of “bridges” between people even those previously considered adversaries (Cohen, 2005; Lance, 2012). Musicking also appears to help in the developing and redefining of relationships (Lance; Riiser, 2010) and the encouraging of dialogue (Lance; Shank & Schirch, 2008). In this study, the collaborative process of making music appears to have
supported new learning, specifically for the musicians (Cohen, 2015; Riiser). These accomplishment, learning, dialogue, and relationships building, are considered necessary steps for conflict transformation (Lance; Lederach, 2005). Despite these findings, it was not explicitly apparent why music was so effective in this realm. This question will be explored in the next section of this discussion.

**Why Music?**

Why might music be an effective tool in peacebuilding? If, as Wheatley (2002) argues, the beginning stages of change stem from finding a commonality, one could argue that such a connection could be made through sports (such as the Olympics) or through other cultural exchanges such as with cooking. Lance (2012) supports this theory suggesting that a commonality could be found in sports. However, other arts enthusiasts would disagree, arguing that music is a particularly effective tool for this type of work (Brooks, 2010; Urbain & Opiyo, 2015; Zelizer, 2003). What is it about music that may make it so useful in this context? The next section will discuss some thoughts on why music may be a unique tool for peacebuilding as it connects to the findings.

**Music as a Unique Peacebuilding Tool**

In order to understand why music is a unique tool for peacebuilding, it is important to consider the particulars of music and musicking. As Riiser (2010) argues in his study of the Divan Orchestra, this type of collaboration does not happen in other venues like sports as they are inherently competitive. There must be something unique to music that makes it valuable in this arena. In the interview with Kasiva, as a part of this
study, she articulated her belief that the strengths of music comes from the fact that all people relate to music:

It is all intertwined with the music. You know like, exactly as I’m talking – using these musical examples in relation to the problems on the ground. This is it – because people relate to music. People relate to things they can remember and songs are some of the most powerful ways of sending out messages or impacting [change] – songs, stories, art basically is one of the ways that teaches the best and makes you remember stuff the best. (personal communication, April 15, 2015)

Barenboim, conductor of the Divan Orchestra, suggests that music “has the power to speak to all aspects of a human’s being, and to allow that person to experience the connectivity of personal, social and political spheres” (Riiser, 2010, p. 22). It would appear that some of the qualities inherent in music make it particularly useful in addressing conflict, whether it is the emotional chord it touches in people or the way all people seem to relate to music. The act of music making may also encourage an opportunity to practice aspects of the peacebuilding process.

Shank and Schirch (2008) also suggest that ABPB, including the use of music, offers a unique tool for peacebuilding because it is non-verbal. Sharing a statistic from communication theorists that argue that 65-93% of all communication is non-verbal, Shank and Schirch ask: why do peacebuilders spend so much time talking? Shank and Schirch, suggest that the arts, like music, express what cannot be expressed in words:

Arts-based peacebuilding recognizes the limitations of verbal communication and suggests practitioners use the arts to elicit information and convey meaning
difficult to communicate. Art forms such as music, dance, theater, or the visual arts use symbolic references to nonverbally communicate something about the real world that is missed when communicating through the direct logic of words. (p. 235)

In areas of conflict, where trauma is prevalent, it may be more effective to use the nonverbal art of music to reach those affected (Cohen, 2005).

It would appear that some of the qualities inherent in music make it particularly suitable in addressing conflict, whether it is the emotional chord it touches in people or the way all people seem to relate to music. Music’s ability to communicated ideas that may be difficult to communicate through words also makes is especially useful in the realm of conflict transformation. The act of music making may also provide an opportunity to practice aspects of the peacebuilding process, which will be explored in the next section of this discussion.

**Use of music to embody complex “negotiations.”** The findings from this study revealed some evidence that the act of musicking allowed for the musicians in The Nile Project to practice peacebuilding skills. As Girgis articulated, “What can musicians add to the conversation?” (personal communication, April 15, 2015). The process by which this group of people with completely different musical traditions came together to create one sound, one song, one album could be a new paradigm for cross-cultural conversations and negotiations that leads to conflict transformation. Making music with such different musical traditions may be as challenging as dialogue between countries with different languages, cultures, and belief systems.
To the general public (those with no musical training), the notion of bringing a group of musicians together to make music may not seem like much of a challenge. This is what musicians do, come together with all their instruments and “jam,” which usually involves improvisation based on common chords or playing commonly known songs. However, in the case of these musicians, particularly those from Egypt versus other African countries like Ethiopia and Kenya, the musical languages that they speak are completely different. These countries have different songs, musical traditions, and completely musical scales. These musicians would not be able to play together until one or more of the musicians changed how they played, altering the very core of what they do. Riiser (2010), in his research on the Divan Orchestra in the Middle East, suggests that the negotiations that go on internally in a group of musicians mimic that of politics, and that music does not act as a utopian state where musicians come together in the common language of music making.

The notion that music is a common language is a widespread assumption, however some have challenged this belief. Cohen (2015) argues that music is not a common language, and that musical traditions are more dissimilar than similar. Looking more closely at what The Nile Project underwent to make music together supports this theory. In the most basic terms, music from the west and the east use different scales, which are the building blocks of creating melodies. Music of Egypt is based on a pentatonic scale, typical of eastern music, which means they use a five-note scale. The other countries’ music is based on the western scale, which is built using seven notes. In lieu of a complicated explanation of music theory, consider an analogy to writing.
Imagine that all writing was done using a limited number of words. These particular words could be combined in various ways to create different sentences, and those sentences could be combined together to make one essay. This process is similar to how music is created. Different musical traditions have different sets of notes, which have a certain relationship to each other. When these notes are combined, they make a very different sound than could be created with a different scale. Musicians who use different scales cannot easily play together. Having a musician try to use a different scale is like asking a person to write in a foreign language.

When the musicians from The Nile Project with their diverse musical traditions came together to make their first album, *Aswan*, what scale did the musicians agree upon? Would those from Ethiopia and Sudan play in the Egyptian scale? Changing scales would demand that the musicians deny their traditions and “musical language” in effort to play together. In taking on the pentatonic scale, the music would sound more like Egyptian music and lose the identity of the other musical traditions. As Alsarah claimed, she was not interested in making Egyptian music:

> There was a lean to take it to a more Egyptian side. And it was something I really hated, something about it. I’m not interested in coming here to make an Egyptian project. That’s not why I came. I’m not interested in any one identity taking over.

(personal communication, April 16, 2015)

Moreover, this relinquishing of their musical language would mirror the political relinquishing, giving Egypt control over both water rights and musical scales. This
concession would not lend itself to conflict transformation or positive feelings among the musicians.

So how did these musicians negotiate through this conflict? They learned each other’s musical language. As Jorga affirmed, “I wanted to have this conversation between the Ethiopian and Egyptian scales” (personal communication, field notes, April 14, 2015). By exploring this new space, something new was created. Tan (2014) noted a similar finding in her study of the *Breaking Down Walls* program that brought Muslim and Christian students together to make music. Tan suggested that after Christian students shared a song they wrote especially for the event, a “musical conversation” began. By developing new ways to “speak” to each other musically, the musicians in The Nile Project were able to accomplish “unity in diversity.”

**Unity in diversity.** Lederach (2005), in his articulation of what is truly necessary for sustaining peace, introduced the notion of “paradoxical curiosity” (p. 35), which resembles the concept of unity in diversity in its goal to embrace complexity and duality, rather than binary solutions to conflict. As he explains:

>[Paradoxical curiosity] approaches social realities with an abiding respect for complexity, a refusal to fall prey to the pressures of forced dualistic categories of truth, and an inquisitiveness about what may hold together seemingly contradictory social energies in a greater whole. (Lederach, 2005, p. 36)

In other words, paradoxical curiosity is the ability to be open to binary solutions to peace that do not require concession. This concept is contrary to what is often done in conflict situations that habitually require sides to compromise, often leading to weak compromise
or one side conceding (Tippett, 2012). Alternatively, Lederach recommends existing in complexity, in a kind of both/and instead of either/or space.

Paradoxical curiosity is exemplified in a story shared by Lederach (Tippett, 2012) in which a seemingly intractable situation in diffused in Nepal. In this case, various ethnic and political groups who needed to cooperate to divide the natural resources in the area developed a peaceful gathering where opposing sides could meet and dialogue. They developed a process where people from and within the groups in conflict could stay true to their groups’ belief systems and cultures, but also work together. With a hint of creativity, they named the gathering after guati soup, the national Nepali soup (Tippett, 2012). This soup is made up of nine beans, each with its own process of fermentation. The beans are able to retain their own essence, but when combined, also create a new and delicious flavor. This metaphor mimics what this gathering hopes to accomplish. In his study of the Divan Orchestra, Barenboim articulated a similar phenomenon, “where everyone is interdependent while at the same time expressing their own narrative and subjectivity, that makes the orchestra a ‘utopia’ or ‘alternative social model’” (Riiser, 2010, p. 23).

This notion of unity in diversity – and even food analogies – also appeared in the interviews with The Nile Project musicians. Alsarah explains:

So learning all of that from each other – that’s the point. So the idea that to learn something and to use it you must sacrifice something; something must bend. But things that are bent and things that you sacrifice and give up, they don’t have to
be forgotten. They don’t need to be ignored. They just need to be not necessary for that very moment within that one particular part of the fusion. It can come in another part of the fusion. To me it’s like – are we creating a soup or are we creating a salad? I think The Nile Project wants to be a salad. And I think what we do is salad. Occasionally, sometimes you got to just chop the carrot into small bits so you can eat it, as part of it. You can’t leave the carrot whole. But the carrot is still the carrot. (personal communication, April 16, 2015)

Perhaps the cooking metaphor came out of the fact that we were enjoying a meal together, but the similarity to Lederach’s metaphor is uncanny. Girgis, in a class visit, used the same metaphor. When asked by a student if the group was a “cultural stew,” Girgis responded with:

It’s a salad – the residencies are our kitchen. The performances are our dining room. You see the product, but there is a lot of processes that you are seeing. You get something pure and clean (the taste of olives) – that has to be thought through – that is what we think about when were are making a play list – you can identify it. (personal communication, field notes, March 30, 2015)

Since this was not a direct quote, but transcribed during an observation, it may not be verbatim. However, Girgis’ overall sentiment was similar to what Alsarah shared, that in their music you are able to hear one distinct sound that is pure (like the taste of olives in the salad or the sound of an Egyptian flute), and yet together it creates something better than what could have been created alone.
Alsarah also uses the word fusion, a term used both in the creation of new foods and music. Considering how the music acts as a fusion is noteworthy. Upon listening to the music of The Nile Project, one might hear the djembe, which is a traditional sound from Kenya, or a flute playing in an Egyptian scale, or strings being plucked on an inanga from Rwanda. Each of the sounds has its moment to be highlighted in the piece, and is recognizable, but then there are moments when they all blend to make a new and unique sound.

Perhaps this modeling of “unity in diversity” is just what is needed to find peace in East Africa where so many distinct cultures all exist on one continent. There was a lot of talk of a unified Africa in the interviews I conducted with the musicians, so clearly this idea is on the minds of those who live there. They all agree that a unified Africa is necessary to end the conflicts on their continent as well as to create a stronger economy, but with this comes a tension. How might one become unified, but without losing what makes each of the nations or even tribes unique? Alsarah articulates how in a prior attempt to draw borders, this goal was not accomplished:

So you can see all this artificialness of the borders. In our attempt today to create a national identity (…), we have been unable to really come to peace with our micro identity and macro identity in these nations. And I think the this is the reason for so much violence [and] the struggle that happens in Africa. It’s creating – [because] a lot of these governments are creating national identities that do not reflect the communities in these countries and so people feel threatened. They feel like their tribal identity is threatened. There being is present [They are loosing
their identity] in order to be part of this giant soup; this giant national identity.

(personal communication, April 16, 2015)

Music, emblematic of culture, may help to accomplish unity in diversity in East Africa. Music and culture are an outward expression of a people, be it tribe or nation, and they can be emblematic of beliefs, histories and traditions (Urbain & Opiyo, 2015). Since music is a powerful and pervasive art form in Africa, it may be a particularly useful peacebuilding tool there (Urbain & Opiyo). Urbain and Opiyo, in their introduction to a special series on the use of arts in peacebuilding in Africa, argue that the performing arts, particularly music, are an important tool for transforming conflict on the continent due to the rich history of music there, which is “deeply embedded in the social DNA of much of the continent’s people” (p. 3).

The concept of unity in diversity in regards to music and peacebuilding needs further research, but may be one way to understand how The Nile Project is able to exist and flourish in this complexity, ambiguity, and duality. It further supports how the arts help reach what Lederach calls “the other side of complexity” (Tippett, 2012). This notion of existing within complexity is something that is explored in great length by systems thinkers. In the next section, the review of literature will be revisited to help connect systems theory with the findings as well as align all the various aspects of this study.

**Connection Between Music and Conflict Transformation with Systems Theory**

Systems theory was deemed foundational in the creation of The Nile Project. Therefore, considering some of its key themes in relation to the findings may provide
deeper insight into what The Nile Project is accomplishing in their work and help to better understand the role of music in addressing complex issues with organizations in the 21st century. These themes are: relationships, tinkering, complexity, paradigm shift, and presencing. Each will be addressed individually in the next section.

**Relationships.** One theme that is salient in all of the supporting literature on systems theory, peacebuilding, and music making, is the importance of relationships. Girgis shared that systems theory, specifically chaos theory, had a significant influence on the formation of The Nile Project. Chaos theory is based on the new sciences, such as quantum physics, that affirm that all matter exists (or can be recognized as existing) only in relation to other matter. For example, the atom can only be identified when measured in relation to other atoms (Lindley, 1996). This new understanding of science and the world makes relationships central. This notion of the world greatly influenced systems thinkers like Margaret Wheatley who suggests, “Life is attracted to order- order gained through wandering explorations into new relationships and new possibilities” (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1996, p. 6). Lederach also sees relationship building as central to peacebuilding, affirming, “The key to enduring change, is not mass amounts of people, but a quality of relationship between unlikely people” (Tippett, 2012). Lederach further explained that too often we try to create more people who think like us, but instead we should be working towards building quality relationships between people who do not think alike. The Nile Project may be doing just that in its accomplishment of both relationship building and musical creation among the diverse musicians who participate.
**Tinkering/ creativity/ play.** Another theme identified by systems thinkers, peacebuilders, and musicians alike is the notion that play and creativity, what Wheatley (1996) calls tinkering, can lead to new possibilities. These new possibilities can lead to solutions to problems, sustainable change, diversity of ecosystems, or new musical creations. Wheatley suggests this is another lesson taught by the new sciences, which have demonstrated that life finds a way towards survival through creativity and play, by finding what works. Darwin’s notion of “survival of the fittest” is no longer the primary understanding for how living things survive in nature. The new scientists believe objects embrace diversity, explore and adapt in relation to others in an effort to survive. Peacebuilders such as Lederach also support the importance of creativity in sustainable change and peace, affirming that we have to imagine a reality not yet envisioned. Musicians like those involved in The Nile Project are embodying the use of creativity to envision a new reality, where the combinations of instruments, new conversations between scales, and fusions of lyrics in multiple languages are creating sounds never yet heard.

**Complexity.** Systems theory has provided a way to understand and address problems in the 21st century. It is a common understanding among systems thinkers that the world is changing more rapidly than ever before and that problems are more complex and interrelated, requiring new ways of understanding and responding (Alperovitz & Speth, 2015; Meadows, 2008). Meadows suggests that systems theory helps us to better understand parts of systems, to see interconnections, to more readily think about future behaviors of systems, and to be more creative and fearless in redesigning systems.
Following a systems theory model helps us reinvigorate our intuitions, making our lives and our world better (Meadows).

How does the notion of systems theory relate to The Nile Project? The issues facing the Nile basin region in East Africa are clearly a systems problem. There are multiple stakeholders. The sharing of the water has to be accomplished by all involved in a order for the system to work for all. For example, putting a dam up in one spot may help one country like Ethiopia, but then others might suffer drought. The people of the Nile basin and the various political leaders that govern this area make up another system, which has functioned in a certain way up until this point. Additionally, the Nile River itself is part of an ecosystem. Whatever changes are made to the river will also have an effect on the people, animals, and that ecosystem there, which needs to be considered when addressing this complex issue.

Considering all these layers and the complexity of the problem, seeing this issue facing the Nile basin area as a systems problem encourages stakeholders to think differently about the issue (Meadows, 2008). Systems thinking requires creative and holistic thinking and reminds those invested that change in one area affects another. Solutions demand big picture thinking rather than quick fixes that can create further problems (Meadows, 2008). Solving systems issues, claims Meadows, is about finding the “leverage” point. What change can happen in one part of the system that can help transform the entire system for the better?

A paradigm shift. The notion of a “leverage point” is a key aspect of systems theory and is defined as a small change, that if realized, can change the entire system
One of the most powerful leverage points, identified by Meadows, is a shift in the paradigm or mindset from which the system arises. Essentially, it involves changing the perceptions and the beliefs of those involved and the deep held assumptions that exist. Meadows, rearticulating the seminal theories of Thomas Kuhn about paradigm shifts in science, explains how this shift can be attained: (1) by continuing to voice the failure of the current paradigm and by (2) supporting the new paradigm by speaking out, loudly and often, and (3) by “insert[ing] people with the new paradigm in places of public visibility and power” and by “work[ing] with active change agents and with the vast middle ground of people who are open-minded” (Meadows, p.18). While all three of these efforts are being accomplished by The Nile Project, the later is most closely aligned with their work. In an effort to accomplish this shift, people inside the paradigm have to experience something different, something outside the paradigm in order to help them to envision a new reality, one that is alternative to the current system.

It is my belief that The Nile Project is attempting to intervene in the system by changing the paradigms and mindsets of society on a variety of levels, political and social, and in various locales: the Nile basin, the continent of Africa, and the world. Their world tours and workshops and classroom visits are intended to change perceptions and assumptions about Africa including some of the negative perceptions articulated by one student during a classroom visit, who admitted that all she knew about Africa was that it was a place where there were starvation and wars. In contrast, the new reality put forth by The Nile Project is one of cooperation, cultural significance, and hope. There is also an attempt to change the mindset of those living in the Nile basin area to see themselves as

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neighbors instead of adversaries, as embodied on stage and in the relationships of the musicians.

The Nile Projects’ performances model a united Africa, with the various musicians from a variety of countries on stage together and relating to each other in a joyous and friendly way. This organizations’ high profile and highly visible status, particularly its involvement of well-known musicians, are placing it on the level of a paradigm shift that Kuhn and Meadows consider effective. Shank and Schirch (2008) also argue that music performances in the public eye create a platform, and that the high profile and media attention works to “escalat[e] the intensity of a conflict so it cannot be ignored” (p. 221). At the time of the writing of this dissertation, The Nile Project was highlighted in two consecutive episodes of BBC Radio. In 2013, they were on national television, Al Jazeera Live Egypt, one of the largest news organizations in the country, as well as covered in world press by National Public Radio and the *New York Times*. Additionally, they presented live performances in Egypt and Ethiopia in 2014 with musicians of high profile such as Dina El Wedidi, a star in Egypt.

**Presencing.** Otto Scharmer (2009), a follower of systems thinking, identifies another key way to enact change in a system, which he calls “presencing,” defining it as learning from the future as it emerges. In other words, this idea of presencing is that solutions to problems can only be accomplished with a greater attending to the other and the issues with empathy and understanding and a deeper form of listening. Scharmer equates this to the ways that artists attend to a work of art. Presencing also depends on dialogue and the telling of stories, which are both outcomes of The Nile Project.
Moreover, perhaps music, in its attention to listening and the way it engages emotions, may make it an exceptional tool to encourage presencing.

Zambaleta

One way to reach a tipping point politically through music or “noise” is through zambaleta, a concept that has not been researched, but was imparted by Girgis in his interview and foundational to what he is hoping to achieve with The Nile Project. Zambaleta is an Egyptian slang word for a kind of party in the streets. The idea is that there is a loud sound, be it music or noise or something in between, that creates such a disturbance that people are drawn to it and get involved and participate.

Girgis describes zambaleta:

It’s like, you’re sitting here and you hear like a raucous outside and you’re like, ‘I don’t know what that is?’ It’s like interesting, there’s like a bunch of people, like a big circle of people, a bunch of kids in that garden outside and they are like making a lot of noise and you don’t know where the noise is, to the point of, you don’t know if they are fighting or if the noise means they are partying. (…) It’s like that space between music and noise, so if you are intrigued by that, you run outside. (…) You only find out what it is by going from the periphery to the center. That’s because the source is in the center. And there are lots of people around so they [cover it] – but most of them are like also participating – like if you want to get to the focal point where it’s coming from you have to go to the center. And as you go from the periphery to the center, and you discover what it
is, you engage with it the way that everybody else has engaged with it in order for it to grow to what it is that attracted you. So it has like this magnetic effect.

Girgis also explained that a zambaleta can be a powerful political motivator and in his opinion one such zambaleta helped to “tip the scale” in the Egyptian revolution (personal communication, April 16, 2015).

Understanding how The Nile Project connects to zambaleta was unclear. The Nile Project is not a zambaleta itself, as a zambaleta cannot be premeditated; it has to be spontaneous. But Girgis explained that you can create an environment for a zambaleta. So perhaps The Nile Project is doing just that, creating a conducive environment where a tipping point (or zambaleta) can occur. Perhaps when people see this show, this group, they too become curious and want to know more leading them to participation and leave the periphery.

**Music Touches an Emotional Chord**

One reason that music may be a unique tool for peacebuilding is how it arouses emotions in humans (van de Dungen, 2008). As was discussed in the review of literature, many studies have found that the emotional response gained by using music in the peac building process was effective (Brooks, 2010; Lance, 2012; Urbain & Opiyo, 2015; van de Dungen). One concept that was revealed in the review of literature, that was not a strong finding in this study but begs further attention, is the notion of “collective vulnerability” (Jordanger, 2008, p. 129). This notion may help explain why music is a powerful tool for peacebuilding.
Collective vulnerability. Jordanger (2008) describes collective vulnerability as a heightened awareness, a collective mental state that occurs as people all listen to the same music. In this state, people are able to emote in a non-threatening way, and share a common experience, in which “negative emotions, particularly unacknowledged shame and anxiety, may be transformed into positive emotions and possibly a state of flow in the group” (Jordanger, 2008, p. 137). This common experience allows participants to see connections between themselves, encouraging them to open up and engage in dialogue.

The findings of this study did not reveal a great amount of evidence of collective vulnerability in this study, but that may be because the research took place during the tour and after the residencies. The residencies, where the musicians first encountered each other and first created music together, would have been a better place to evaluate the existence of collective vulnerability. However, it is worth noting that there were some references to a certain sense of vulnerability that music elicited in the participants. For example, in Kasiva’s explanation of the learning she did when she was involved in One Beat,11 it is clear that musicking and the talent musicians displays, elicits emotions in her:

There was this guy who landed at the airport with two maracas, just two maracas. And I was like, why is this guy even here? And when he went on stage, I remembered; I cried while he was playing, because the things he did with these two maracas. They’re just two shakers for heaven’s sake. But what he did, it’s like mind blowing. (personal communication, April 15, 2015)

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11 OneBeat is another music organization dedicated to conflict transformation (see p. 36 for more details).
The notion of being humbled in the presence of other musicians, in addition to her emotional response indicates a sense of vulnerability in the presence of music.

Girgis also references vulnerability in his explanation of their project, “Today this is really about that vulnerability – coming on stage and sharing something – sharing music is one of those things that we really feel strongly about” (personal communication, field notes, April 14, 2015). Music, especially performing music, makes one vulnerable. As musicians expose themselves and their work on stage, they pave the way for a collective emotional experience as described by Jordanger (2008). This concept of collective vulnerability is something that begs further study. Jordanger’s (2008) research revealed that collective vulnerability encouraged the participants in his studies to engage in dialogue despite anger and distrust. Collective vulnerability may be a key tool for encouraging conflict transformation.

**Implications**

This study has clear implications for research and practice. Detailed implications for each will be discussed in the following section.

**Implication for Research**

The first implication of this study is the contribution it makes to the small area of research on the use of music in peacebuilding. The findings in this study suggest that music may be an effective tool for transforming conflict. Too often peacebuilding initiatives fail (Lance, 2012). Lance shared a statistic reported by the World Bank that nearly 50% of all countries receiving peacebuilding aid, do not succeed. Considering this
staggering reality for general peacebuilding processes, it is vital to search for other means
to achieve conflict transformation, including arts based peacebuilding.

Musicking has been shown to help build relationships, to create opportunities for
learning, and to offer practice in conflict transformation on the micro level, all of which
have been identified as a means towards peacebuilding (Galtung, 2015; Lance, 2012;
Lederach, 2005). The collaborative process of making music requires a level of
participation that demands listening on a deeper level and being attuned to the other, what
Scharmer (2009) calls “presencing.” Making music together, specifically across cultural
and musical boundaries, requires each participant to give up something in order to make
something new, embodying what Lederach (2005) calls the moral imagination.
Musicking demands communicating on a new level. As Jorga shared, the work of The
Nile Project encouraged a musical conversation between the western and eastern musical
scales, where neither one dominated. The musicians were able to accomplish unity in
diversity by finding something new in the “conversation between the two scales” (Jorga,
personal communication, April 14, 2015). In this sense, The Nile Project is modeling a
new way to transform conflict; one that mimics what Lederach suggests is a more
sustainable one by creating something new instead of a binary solution where one side
“wins”.

If musicking succeeds as a new way to transform conflict, then it means that
music may help to inspire people to connect and problem solve in a larger context. The
process of engaging in conversations on another level – of attending to the other through
music – may help people envision alternative solutions, greater than one person could
imagine on his or her own. The evidence provided in this study adds to a small body of research that affirms the use of musicking as an effective peacebuilding tool, which may support policy and funding for arts based peacebuilding.

A second implication of this study involves support for arts based research. The use of arts based research methods was critical to the effectiveness of this study, which had music at the core of its mission. Due to focus of this study, it was imperative to have an ear for music throughout the process, from collecting and analyzing the data to writing and presenting the findings. Perhaps most notable was the use of musicking in the interview process. Playing the ukulele for my interviewees and sharing my voice in song before delving into the interview acted as an icebreaker, helped alleviate some tensions, and possibly acted to change the power dynamic. It made me as vulnerable in the sharing of my voice as the participants may have been in the sharing of their stories. Jorga expressed his appreciation of the effort, saying that it was so different from other interviews where he felt pressure from having all the attention on him. In Kasiva’s interview, I was not able to tune my instrument, so I had to give up and sing a tune *a cappella*. This mishap ended up being rich material for dialogue, with Kasiva even using it as an analogy in her interview. The musical exchange also provided an opportunity for learning, as Kasiva had never seen a ukulele before. This process mimicked very closely what may have occurred in the first meeting of The Nile Project musicians, and therefore was an ideal way to initiate a discussion with the participants.

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12 To sing without musical accompaniment
This experience adds to a small but growing body of research in support of arts based methodologies in qualitative research.

Implications for Practice

This study also has a few noteworthy implications for practitioners of arts based peacebuilding. Key implications include: conducive environment, shared leadership, and the importance of music making.

Conducive environment. Based on the review of literature and some of the findings in this study, it appears to be important for arts based peacebuilding initiatives to consider environment. This study suggests that environment plays a role in setting the tone for collaboration and dialogue, helping participants feel safe and welcome. For example, Jorga thought the residencies of The Nile Project resembled a family reunion, with food and festivities, which may have encouraged the feeling of being family and friends. Jordanger (2008) affirms that environment plays a role. His use of Guided Imagery with Music sets the tone for collective empathy and emotion, and later dialogue.

Girgis was intentional about the environment that The Nile Project created for their residencies, utilizing a number of processes that set the tone for their collaboration including: Appreciative Inquiry, The U-Process, and The Art of Hosting. Appreciative Inquiry was not discussed in this study but is a well-known organizational change technique that begins with considering what is positive about the issue (e.g., Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Scharmer’s (2009) U process is also foundational to the work of The Nile Project. It demands intentionality about space, time, and the environment. According to the U process, the physical space must be empty, free of clutter and basically a blank
slate. Use of time is important, too. Not only must organizers allow for enough time, but they must also be sure to have an “energy” in the flow of time. Making some connection with the participants before the meetings is also important, beginning the important step of relationship building. The Art of Hosting is also very specific about the environment they establish for the methods they use. People who hold the meetings are called “hosts” to evoke a welcoming environment. Participants are encouraged to sit in a circle, making sure that all are seen, feel included, and are heard, adding to the welcoming environment.

Although there is no evidence from this study to support the effect the surroundings and natural environment has on the effectiveness of The Nile Projects’ program, the residencies for The Nile Project are set along the glorious Nile River in beautiful surroundings. Jordanger suggested that the natural environment may have played a role in the successful GIM sessions he conducted, which were also in a beautiful natural surrounding including a beach (personal communication, January, 9, 2016). The role of the natural surroundings in arts based peacebuilding may be an area for further research.

Although there is not one sure way to create a conducive environment for arts based peacebuilding, being purposeful seems to be vital to its success. It appears that participants in arts based peacebuilding need to feel welcomed and safe in the process in order to collaborate and participate in open and honest dialogue.

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13 The Art of Hosting is an approach to leadership that encourages dialogue and co-creation for problem solving. Typical methods used in the Art of Hosting are Circle, Appreciative Inquiry, and World Café (for more information see “Art of Hosting” in the review of literature on p. 60).
**Shared leadership.** The Nile Project is also committed to shared leadership in the collaborative process, which means that musicians had a lot of control over the initial process of music making. They switched roles from teacher to student, lead vocalist to chorus member, and initiator of a new piece to collaborator. This shared leadership may also be an important aspect to consider in arts based peacebuilding. One noteworthy study is Riiser’s (2010) investigation of the Divan Orchestra. Riiser suggested that the leader of this orchestra was especially domineering, which did not lead to participants feeling safe to engage in dialogue and share their feelings. Similarly, Shank and Schirch (2008) suggest that the elicitive model (based on the work of Lederach), which encourages the sharing of leadership, is particularly effective. In the elicitive model, everyone teaches and learns, and the focus is on co-creation and a high level of participation by all. Considering these findings, practitioners may want to find ways to share leadership in their peacebuilding efforts.

**Music making versus music performance.** One last implication to consider when using music in conflict transformation is the value of music making, not just music performances. Some research suggests that musical performances alone are not effective enough to transform conflict (Bergh, 2007; Bergh & Sloboda, 2010). In their review of literature on the use of music and art in conflict transformation, Bergh and Sloboda found that the effectiveness of the program depended on active participation in music making. Bergh’s had the same findings. His study on the program Klangrikt Feelesskap (Resonant Community) in Norway, reported that musical performances were not enough to have lasting positive effects on a community. The project was initiated to combat what the
organizers considered growing racism in Norway due to increasing immigration from countries such as Africa, Asia, and Pakistan. The organizers believed that if they introduced young students to traditional music and performances from these countries, there would be an increase in understanding and a decrease in negative attitudes about “the other.” However, Bergh found that the musical program did not change participants’ attitudes at either the time of the program or after, despite reports that it did. Bergh suggests that this lack of change in attitudes was due to a corresponding lack of connections between programming and actual student’s lives. In addition, students were passive versus active during the program, watching performances instead of making music together. This current study supports Bergh’s finding. The emphasis on musical collaboration in The Nile Project appears to have been one of the strongest ways that peacebuilding was realized.

**Limitations of this Study**

There were a few limitations that may have impacted this research and would be important to consider if replicating this study. First, due to time and budgetary constraints, the data collection process was limited to The Nile Projects’ tour stop at one university. While the data collected during the tour yielded some findings, being present at the residency would have been fruitful in helping to understand how the collaborative process was accomplished in the actual musicking process.

A second limitation to the study was the small number of participants. Due to time sensitivities, the need to accomplish the research while the group was in the US, and the limited English skills of some musicians, only three musicians were able to
participate in the study. In future studies, it would be ideal to have more of the musicians interviewed to share their experiences with the collaborative process of music making. More participants would add valuable data to a limited amount of qualitative research on musicians’ experiences in music and peacebuilding.

There was also a third limitation of time, which only allowed for one interview with the participants. Due to the musicians’ busy schedule during the tour, there was not time to conduct a second interview with the participants. Email exchanges did occur after the tour, but limited information was gained from these communication attempts. Upon analyzing the findings, it became apparent that additional questions asked of the musicians would have helped to understanding how musicking could act to encourage conflict transformation. These potential additional questions will be explored in the next section.

**Areas for Future Research**

Since there is a dearth of empirical evidence on the use of music to transform conflict, more research is needed in all aspects of the process (Urbain, 2015). However, this study revealed some specific areas that would benefit from further research. Three suggested focuses will be outlined here:

1) How did the musicians navigate unity in diversity in the musicking process, providing more detailed exploration of how negotiations were accomplished? Most specifically, how did the musicians decide on which scale to use as well as make other musical decisions that affected the compositions?
2) If and how the act of collectively creating music with a diverse group of musicians acts to challenge assumptions and change perceptions of the other (Lance, 2012)? How did this occur and what was the result?

(3) If “collective vulnerability” (Jordanger, 2008) occurred in any way during the musicking process, how did this occur and what was the result?

Regarding the first focus area, the findings revealed that the practicing of peacebuilding may have mainly occurred during the musicking process. Therefore, observing the program residencies would be an important next step for understanding how music can be used to transform conflict. Further research could be focused on the musicking process and what occurs during this exchange that helps to contribute to conflict transformation.

Regarding the second focus, midway through the analysis of data, it was discovered that musicking might potentially be a means to challenge assumptions and change perceptions (Lance, 2012). This notion is an area that needs further research, as the interview questions in this study did not address this in any way. While the findings hint that some assumptions of the other were challenged, this area needs further exploration, as it has been identified as a necessary stage in conflict transformation (Lance).

Finally, Jordanger’s (2008) notion of collective vulnerability seems to have great potential for understanding why music may be a particularly effective tool for peacebuilding. Since this concept was revealed after data collection, it was not explored.
in any depth in this study. However, this would be an excellent source for further research, as there appears to be a limited empirical evidence to support it.

In addition to these three central topics, this study raised a few other issues worth investigation. The idea of zambaleta, and how such a spontaneous event could engage participants in conflict transformation, would be an excellent source for future research; especially since there has up to this point been no formal study on the subject. Additionally, how the natural surroundings may play a part in setting a conducive environment for effective peacebuilding, was not answered by this study, but would be an interesting question to investigate.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to find out what The Nile Project could teach us about the use of music to encourage collaboration among people with diverse languages, musical and cultural traditions, and perhaps political views. The findings provided some evidence that music, specifically musicking, can act as a step towards conflict transformation on a micro level. It was revealed that new relationships were formed among musicians as well as new understanding of the other. Rather than seeing people as citizens of the country on the other side of the conflict, musicians now saw each other as fellow Africans, musical partners, and potentially neighbors and friends. Music acted as a bridging agent for these participants, stimulating their curiosity about the other and the other’s musical traditions and instruments. Curiosity helped to initiate dialogue and to inspire learning and new understandings of each other. One specific finding was that The
Nile Project gave the musicians an opportunity to learn more about other Africans, something that was noted as a need by the musicians. Such benefits are foundational to peacebuilding (Lance, 2012; Lederach, 2005) and may even act to create a paradigm shift in this systems problem on a macro level. Not only might these musicians, who are esteemed in their countries, go back into their communities with this new understanding and act as ambassadors for change, but audiences are also getting a chance to see a new “tune” for Africa on stage: one of cooperation and hope. This new vision may pave the way for new ways to transform conflict in Africa, perhaps even to solve the water crisis facing the Nile basin area.

If Wheatley (2002) is correct, and change can happen from simple conversations about what people care about, then The Nile Project is an excellent breeding ground for conflict transformation. As Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” While there is not yet any documented change in perceptions and attitudes beyond the musicians’, there is the potential for positive understandings of ‘the other’ to spread as performances and workshops continue in Africa and worldwide. If Lederach (2005) is correct, the crisis facing the Nile basin will not be solved unless the people in the area initiate the change. He affirms that sustainable change must begin in the community and by the community, not by governments and outside forces. If this is the case, then The Nile Project may be on the right track starting the work with the musicians.

The notion that the people of the Nile basin can make change possible is foundational to the mission of The Nile Project and is substantiated by a report done by
the Wilson Center: “Since the inhabitants of a river basin play critical roles in the success of any international agreement, interstate negotiations should also include stakeholders beyond the national government” (Kameri-Mbote, 2007, p. 4). One of the policy initiatives established by the Wilson Center is a capacity-building one, to encourage various players from fishermen to women’s groups to get involved and close a gap between civil society and government (Kameri-Mbote). After this study, perhaps musicians should be added to this list. Angela Glover Blackwell puts forth a hopeful message in her discussion of models that are involving stakeholders in solving systemic problems in the US, but is true for systemic change in any nation: “People in this country are solving the problems themselves. They’re coming up with new models and strategies and within those models and strategies are the kernels of a systemic way to move forward” (Alperovitz & Speth, 2015). The Nile Project may be providing a new systemic way to move forward, creating harmony from dissonance in East Africa and beyond.

A Final “Note”

At the start of each performance of The Nile Project, Sophie from Rwanda enters stage alone. She plays the inanga, an ancient instrument, and sings in her native tongue. Sophie is the first female player to play the inanga in her country. As she plays and sings a haunting melody, one by one the other Nile Project musicians enter the stage to “The Welcome Song”. Although it is taboo for women to play the djembe in Africa, Kasiva moves to her drums. Some of which are traditional ones from Kenya and some adapted by her own hand. Hani, another percussionist from Egypt, enters next. He may play the daf or riq, traditional Egyptian drums, or the Ugandan long drum. It was shared that as
soon as the musicians from The Nile Project started to play together, they swapped
instruments often (The Nile Project- Full Performance : Live on KEXP, 2015). Nader,
from Cairo, next joins the musicians by playing the Kwala, or Egyptian style flute. Jorga
enters next and adds the sound of the Ethiopian saxophone. He often wears a scarf made
by Kasiva’s mother, as a sign of their “solidarity” (personal communication, January, 16,
2016). Dina, a singer from Egypt, takes her place on stage next to Jorga, despite political
divides between their two countries. When Selamnesh enters from Ethiopia, she adds her
own flavor, with vocals in Amharic. As the rest of the musicians join, including the rich
voice of Alsarah, in joy and collaboration, they create harmony from dissonance with a
new vision for Africa, music, and the Nile River.

Ya Abay Weha (Waters of the Nile)
By The Nile Project

Amharic

Ye abay weha motlo yefesal boy le boy
Minew behelme metah dehna
Ayedelehim woy

English

Year after year the Nile has
never failed to be a wellspring of life
If we have love and peace
it’s more than enough for all of us

If our love is true and from
the bottom of our heart
the Nile is enough to sustain all of us

It makes no sense to say “let it be mine”
when we can all drink from the Nile
and satisfy our thirst\(^{14}\)

\[\text{ عربي} \]

امتلأت مياه الليل
وغانت على جانيكه
رأيتك في أحلامي يا محبوبتي
وأنت لا ترى أن كنت بخير الليلة؟

\[\text{14 Ya Abay Weha (Waters of the Nile) performed by Selamnesh (Uganda): Original language: Amharic, 2014.}\]
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information Sheet

Research Information Sheet

Title of Study: The Nile Project: Orchestrating A New Leadership Model to Address Complex Social Problems.

Principal Investigator (PI): Kelly Mancini Becker

Faculty Sponsor: Juliet Halladay

Funder: The University of Vermont, CESS – Educational Leadership Program

Introduction
You are being invited to take part in this research study because you have been a key player in the development of The Nile Project organization and have valuable information to share about its purpose, development process, and your involvement in the program. This study is being conducted by Kelly Mancini Becker, a doctoral candidate at the University of Vermont.

Purpose
This study aims to understand and explore the processes this organization took to create a new and truly collaborative structure, which uses music as its binding agent to break down barriers in effort to encourage discourse and inspire action to solve real world issues.

Study Procedures
If you take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in an approximately one-hour interview. In the interview, you will be asked a few questions about your involvement with, and experience of the collaborative process involved in the Nile Project. However, there will be plenty of room to share your experiences due to the informal format. This interview will be recorded, so that my representation of your words are as accurate as possible, and so that I can return to this information at a later time.

In effort to follow a similar process to your work in the project, the researcher will ask if you are willing to participate in a short music making session (approximately 20 minutes) where the researcher will teach you a song, you teach a song, and we attempt to put them together in one song. The addition of this unusual protocol is to stay in alignment with the
process this organization took in its use of music to inspire dialogue and break down any barriers to an open and honest discussion. It is my hope this procedure will do the same for the interview process. You may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview, but this will be totally voluntary.

**Benefits**
As a participant in this research study, there is no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future. It is my hope that your organization can provide a model for other performing arts groups that hope to inspire and ignite participants in systematic and social change.

**Risks**
We will do our best to protect the information we collect from you during this study. We will not collect any information that will identify you or use your name unless you are willing and interested to have your name (and instrument) included in the written published product.

**Costs**
There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

**Compensation**
You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality**
At the onset of our interview, you will be asked if you would like to use your real name or choose another name (alias) that will be used throughout the study and in the published materials. If you choose to be unidentified, all information collected about you during the course of this study will be stored with a code name (only I will know the code name and its connection to your real identity) This system will (1) allow me to contact you for future interviews in the case I need clarification and or additional data (2) It will allow you to check and agree to any written data that will be used in the published study to ensure I have properly represented your meaning. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Once the interviews have been listened to the repeatedly, and transcribed, they will be destroyed.
All information gained from our conversations will be kept on a password - protected computer and on a secure university network. The study will be conducted over the course of a year. If information is needed beyond that date, the participants will be asked if the information could be used in future studies.
Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal
Taking part in this study is voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. Any previous gathered information will be deleted and not used in the research study. Beginning the interview is a sign that you have read, heard and agreed to be a participant, which will be noted as implied consent.

Questions
If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact me, Kelly Mancini Becker, at the following phone number (802) 233-7562 or by email at kelly.becker@uvm.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, then you may contact the Director of the Research Protections Office at (802) 656-5040.

SURVEY participant script:
My name is Kelly Mancini Becker, and I’m a researcher from the University of Vermont. I am conducting research with The Nile Project and as observer of either the performance, this class presentation or both, you have valuable information to share with us on your response to this group. This Nile Projects’ mission is to “inspire, educate, and empower” therefore the questions in this survey are aimed to see how this group may or may not have achieved this mission during this visit.

If you are willing, and are 18 years or older, please fill out the survey that is being distributed. Do not put any names on the survey so that there is no way to connect the information you provide with you. There is neither any compensation for participating or ramification for not. This survey has no impact on your grade or participation in this course. But know that your thoughts and feedback are important in understanding the impact of this program, which may add to a growing body of knowledge on the use of the arts in education, advocacy and action.
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The Nile Project
Kelly Mancini Becker, UVM- Dissertation Proposal
Interview Protocol

*Interview will begin with the reading of the IRB information sheet and gaining consent and a music making activity.

Questions (but it is a semi-structured format and may veer slightly from these initial questions):

1. What were some of the reasons that you began the project and or got involved in The Nile Project?

2. Can you share some of your initial experiences working with the group? How were sessions organized during the initial residences?

3. What were some of the initial processes you underwent to make music together?

4. What have you learned from this process?

5. What were your initial thoughts on the water issues associated with the Nile before you joined this organization? Were you involved in the conversation before your work with this project?

6. What are your thoughts about the water issues facing the Nile now? Has the project had any impact on how you think about the Nile water issues, your part in this issue, and ways to address social issues in the future?

7. Thinking from the start of the project (when you joined to now), what are some experiences you have had that have made you think about the role of music in addressing social issues?

8. What has it been like to work with musicians from so many different countries? How has it, if it has, changed your musical style and / or your feelings about music and musicians from other countries?

9. What is your intention for next steps with this organization? What are some of your hopes for your involvement and the future of the program?
Appendix C: Student Participant Survey

Survey

1. Did you enjoy the workshop or class visit?
   1- not at all   3- kind of   5- very much

2. Did you learn something new about the Nile Basin?
   1- nothing new   3- some   5- A lot

3. If your workshop/class used live music, did it have an impact on the workshop or class visit?
   1- not at all/ don’t think so   3- a little bit   5- greatly

4. If the musicians shared some of their experiences and perspectives in your workshop/class, did it enrich the experience?
   1- not at all/ no sharing done   3- Somewhat   5. It made a big difference

5. Do you see a connection between the music and the issues with the Nile?
   1- not at all/ not really   3- kind of   5- a strong connection

6. Has the workshop or class visit made you more curious about the Nile?
   1- not really   3- kind of   5- yes, very curious

7. What are the chances that you might look into social/environmental issues that concern you or your community after hearing about this project?
   1- not likely   3- I might   5. Very likely

8. What aspect of the workshop was most compelling to you? Why?
9. What is one thing you learned today that you would take away? What is one question you still have?
**Appendix D: Coding Manual**

Stage 1 Coding: A priori codes based on initial conversations and early literature review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Any connection made to being curious, be it about music, about each other, etc.</td>
<td>“I actually felt that we are not curious enough as a country.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music as educator</td>
<td>Any reference to learning: be it about music, about each other, about Africa</td>
<td>“I think it’s a brilliant initiative and I believe that music is the ultimate way to educate people about each other.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music inspires</td>
<td>Any reference to the “power” of music to inspire either musicians or audiences</td>
<td>And when he went on stage, I remember .I cried while he was playing because the things he did with these 2 maracas.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration/</td>
<td>Any talk of musicians working together</td>
<td>“So being in that space of collaborative, being able to actually collaborate with other people and see what sort of the world has to offer was like; it was eye opening for me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>The idea that musicians are expressing understanding of each other</td>
<td>“He told me it was a collaborative kind of space, just like One Beat.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>References made to learning new things</td>
<td>And then being here and discovering .oh my god. These people have fiddles, lyres. We literally share the same instruments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music as Change agent</td>
<td>Any discussion of music as helping to encourage change on any level</td>
<td>It deepened my comprehension of that process (of how music can be used in addressing social issues).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Any reference to the process of making music and or collaborating or working on the project as being challenging</td>
<td>There definitely was (challenges in that first residency)...There was a lean to take it to a more Egyptian side. And it was something I really hated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stage 3 Coding: Final list of codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning</th>
<th>At this point- learning/education and discovery were all combined to mean ANY learning that was a result of the program.</th>
<th>“Every country has its own language and within that country every sub group has its own accents in its language and so learning of that from each, that’s the point.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Doing things in a different way, change in thinking- musically or otherwise as a result of TNP</td>
<td>“Because we are used to doing things in a certain way, we feel obliged to do them in that way. And we actually we don’t give ourselves space to start thinking of other ways of doing something.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music connects people</td>
<td>Any reference to how music is a bridge for people; love of music or love of music in the region as a reason to bring these musicians to the collaborative process</td>
<td>“Using songs as a means or a media of exchange is sort of like the best way to connect people together because who doesn’t love music.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td>This can be a reference to the group as having the intention for dialogue, but more pertinent is any evidence that the group encourage dialogue.</td>
<td>“process of engaging people to have conversations on another level- to see different perspectives to hopefully people to see alternative solutions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispelling biases/ confrontation assumptions</td>
<td>Any reference to musicians having biases or preconceived notions about the “other” and any evidence that there was a change in how felt about the “other” as a result of the project.</td>
<td>“We all come with our cultural baggage. I had prejudices that I had to get rid of.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African identity/ Pan African</td>
<td>Any reference to African identity- or wanting to create a Pan Africa-</td>
<td>“I’m also.. a Pan African. As far as my personal view on life and how the world show be.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Any evidence that new and or stronger relationships have been built as a result of the project.</td>
<td>Change starts at home. Starts in you and being the kind of musicians that go out to get to know fellow musicians from like my neighbors and my community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity in diversity</td>
<td>Any reference either directly or by example of allowing for difference to be allowed while still creating unity.</td>
<td>To learn something and to use it you much sacrifice something.- something must bend. But things that are bent and things that you sacrifice and give up. They don’t have to be forgotten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducive environment</td>
<td>Any reference to an conditions that encouraged conversations, collaboration, etc.</td>
<td>“it was like a family reunion....it had a camp atmosphere”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music allows for opportunities to practice peacebuilding</td>
<td>Any reference in the text that demonstrates the challenge it takes to negotiate to make music collaboratively- and how it may mirror the peacebuilding process.</td>
<td>Yes you can. Have you ever been with a musician in a room? It’s just as personal. We can go to war over a wrong note.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Any reference to the need for or lack of opportunities for Africans to work together/ get to know other Africans.</td>
<td>“we know precious little about each other in the Nile basin, very very little.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>