

Quotes from the book: “Nonviolent experiences in Haiti”

Peace Brigades International did not settle here definitively: that was not their mission. First and foremost they bore witness by virtue of their very *presence*, which was highly significant, at a time when others had cautiously chosen to seek shelter. By coming forward with humility, claiming neither to be the bearers of absolute truth nor even to be able to offer us any magic formulas, the Peace Brigades showed themselves to be true *companions* on a road towards a peace we could *build together*. ... Peace Brigades International have listened to Haiti and its population. Without passing judgment, they have tried to understand: with their minds, but also their hearts; with, moreover, the unshakeable desire to help. The experience was not perfect. We have learned that it was even frustrating for some of the volunteers.

Through this evaluation, the reader is invited to share the experience of Peace Brigades International in Haiti. In a world torn apart, it is a good thing to be able to associate with this *daily presence*, this *respectful accompaniment* weaving the fabric of *deep and true solidarity*.

Claudette Werleigh

As some of the contributors here point out: peace is not the goal, it is the path taken. Gandhi never spoke of achieving peace, but only of carrying out “experiments with truth.” You have in your hands a unique document evaluating PBI’s five year experiment with truth in Haiti. It isn’t a boring chronology, nor a self-congratulatory puff-piece, but a serious attempt to learn from the experience. It doesn’t hesitate to be self-critical. True to the educational methods developed in the field, the book uses a range of techniques to draw its lessons, from personal testimony to statistical social science.

PBI has always tried to demonstrate through the commitment and action of its own volunteers that even in desperate conflict situations, nonviolence is not only a moral choice, but also realistic and pragmatic option. We have seen in our two decades of fieldwork that in every conflict and every culture there are courageous people who are making nonviolence work, and who need encouragement and support. We have also come to see another important mission that of demonstrating alternative positive roles for “foreigners” based on mutuality and equality, in cultures where legacies of colonialism, violence and paternalism make this extremely difficult. Nowhere was this more true than in Haiti.

Liam Mahony

PBI Haiti observed and at times took part in debates over these issues, without seeking to favour any given individuals or political groups but rather to commit to democracy and peace. PBI Haiti's news bulletins were proof of this concern in Haiti itself as well as directed towards of the public opinion of the international community. By choosing to work in partnership with local NGOs, PBI wanted to encourage the disadvantaged and outcast realm of politics. By placing itself at the service of Haitian citizens working for peace and the respect of human rights, PBI contributed to democratic efforts. Thus the framework of Haitian political life helps to explain PBI Haiti's project strategy for the duration of its action in Haiti.

Gilles Danroc

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The aim of PBI's activities in Haiti was therefore never to propose ready-made solutions, but to contribute to the opening up of a space for exchange, reflection and training. The style and techniques of participative workshops seemed to be the most suitable in order to allow the participants to develop their own skills. The trainings for trainers aimed to create a broader base of trainers willing to respond to the great demand for this type of workshop from Haitian organisations.

Jürgen Störk

There is no doubt that the collaborative approach represents a symbolic turning point in the whole process, whereby initiators who are aware of their quality of being 'outsiders' and of the temporary nature of their work hand over their know-how to initiated partners who in turn are keen to test and validate their newly acquired knowledge. In this sense, it is a practice which is worth recognising, valuing and reproducing, not just by PBI elsewhere (which in fact has already happened) but also by the GFP trainers if they are going to work on increasing their own numbers and on spreading the message. Here too, the co-facilitation report for the KIROS in February 2000 clearly established the benefits of co-facilitation, following an experiment which was held to be a total success: "The GFP has played its role brilliantly".

Sabine Manigat

Global civil society is composed of thousands of organised groups, which make a commitment to protecting the environment or to human rights and nonviolence, as in the case of PBI. What is needed is a network, ready for action, which locates as much decision-making power as possible at the lowest levels. Organisations like PBI can, in the context of a global civil society, make problems visible, call the powerful to render accounts, extend the process of public decision-making and democratise societal structures.

When people stand with their backs to the wall, they risk retreating into themselves, or simply fleeing blindly forwards. For precisely this reason are organisations like PBI so important. They lend strength to people who are in desperate situations. The consolidation of civil society requires a global solidarity. It sets as a precondition - with a view to a bottom-up development process - the shoring up of independent local politics and identity. I wish PBI all the best in their valuable work.

Ueli Mäder

How can we evaluate the five years spent in Haiti? For a non-interventionist organisation like PBI, the question is not so much "What did WE accomplish?" as it is "Were we useful to THEM?", the THEM referring to the Haitians involved in a nonviolent way in working towards human rights and peace. Once the question is posed in this way, signs of encouragement are to be found not in the direct results of PBI's activities, but in the actions accomplished by our Haitian partners.

Marc Allenbach

Founded in 1981, PBI arrived in Haiti in 1995. A lot of ground had been covered therefore during this period. Haiti reaped the benefits of this experience, just as the Haitian experience of peace and active nonviolence education would benefit others. Thus, in addition to providing protective accompaniment, PBI can now proudly display an additional asset, since the time of its prolonged stay in Haiti from 1995 to 2000. The actions carried out are noteworthy in themselves, notwithstanding the difficulties and, no doubt, some disappointments as well. The men and women of Haiti who have been touched by PBI were also able to become better acquainted in their relations with each other.

It is a good thing to say that peace is the path we take to aim for it. The same thing applies to justice and for justice. The contents of this book are very apt in this respect; one must absolutely not forget Gandhi's aims: active nonviolence does not mean pacifism for the Mahatma. The two institutions which arose from this action, GFP and Shalom, still have their work cut out for them, if it is true that "if you don't fight against injustice or for justice, you lose your dignity."

Another result of PBI's action could be the publication of this report in Creole, for all of us!

Necker DESSABLES

In PBI's other projects, the main work is that of protective accompaniment. This implies above all a structural type of work: the presence of an international observer reduces risk and fear by enlarging the political space of local activists. This effect does not in itself represent any lasting change in the social structure. It does however enable local activists to work for a cultural and structural modification of their social environment towards a greater prevalence of justice and peace.

In Haiti, however, the requests received from Haitian organisations redirected the PBI project towards an essentially cultural work. The term culture, in this paragraph, is to be taken in the broader sense of the term, not as a reference to the differences between cultures but to distinguish it from the concept of structure (power relations, social organisation, etc.). Forums, participatory workshops and sessions of training for trainers are opportunities for the participants to share and to bring into play their perceptions, attitudes, and values. In this respect it is cultural work.

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Principles of nonviolence, impartiality and non-intervention, modest financial means, volunteers, life style and work in teams, decisions by consensus: all these aspects of PBI have helped our partners to change their usual image of international presence in Haiti. Because PBI displayed no material interest, they were able to offer a type of exchange in which they had no power of financial control, nor did they encourage corruption in any way. Because they did not operate according to any pre-established plans but only in response to requests, and because they were constantly careful to encourage a truly egalitarian intercultural exchange, PBI represented an alternative to a considerable number of Western training programs.

For example, PBI placed the question of "how to do it" before the question of "what to do"; social competency before knowledge; decision-making processes before level of expertise; the quality of relations before the quantity of accomplishments. Similarly, this book seeks in no way to propose a ready-made model or a strategy to be reproduced as is.

Haiti Project Committee

Conflict transformation in Haitian society is an immense and complex task, and it would have been naive to hope that this brief experience might suffice to resolve all the problems. I have appreciated the clear-sightedness and modesty displayed in the evaluation of this experience by the persons involved. The main impact was to be felt on the level of training, the strengthening of the Haitian partners' ability to take over the work of conflict transformation and peace promotion. It would seem indeed that the goal of any collaboration for lasting development must be the following: the outside collaborators must aim to attain, as quickly as possible, the rank of "useless servants." PBI's mission in Haiti has been accomplished, but others there have taken up the torch. The results are not, moreover, unilateral. Activists in Haiti have spoken of "tales of encounters so rich that we have all been transformed" or even of contacts where "we learned as much about ourselves as about our hosts" .

So there are a multitude of reasons why this eye-witness account ought to be read and why it should meet with success, both in Haiti and abroad.

Charles Ridoré

PBI volunteer work requires adapting to cultural differences, developing specific skills, responding to a variety of requests, taking into consideration the evolution of the situation, and maintaining a high quality of communication within the team and, by extension, within the project. The team must therefore confront a wide variety of stress factors; the volunteers' skills, particularly in the field of *savoir-etre*, are severely tested on a regular basis.

Haiti Project Committee
