Global Civil Society for Peace and Human Rights: Communicative Dimensions and Performative Effects of the International Accompaniment of Peace Brigades International in Colombia and Sri Lanka

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Abstract:
Since its implementation in Latin America in the early eighties, international accompaniment has been consolidated as an effective tool to increase the political space for local activist and communities. Under oppressive regimes or in situations of armed conflict, the fundamental work of peace activists (campesino leaders, trade unionists, human rights defenders and so on) becomes especially difficult, having to face threats, kidnappings, desapariciones, torture and killings, among other forms of aggression and suppression.

In this context, the global civil society can channel its soft power and capacity of having a bearing on the armed parties in order to achieve a rise of the space for local peaceful action. This can be made through international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) offering protective accompaniment on the ground, such as Witness for Peace, Fellowship for Reconciliation or Peace Brigades International, to mention the most representative.

A model that I defend in this paper, relies on a communicative body that is both verbal and non-verbal in its systematic and periodic meetings with the authorities at all levels, diplomats and other actors (INGOs, local associations and groups, international organizations, etc.). This communicative body is also manifest in the activation of the emergency network, in the spreading of reports, bulletins, press releases, and so on. It is basically due to this extensive communicative movement that the required conditions for the work of INGOs providing protective accompaniment are fulfilled.

The analysis of the still poorly researched relationship between nonviolent civil intervention and communication, its conceptual foundations and action dynamics, will be illustrated with Peace Brigades International and its tasks in Colombia and Sri Lanka, both areas of quite different armed conflict in which an international actor as Peace Brigades has adjusted its working practices to local circumstances.
Peace Brigades, I argue, puts in practice a nonviolent accompaniment model based upon communicative strategies. These strategies not only perform activities in themselves in the shape of compromises, but also facilitate the achievement of positive goals, namely: 1) Protection and security; 2) Encouragement and empowerment of the accompanied; 3) International visibility of civil society and peace initiatives in Colombia and Sri Lanka; 4) Monitoring of the situation and denunciation of human rights abuses. Effects that, I defend, can be read in the language of needs and satisfactions and constitute an integrative part of what has been characterized as human security.

Hence, this research paper hopes to be a driving force for further research on the role of communication in the search for peaceful transformation of armed conflicts and social change, with special interest in latent potentials, internal mechanism and relational networks of international accompaniment. Over and above the mentioned case studies, the communicative model of non-violent intervention can be extrapolated to other conflicts and situations, with local adaptations.

The theoretical reference framework of this paper is built mainly upon the philosophy of language coming from the J.L Austin and J. Searle and speech acts theory, with some influence of the theory of communicative action stated by J. Habermas and the philosophy of peace developed by Vicent Martínez Guzmán. Moreover, it is also a review of conceptualizations such as human needs and human security, following authors such as Max Neef, Amartya Sen or Martha C. Nussbaum. Along with the latter, reflections over power (H. Arendt, J.Nye), nonviolence (G.Sharp, B. Martin, W. Varney or M.López) and civil society (M. Kaldor, D. Held or J. Keane) are also taken into consideration as decisive parts of this paper. The theoretical construct is complemented with a discursive analysis and empirical material, obtained from personal interviews with members of Peace Brigades and accompanied local activists.