

Coexistence International at Brandeis University

Peace and Peace Practitioners: a profession for a damaged world

Reflections after the gathering April 6-7, 2006

“Peace is a constant activity of diversity. Peace is not static. Rather, it is a constant exercise of respect for people. Peace follows a trajectory: personal peace, communal peace and lastly, world peace. If we continue to rule the world with the law of “an eye for an eye”, we will all end up blind”

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Argentine, 1980 Nobel Peace Prize.

In the recent gathering at Brandeis University, at Coexistence International, a group of thinkers met to discuss, to share ideas and opinions about the possibility to see Peace Building as a praxis.

What a Coexistence International and the praxis of art have in common is that both disciplines assume that “it can happen”.

An artist is, above all, an optimist, in that the root of the art practice departs from trust that something that is not existent yet, can become. That is the very kernel of a work of art. Artists envision a possible resolution to make real an intuition. Artists trust both the intuition and the craftsmanship with which the artist will convey the actual art piece. This craftsmanship is the result of experience, of discipline and commitment towards the artist’s vision.

And, although artists complete a piece and effectively succeed in accomplishing a vision in a form of a piece of art, it is frequently the case that artists see their work as a “work in progress”. When an artist is asked which is the most beloved or more successful piece as “so far? the answer most often than not, is: “The art work that is yet to be created”

In this way the artist addresses that art and art practice is an activity that requires commitment, professionalism and vigilance.

Analogies can be drawn between the creative process and the peace process, specially in what concerns the awareness that is a “work in progress” and the demand of commitment and vigilance that this may require.

A new category of practitioners of peace building/ peace workers is emerging. In this emerging, a question is being posed: a peace builder/ peace worker is infused by vocation or by professional training?

The question, although relevant, appears precarious in that peace makers and peace itself (or the possible acquisition of it) is not an absolute but a constant moving target, an *Aleph* (in Borgean definition) that contains a constellation of priorities, risks, legal prospects, legal propositions and/ or failures and a multitude of forces and people involved that manage to infer with the peace process.

Peace is escorted by urgencies.

Today, April 2006, Peace in Darfur means the imminent cease of fire, the stopping of genocide.

Peace in Argentina means to continue the rebuilding of inner economy to repair the catastrophic failure of 2001 that caused nearly 50% of unemployment polarizing a micro-group of wealth against a huge percentage of the population becoming impoverished and impotent to regain control of their means.

As there is state terror, there is also a market terror, an economic terror (terrorismo de mercado, terrorismo económico). Every time there is a child dying of hunger or malnutrition that child looks at us and declares that she/ he is a victim of that market terror.

Peace in Argentina today means to continue remembering the damage caused by the military junta thirty years ago. Argentines perform this act of remembrance as a cultural/ co existence resistance of the citizenship, committed to concur in an act of historical defiance.

In this defiance Argentina endures a peace process exempt from military intervention. Adolfo Perez Esquivel stated that : "armies are the confirmation of human fragility" and he has recommended that : " we, the people, needs to assume ourselves as protagonists of our own history"

It is in that assuming of the constituencies of the world as a community that the way to Peace is conveyed.

As peace and peace processes can not regarded as absolute, peacemakers and peace workers/ peace practitioners can arrive to this practice as the result of:

- Personal involvement/ personally affected by violence or state terror
- Personal experience or related to affected victims of violations of Human Rights
- Urgency to act
- Training and available tools
- Circumstances of possible impact in affecting the peace process
- Proficiency of local languages to establish communication with antagonistic groups

- Effective community networks and community alliances nationally and internationally to reinforce the demands of peace building
- Support of local, national and international legislation that legitimize the claim for peace and the peace process.
- International partnerships with intellectuals, legal figures, artists and cultural figures that commit unanimously to the claim for peace and justice.