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COOPERATIVE ACCOMPANIMENT AND PEACE BRIGADES INTERNATIONAL IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

International nonviolent protective accompaniment is a technique used by Peace Brigades International (PBI) to protect threatened human rights activists in Sri Lanka. PBI's accompaniment in two different cases shows how the strategic use of information by PBI helped to increase the safety of local activists. One case, that of an individual human rights activist, demonstrates the importance of coordination and networking as a threatened human rights activist fashioned working relationships with human rights organizations. Another case, that of members of a grassroots organization promoting nonviolent change shows that international networking and protective accompaniment extended the choices available to members of a grassroots group under threat, making it more possible for exiled leaders of the group to return to Sri Lanka and continue working for social and political change.

Human rights and nonviolent activists face a dizzying array of threats to their well-being.¹ Although astute activists may know how to exploit the political dynamics of these threats and turn them to their advantage, they may not always be able or choose to do so. Although

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structural remedies that address the roots of political violence are the preferred long-term solution, some short-term tactical responses that may facilitate the eventual implementation of structural solutions. International nonviolent protective accompaniment, one such technique, rests on the idea that the presence of unarmed international escorts alongside local activists can deter attacks. Violence and threats directed at foreign nationals, or those they are escorting, often result in higher political costs for the transgressors than the same actions directed at unaccompanied local citizens.

When members of a clan accompanied each other to the local watering hole for protection thousands of years ago, they were using simple protective accompaniment tactics. Like so much else in the early history of nonviolent action, these first applications were likely spontaneous and intuitive developments (Sharp 1973, 101). But accompaniment tactics evolved, becoming more complicated as human interactions grew and as people gradually learned more about the technique. Social movement history reveals that today's nonviolent tactics are often modifications or revivals of previously popular tactics (Oliver 1989). In the twentieth century, social movements committed to nonviolence began refining protective accompaniment techniques in a variety of contexts. Some of the most prominent examples come from the U.S. civil rights movement.

In the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, for instance, eight blacks accompanied by eight whites rode buses through the Upper South to test a 1946 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated seating on interstate travel. Sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Congress on Racial Equality, it was a forerunner of the more famous "Freedom Rides" through the Deep South in 1961, testing integrated seating on interstate bus travel and the integration of bus terminal facilities (Farmer 1985). The Freedom Summer of 1964, organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), brought nearly one thousand young white volunteers from the North to Mississippi to work alongside the mostly black SNCC fieldworkers attempting to register blacks to vote. The organizers calculated that the presence of whites would decrease the likelihood of violence and make it easier to turn to their advantage any violence that did occur (Sitkoff 1981).

Escorting opposition politicians or human rights activists from exile back to their home countries is not uncommon. Well-known examples include the violence-marked return of Benigno Aquino to the Philippines in 1983, and of Kim Dae Jung to South Korea in 1985 (Weston 1985). Peace Brigades International (PBI) escorted Rigoberta Menchu to Guatemala on five occasions prior to her receipt of the Nobel Peace

Prize in 1992. More generally, PBI's team in Guatemala has helped increase the political space necessary for dissident groups to grow and flourish, especially in the case of the Mutual Support Group for the Disappeared (Coy 1993; Mahony and Eguren 1997). Witness for Peace placed foreign nationals around Jalapa and throughout Nicaragua in the 1980s, attempting to deter an invasion of Nicaragua by counterrevolutionary forces or by the United States (Griffin-Nolan 1991). Weber (1993) concluded that small-scale initiatives like these hold great promise for relevancy and effectiveness.

Accompaniment forms vary, going beyond simply escorting threatened individuals. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visits political detainees to provide them with international visibility and protection from abuse while imprisoned (Blondel 1987). Amnesty International, and the International Committee of Jurists send international observers to trials where the rights of the accused are likely to be abrogated, or where human rights violations are raised (Ray and Taylor 1977; Weissbrodt 1982). Newmann and Weissbrodt (1990) claim that these visits can have a substantial impact on fair treatment being accorded the defendant.

Yet another variant of the accompaniment tactic is used by international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS), which send international observers to oversee elections where political intimidation, violence, or election rigging is probable. Sometimes, as in Haiti in 1993, these observer missions are not tied directly to elections, but rather they monitor human rights, opening space for political activity and facilitating the return of exiled political leaders like the deposed president Aristide. The UN and OAS abruptly removed their observers from Haiti in mid-October, 1993 in the face of rampant violence and repeated failures of the initiatives of international governmental organizations. That left the observers from Cry for Justice (a coalition of NGOs that included PBI) as the only international presence in large areas of the countryside.

Sri Lanka's parliamentary election period of July-August 1994 was marked by heavy levels of political violence and intimidation, including thousands of violent incidents and over twenty election-related murders (Inform 1994; Perera 1994). In response, Sri Lankan nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) set up a grassroots citizens' poll watch, with cooperation from the International Human Rights Law Group and PBI, who provided international observers and escorts to accompany the local monitoring teams (Coy 1994; International Human Rights Law Group 1994).

Peace Brigades International is a TSMO specializing in international

protective accompaniment. It was founded in 1981 by Gandhians and Quakers long active in international peace efforts. Significant deployments of PBI teams include Guatemala (1983-present), El Salvador (1987-1992), Sri Lanka (1989-present), Canada (1993-present), Colombia (1994-present) and Haiti (1995-present). PBI teams usually enter a region upon the invitation of an organization engaged in nonviolent struggle. Operating where political space is contested and democratic freedoms are compromised, PBI adopts a stance of nonpartisanship as it aids local activists attempting to secure political space within which human rights and nonviolent struggle may be more safely exercised. The organization has pioneered a model of nonviolent protective accompaniment by volunteer foreign nationals (Wiseberg 1991; Coy 1993, 1995).²

Functioning as international observers, PBI escorts are committed to and trained in nonviolence. Armed with cameras, notebooks, and sometimes cellular phones, they accompany only those who disavow the use of violence.³ Their presence may reduce the potential for violence and, in any event, allows PBI to publicize eyewitness accounts of violent incidents. The eyewitness nature of the accounts increases their credibility and significance: to be able to say, "We were there and we saw ..." amplifies a message considerably (Weissbrodt and McCarthy 1981).

Typical recipients of PBI accompaniment include journalists, trade unionists, human rights workers, indigenous peoples, health workers, refugee communities, religious figures, opposition politicians, and local NGOs under threat from governments or parastate organizations as a result of their nonviolent activities.

Protective accompaniment by PBI takes many forms, depending on the social and political dynamics of the conflict, the nature of the perceived threat, the recipient's preferences, and PBI's resources in the field. PBI's international escorts may provide constant, twenty-four-hour accompaniment. In other cases, they may be present only when a local activist engages in public actions and feels under increased threat. Or PBI personnel may simply make conspicuous visits to an organization's offices or an activist's home. These unpredictable visits are designed to heighten the international visibility of the local activist, thereby increasing the safe political space within which the activist can operate.

The deterrent value of the accompaniment depends upon clear and

2. Other NGOs, especially the Shanti Sena in India, have long done similar nonviolent interventionary work, but largely in a domestic context relying on local activists (see Weber 1993).

3. A grant from the European-based NGO Forum supporting PBI's escorting of election monitors in Sri Lanka allowed it to introduce cellular phones to its nonviolent action toolkit.

regular communications between PBI and governments, police and military forces, or paramilitary groups thought to be somehow responsible for the threat (Eguren 1994; Mahony 1997). Potential violators of human rights must understand that adverse publicity generated by PBI can bring increased domestic and international political costs in response to an attack.⁴

Like most transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs), PBI utilizes a number of institutional mechanisms to enhance its influence in the global political arena. The organization publishes a sixteen-page *Project Bulletin* ten times each year. Written by PBI teams in the field, it reports on their work while analyzing the politics and state of human rights in the countries where they are operating. Just as important may be the *Bulletin's* regular profiles of and interviews with local activists, which give voice to activists in the global South whose political struggles are often ignored by an international media dominated by Northern interests (Muzaffar 1992).

PBI has built an Emergency Response Network (ERN) consisting of about six thousand people across the globe who are linked through computer and telephone networks. ERN members receive action requests about threats and violent incidents facing PBI teams or those with whom they work. They then send letters, telexes, faxes and phone calls to government officials and others, calling for the correction of the perceived injustices. These communications tell perpetrators of political violence, "The eyes of the world are upon you."

A useful response network must be regularly maintained and updated, have clear commitments from its members to respond, and use the latest in computer technology, automated fax and telex generation, and delivery services. The availability of this technology is one of the reasons for the increased power and influence wielded by some TSMOs in global politics (Dorsey 1993).

Human Rights and Accompaniment in Sri Lanka

Long-running ethnic tensions in Sri Lanka exploded into overt civil conflict in 1983. The mainly Hindu Tamil minority (17 percent) came under severe attack by the largely Buddhist Sinhalese majority (74 percent) in July 1983. The rage ran its course in less than a month, leaving over 3,000 Tamils dead and turning close to 150,000 into refugees.

4. One of the most violent police attacks on PBI clients in Sri Lanka's Free Trade Zone (a frequent site of labor unrest and PBI escorting) resulted at least partly from the failure of the PBI team to directly communicate with and explain its mission to police officials in the Zone (Coy 1995).

Before July 1983, only small sectors of the Tamil community—primarily in the north and the east of the island—worked for an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka. Some, particularly the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), embraced armed insurrection. After the 1983 ethnic riots, however, much larger numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils agitated for an independent or semi-independent homeland, and many accepted armed struggle and terror tactics as a means of obtaining this goal (Hoole et al. 1992; UTHR 1992). In response, the Sinhalese-dominated government instituted a series of repressive internal security measures aimed primarily at the Tamil minority.

Meanwhile, a second front was opened up in the south against the embattled government by Sinhalese nationalists known as the Janatha Vimukthi Perumuna (JVP). Revolutionary Marxism mixed with Buddhist-Sinhalese chauvinism in the JVP to create a peculiar political force bent on revolution. An Indo-Lanka Peace Accord was signed between Sri Lanka and India in July 1987, introducing an Indian peacekeeping force in the Tamil-dominated north. The JVP exploited anti-India and anti-accord sentiments in the Sinhalese population and stepped up their revolutionary activities, including assassination, intimidation, torture, and other terror tactics (Chandraprema 1991).

In response to the twin threats it faced, the Sri Lankan government and its agents employed tactics that Sloan (1984) has called "enforcement terrorism," including summary executions, disappearances, secret arrests, torture, and prolonged imprisonment without trial.⁵ Many reliable estimates put the dead and disappeared related to the JVP rebellion at around 30,000.

The JVP rebellion was largely crushed by 1991, but the government's war with the LTTE continued unabated into 1995. Emergency Regulations and the Prevention of Terrorism Act are still in place, severely curtailing civil liberties (Hyndman et al. 1994, 48–64). Secret arrests and unlawful detention, combined with extortion and torture, are widely experienced by the Tamil minority at the hands of the Sinhalese-dominated police and military (Amnesty International 1994;

5. For international reports on general human rights conditions in Sri Lanka, see the reports of Amnesty International and Asia Watch. Also helpful is the Report of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, wherein the situation in Sri Lanka was termed the "worst ever" in the records of the Working Group (UN Working Group on Disappearances 1992). For domestic documents, see the reports of the nongovernmental groups INFORM and the Civil Rights Movement and the governmental Human Rights Task Force. An illuminating documentation of a significant case from this period is Batty Weerakoon's booklet, *The Extra-judicial Execution of Richard de Soysa* (1991, Colombo, Sri Lanka, self-published).

UTHR 1993). And although the number of disappearances has dropped significantly, they were still occurring as of 1995.

When PBI was first invited to Sri Lanka in 1989, very little political space existed there. The term *little political space* means that those who engage in even minimal oppositional political activity, human rights documentation and promotion, independent and critical media activities, trade union organizing, or other grass roots organizing are persecuted and under threat. It may also mean that those who simply express opinions critical of the governing regime risk violations of their fundamental civil and political liberties.

In Sri Lanka in 1989 human rights organizing was so suspect and political space was so closed that lawyers who were merely filing habeas corpus cases for the families of the disappeared and the arrested were themselves threatened and even disappeared. The Sri Lanka Bar Association invited PBI to provide accompaniment for those few lawyers still willing to take on fundamental human rights cases.

Governments repressing their own populations are reluctant to permit entry to groups seeking to expose and mitigate human rights violations. Therefore, PBI often sends its staff into countries under tourist visas, without identifying their organizational connections. Once in the country, and after establishing broad contacts among diplomats and domestic and international NGOs, PBI then approaches the local government with its organizational mandate, only then negotiating official status and terms of entry and residency.

This process may take months or years, during which time PBI continues its work in an unofficial, and at times even semiclandestine manner. Every situation is different, but relevant factors influencing whether and when a TSMO gains official status include the degree of governmental repression, the government's experience with international human rights monitoring, the status and prestige of the particular TSMO, the government's dependence upon and vulnerability to trade partner and donor nation pressures; the specific international human rights norms signed by the host nation and the degree to which the nation is "nested" (Meyer 1994) within international norms and institutions, and the degree of bureaucratic inefficiency (this may also be used as a foil for government foot-dragging in dealing with requests for official status).⁶

6. The PBI Central American Project, for example, only received the formal edict for the official status of its Guatemala team in March, 1995, despite having had a team there continuously since 1983. The lack of a formalized, official agreement regarding a team's status can work in favor of a TSMO, resulting in increased freedom for its teams. But it

The PBI exploratory team entered Sri Lanka in 1989 under tourist visas, as did the first members of the permanent team who soon followed. Although the team met with a number of top government officials in the summer of 1990, no agreement was reached on the team's official status. In fact, PBI did not seek formal status or register as an INGO until team members were denied extensions on their six-month tourist visas in the spring of 1991. At that time, international pressure orchestrated through PBI's Emergency Response Network helped advance negotiations of official visa and work arrangements between PBI and the government.

In 1997, PBI continued to provide protective accompaniment to threatened individuals and organizations as well as international observers for demonstrations and other public functions. In response to the mid-1995 escalation of the government's war with the LTTE, the PBI team began more intensive work in the war zone of the island's Eastern Province.

In what follows, PBI's work with two different parties is explored, providing a window into the role PBI's presence may sometimes play in the decisions taken by local activists. The first case concerns an individual human rights activist; the second focuses on a grassroots social movement organization.⁷

Protecting the Individual Activist

Tharmalingam Selvakumar is a Tamil who claims he was abducted, tortured, and detained for six days in January 1993 by the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP). He further claims that the EPDP attempted to extort one million rupees from his family in return for his

is even more likely to have the opposite effect. In fact, lack of official status and relations may compromise the deterrent dynamic of accompaniment by reducing the flow of information between the TSMO and the government. It may also constrain the teams, underscore the tenuous nature of their situation, and make them more timid and less prone to take risks that the work actually requires.

7. Much of the information on these cases was obtained during a participant observation study with the PBI team in Sri Lanka. In June 1993, I joined the team for three months, living in the PBI house in Colombo with the team of international volunteers and functioning as a member of the team. Utilizing standard qualitative research methods (Bogdan and Biklen 1992), I collected field notes based on my daily experiences and observations as a team member and on the many "informal interviews" that naturally occurred in my role as a participant observer. Formal, recorded interviews with recipients of PBI services, members of collegial organizations, diplomats, and police officials were conducted after I left the team. I returned to Sri Lanka and to the PBI team for one month in August 1994, continuing my participant observation research.

release (about \$21,000 in U.S. dollars). He says the EPDP turned him over to the police, who held him without charges. Selvakumar's family managed to pressure the government through a few high-ranking Tamil politicians, and he was released without charges after twenty-two days (Jabbar 1993).

A militant Tamil group with close ties to the Premadasa regime, the EPDP aided the Sinhalese-dominated government in its war with the separatist LTTE. The EPDP is known to use a variety of intimidation tactics against the civilian Tamil population, including extortion, occupation of homes, and forced recruitment (Oberst 1994). As recently as June 1993, armed groups of EPDP cadres operated openly in Colombo with the support of the government (many claimed that these armed groups were used by the government as a form of social control of the minority ethnic population of Tamils), ostensibly looking for LTTE "suspects" who came to Colombo from the LTTE-controlled north. Instances of kidnapping, extortion, and torture of these "suspects" by both the security forces and the EPDP were common in the Colombo Tamil community at this time (Amnesty International 1993).

A former EPDP sympathizer, Selvakumar let the EPDP use a family home in Madras, India. His EPDP interest may have been in reaction to troubles he had with the LTTE over the sale of some property in the north of Sri Lanka. In any event, he chose to disassociate himself from the EPDP; and it was then that he was allegedly kidnapped, tortured, and held illegally while the EPDP attempted to extort money from his family.

Selvakumar filed a fundamental human rights case in the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka against the police, the attorney general of Sri Lanka, and Douglas Devananda, the EPDP leader who Selvakumar claims was driving the van used in his abduction. Upon filing the suit, Selvakumar claims to have received death threats from the EPDP and offers of bribes from both the EPDP and police officials to drop the case. He also says that the police official named in the suit threatened to bring charges against him, publicly alleging links with the LTTE, unless he withdrew.

R. K. W. Goonesekara, a leading fundamental human rights lawyer in the country and former principal of the Colombo Law College, took up the case. Many in the diplomatic community and in the staffs of domestic and international NGOs thought Selvakumar's case had significant ramifications for the overall human rights climate in the country.

It was the first attempt to make clear in the courts the close cooperation between the government and paramilitary groups and political parties in violating an individual's rights. Goonesekara claimed it was

important as part of a larger legal effort to get the Supreme Court to extend the boundaries of liability beyond the state for the violation of fundamental freedoms:

It is nonstate persons, like Devananda, or parastate organizations, like the EPDP, who really are the instigators of what we think of as state violations. . . . What about the man who is at the back of it, who makes use of state apparatus to do some wrong to his political enemies? We had succeeded in some of these cases, and Selvakumar's case would have been another opportunity. (Goonesekara 1994)

Selvakumar added that his case "not only involves me, but a lot of young Tamil boys and businessmen who are taken by the EPDP under the cover of arresting LTTE suspects. Then they demand millions of rupees for their release."

Many in Sri Lanka speak of a "fear psychosis," the fruit of massive political violence, that severely dampens social and political activism. The level of fear in Colombo is manifest in the fact that, although Selvakumar was abducted on New Year's Eve in view of a hundred witnesses, he convinced only two people to sign affidavits regarding the abduction. This fear psychosis is also a function of what Gamson (1988) calls the "legitimizing frames" that regimes use to justify abuses and keep the citizenry in line. The Sri Lankan government repeatedly invoked the frame of "national security" to legitimate and defend abuses against the Tamil minority. Selvakumar's public challenge to that frame was an important element in a series of events that eventually caused the government to bring the EPDP forces in Colombo under greater control.

PBI provided protective accompaniment for Selvakumar from April 1993 through August 1993, when he fled the country with PBI's assistance. It included overnight stays at the family home almost every night, regular daytime visits to the home, and escorts when he traveled the city on business related to his case. During periods when the danger was thought to be especially high, the PBI team provided twenty-four-hour accompaniment.⁸ Their effectiveness was enhanced, moreover, by a *network* of civil rights organizations.

8. International protective accompaniment is often used for those whose life or liberty is threatened by their own government. Governments, as signatories to international human rights norms, and as participants in an increasingly globalized economy, are particularly susceptible to outside pressures regarding internal human rights violations. Since the pressure points for nonstate actors are not as clear, we know less about the effects of international accompaniment when the source of the threat is not directly tied to or accountable to a government. But the intimate, highly public nature of the

The international human rights organization field consists of a patchwork of over 1,000 groups (Shelley 1989). Many have emerged in response to specific forms of oppression, producing distinctive mandates (Steiner 1991, 5–15; Wiseberg 1992, 372). Their impressive but sometimes confusing array of activities has produced at least five functionally-based typologies (Claude and Weston 1992; Ray and Taylor 1977; Scoble and Wiseberg 1974; Shestack 1978; Wiseberg 1992). Their areas of specialization sometimes complement and other times overlap each other (Eide 1986).

Because there is such a large variety of specialized human rights groups, negotiating the maze of organizations can be difficult. It thus took Selvakumar over two months to find the right match, and in the end it was with four separate organizations, three international and one domestic. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was one of them.

Prison visitation and interviewing of political detainees, followed by *confidential* reporting and lobbying of the host government, is central to the mission of the ICRC (Blondel 1987; Forsythe 1990). The high levels of access that the ICRC obtains may be attributed partly to the fact that when it finds governments in violation of international human rights norms, it does not publicize those findings. ICRC's recommendations for change are made privately, and usually only to the government in question. This procedure helps ensure that there is little public loss of face for the transgressors and thus may make it easier for them to change their policies.⁹

Amnesty International (AI), also involved in Selvakumar's case, employs a vastly different method. Like PBI, AI relies on the *public* exposure of real and potential human rights violations and on the power of international lobbying through the letter writing of ordinary citizens and elites. Elizabeth Nissan, a staff member of the Asia Desk at AI in London contrasts the different approaches.

We are not there, we are not going in and out of prisons every day of the week, monitoring conditions and raising concerns with the government privately. But we are publicizing our findings. And it seems to me that these are two sides of the same process that can not be done by the same organization. . . . You can't threaten [a government's international

EPDP's ties to the Sri Lankan government at the time of this case seemed to increase the likelihood of accompaniment having a beneficial effect.

9. Despite repeated requests from the ICRC, Sri Lankan NGOs, and UN agencies, the Sri Lankan government refused to allow the ICRC to work in Sri Lanka from 1983 to 89. For the complicated but revealing history of the Sri Lankan government's political maneuvering vis-à-vis the ICRC, see Civil Rights Movement (1990).

image] in the way that we probably do and expect to have everyday access on the ground. So the roles are different, but quite complementary. In different countries one of our public objectives might be for other human rights organizations to have access as a beginning protection on the ground. (Nissan 1993)

The ICRC visited Selvakumar while he was imprisoned and documented his case. But as Selvakumar soon found out, once a detainee is released, the ICRC is not likely to provide much more assistance. Upon his release from prison, he paid the ICRC a visit.

When I told the ICRC that I was filing a case and that the EPDP was trying to get me and kill me, I asked them if they could help me. They told me they were not in a position to help me. . . . I wrote to Amnesty International and to all these other organizations, too. Very few even answered me. I was so desperate. Finally I had several meetings with a local human rights organization [Civil Rights Movement] and I was told there was an organization [PBI] that could give shadow protection. (Selvakumar 1993)

The international office of Amnesty International in London contacted PBI in Sri Lanka by electronic mail and provided background data on Selvakumar, suggesting that PBI visit him to gather more information on his case for both PBI and AI. The Civil Rights Movement (CRM), one of the leading domestic human rights organizations in Sri Lanka, and the corecipient of the 1990 Carter-Menil prize for human rights, eventually arranged a meeting with PBI and Selvakumar to determine his security needs and compatibility with PBI's mandate.¹⁰

AI sent out an Urgent Action appeal on behalf of Selvakumar in April 1993 and helped place a number of stories about his case in the major daily newspapers in Colombo and elsewhere. Both AI and Selvakumar assumed that his heightened visibility would also increase his security. At the same time, PBI began providing nonviolent protective accompaniment to Selvakumar and his family, attempting to extend the political space within which he could operate safely.

Once Selvakumar found a match between his needs and TSMO mandates, the three organizations worked together in an exercise of "cooperative accompaniment." They channeled information to each

10. The granting of high-profile prizes by foreign organizations to human rights activists whose work has endangered them in their own country is one of many nonviolent tactics used to increase their international visibility and decrease the threat level facing them (Wiseberg 1991; also, see chap. 7 in this volume).

other as Selvakumar's case developed in the courts and as they aided him in his attempt to flee the country until his case was resolved. It was not unusual for Selvakumar to have specific needs that one organization, because of its mandate or resource limitations, could not meet. But it was also not unusual for one of the other organizations to step in and fill the gap.¹¹

This sort of information sharing and task sharing is a typical activity in the NGO world, especially among TSMOs like PBI and AI (Smith et al. 1994, 15; Willetts 1982b, 184). By drawing on each organization's unique resources, a threatened activist may stitch together a patchwork quilt of increased safety.

Selvakumar was initially skeptical of the usefulness of the protective accompaniment technique because of PBI's commitment to nonviolence and its unwillingness to testify in court.¹² But he later credited PBI's presence with reducing the levels of surveillance and harassment of him and his family by the police and the EPDP. He interpreted the working relationships this way: "I sincerely believe that I have been safe this long owing to PBI's presence. Amnesty International brought my case more to light and it was published in the papers through their Urgent Action Network, but the physical presence of PBI was very helpful."

Other activists, stymied by a lack of resources or the complexity of the task, may fail to fashion a protective quilt out of the maze of TSMO mandates. To negotiate a series of politically sensitive working relationships, those seeking protection must often have European language skills, access to transportation or communication, and the means to overcome cultural barriers. Lacking these or the time to investigate and initiate appropriate connections, many give up in frustration. Selvakumar was one of the lucky ones. Fluent in a number of languages, he benefited from family money, broad intercultural experiences, political astuteness, and a tenacious commitment to his cause.

The expansion of human rights TSMOs is a trend that is likely to continue in the near future. As the case of Selvakumar suggests, there are two sides to this coin. The expanding volume of organizations can

11. What I am calling *cooperative accompaniment* has been used many times. In 1989, PBI freed up one of its El Salvador team members to help escort the outspoken Lutheran Bishop Medardo Gomez, a key player in the peace process there. The escorts were an ad hoc group of foreign nationals and church workers from various organizations, coordinated out of an independent office in Chicago (Kinane 1995).

12. The PBI team in Sri Lanka at the time decided that testifying in court on behalf of those it accompanied would violate the team's nonpartisan status and mandate. What constitutes partisan activity is often a contentious issue on PBI teams (see MacQuarrie 1993).

lead to confusion, poorly informed referrals, or fatal delays, but it may also help meet the wide range of needs of different human rights victims and activists. A positive outcome often requires awareness of the particular mandates and services offered by individual organizations and informed coordination among them. Although this networking is not wholly uncommon, broader application of the cooperative accompaniment approach is much needed. The revolution in communications technology that is rapidly expanding and speeding the flow of information between organizations may be a positive force in this regard.¹³

Information is the lifeblood of the human rights movement: collecting, analyzing, and distributing it is a chief function of most human rights NGOs (Claude and Weston 1992, 364; Willetts 1982a, 16–87). Without timely and accurate data, human rights promotion and protection by governments, international organizations, NGOs, and even individual citizens would come to a virtual standstill. And each of these four sectors relies heavily on the information provided by the NGOs working in the field (van Boven 1984; Weissbrodt 1982).

Although technological changes may have expanded human rights information campaigns to a more general audience, most information that human rights TSMOs gather is still directed at policy elites, including governmental and intergovernmental officials, and the diplomatic community (Scoble and Wiseberg 1974). One of the tactics used by the PBI team in Sri Lanka is to maintain what Galtung (1988) calls “strategic linkages” across various domains of power. PBI does this through regular meetings with a broad base of local government officials, diplomats, funding agency officials, and influential international and domestic NGOs. PBI selectively informs these influential contacts about its teams’ activities and the dangers facing local activists, and that knowledge and influence may then be tapped later if needed. As one team member put it, “We try to cast our protective net as widely as possible, including using our diplomatic contacts. We inform and when necessary involve others in the cases we are working on.” Using the “insider status” (Willetts 1982b, 181) that PBI had cultivated through its regular meetings with “influential allies” (Tarrow 1994, 88) in the diplomatic community was an important tactic in Selvakumar’s case.

PBI team members arranged a number of meetings in the embassy of a western European country with the official handling Selvakumar’s

13. According to Narayan Desai, founder of the Shanti Sena and a PBI founder, the absence of accessible and efficient mechanisms for international consultation and communication was one of the reasons for the demise of the World Peace Brigade, PBI’s predecessor organization (Walker 1988).

request for a visa and political refugee status. They provided the official with detailed information on Selvakumar and his case. When asked for the team’s assessment of the threats he faced, they discussed the team’s political analysis of those threats. PBI team members explained what they and some of their Sri Lankan contacts took to be the broader significance of the case, describing the cooperative accompaniment effort that emerged among the three human rights organizations, all of which were providing information to the embassy.

The official said that it is “crucial that we be able to forward to our home office the assessment of human rights nongovernmental organizations with intimate knowledge of the case. . . . PBI’s assessment, reflected in your accompaniment record, combined with AI’s ongoing interest in the case, should go a long way to securing the visa.” The official also directly noted the involvement of the Civil Rights Movement, saying that she knew CRM to be “very careful and astute about getting involved in individual cases,” and that its involvement indicated “both a high level of threat and the importance of the case overall.” Not long thereafter, the visa arrived and PBI escorted Selvakumar to the airport.¹⁴ He now has political asylum status in a western European country and is pursuing a law degree.¹⁵

Selvakumar’s attempt to flee Sri Lanka in the summer of 1993 occurred concurrently with a move throughout Western nation-states to constrict the flow of refugees into their territories. Moreover, the repatriation of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees was increasingly supported even though they would be returning to face significant dangers (Asia Watch 1993). It is reasonable to assume that intervention and advocacy

14. The PBI Guatemala team has also regularly helped threatened activists go into exile. But PBI teams do not always do so. In El Salvador in 1989, the PBI team agreed to a request from contacts in the popular movement not to use PBI resources to facilitate local activists’ going into exile. The team was told that some in the movement had made a covenant with each other that they would stay in the country and continue organizing, and they wanted PBI to honor the covenant (Kinane 1995). A prominent human rights organizer in Sri Lanka, speaking from personal experience, thinks that the availability of protective accompaniment in the days immediately preceding an activist’s flight into exile is one of the most critical and helpful services TSMOs like PBI can provide (Kandasamy 1993).

15. On 13 July 1994, the Sri Lankan Supreme Court ruled in Selvakumar’s favor and against the police saying that they “blatantly disregarded every constitutional safeguard against the arbitrary deprivation of liberty.” The individual officers and, even more significantly, the state itself were all ordered to pay damages to Selvakumar. The court also directed the nation’s attorney general to issue “precise and detailed instruction to all officers in charge of Police Stations as to their duties . . . to respect, secure and advance the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution.” However, the court dismissed the complaint against Devananda and the EPDP for their alleged role in the abduction, citing lack of sufficient evidence.

by the four human rights groups was at least a contributing factor when Selvakumar successfully obtained his visa. Moreover, among the factors that influenced his decision about where to apply for a visa was PBI's advice, based on its inside information about which embassies were known to be especially sensitive to human rights concerns and with which PBI had good working relationships. The strategic flow of information and influence from PBI to the embassy regarding Selvakumar's status exemplifies how TSMOs can affect individual cases.

Bridging National and International Organizations

The second case explores the working relationship between PBI and a social movement organization (SMO) engaged in domestic organizing and international networking, the Center for Conscientization.

Social movements working for local and global transformation through nonviolence are a key element in the political climate of the late twentieth century (Falk 1992; Walker 1988). Despite the political violence that marks Sri Lanka, and in some cases because of it, Sri Lanka is home to SMOs that work collaboratively to redefine political action, exploiting whatever pockets of safe political space they find or can fashion with the cooperation of TSMOs. That social movements tend to operate via broad movement networks has long been recognized (Gerlach and Hine 1970). International networking is important for many Sri Lankan SMOs; in a dangerous political climate it may even function as a kind of informal organizational accompaniment.

Janawaboda Kendraya (Center for Conscientization) is a nongovernmental organization whose members work with two grassroots people's empowerment projects named after the communities in which they are located: the Negombo United People's Organization (NUPO) and the Kotogoda United People's Organization (KUPO).

Inspired by liberation theology and Paulo Freire's work in developing critical social awareness, the Center for Conscientization members (largely Sinhalese and Catholic) began to organize and animate traditionally disempowered and oppressed groups in 1983. They worked with the landless in a land squatting effort, set up community theaters as vehicles for social expression and political dissent, and organized in the garment factories in the Free Trade Zones then springing up in Sri Lanka and within which organizing was restricted. The Center also promoted a radical critique of Sri Lanka's participation in the international political economy. These activities did not endear the group to a government under violent siege from the JVP and the LTTE. The group's founders felt threatened in 1989 and 1990 during the

height of terror surrounding the government's response to the JVP rebellion. Accused of being JVP, the group sent four founders into exile in the Philippines, India, and England.

Others stayed behind and continued their work amid ongoing death threats. In response, they cultivated more contacts with TSMOs, turning to PBI for protective accompaniment in 1990. One member explained that international networking is critical not only for security reasons, but as a step toward unified, structural solutions to what are seen as structural problems.

It is important for us to be able to work with international groups. . . . One incident here can now go all over the world. So every incident has an impact in other places and situations. . . . I see that solidarity among the local groups, national groups, and international groups is an important counter to these present structural problems. . . . All problems are linked with other problems and structures.

The PBI team's work with the Center was varied, and it was evaluated and renegotiated on a regular basis. NUPO members received individual escort and overnight presences, and PBI often provided the group with international observers for demonstrations or marches. But the primary tactic employed by PBI was a regular presence at the offices of NUPO and KUPO. This presence was still being maintained, albeit in reduced form, in late 1993.

The all-day visits by PBI were scheduled on those days when one of the community groups that NUPO or KUPO animates were meeting at the centers. This strategy sent a double message: one of deterrence that was directed at the perceived source of threat and one of hope and confidence building that was directed at the local activists.

The presence of international observers amid the grassroots group was intended to send a message to the government or to paramilitary groups that harassing or attacking this group would be costly. It was likely to make visible behavior the government would rather keep hidden in order to convince aid-donor nations that Sri Lanka was curbing human rights abuses and to persuade corporate investors that it was a stable investment site.¹⁶

16. Government officials openly acknowledge that they were forced by international pressure into setting up task forces and commissions designed to protect human rights (Jayaweera 1991). That most of these mechanisms have largely failed is another matter. That the Sri Lanka government acts with care and circumspection regarding human rights abuses in the periods preceding important aid-and investment-related meetings has long been evident (Abeysekera 1992). The Scandinavian countries have been especially active in human rights promotion in Sri Lanka, including using aid and trade pressures (Counterpoint 1994).

For groups like NUPO and KUPO that organize locally, the presence of an international third party like PBI is both a symbolic and a concrete expression of the concern that part of the international community has for their rights. According to one member of the Center, it not only can defuse the paralysis of fear but also can affect the way local organizers perceive their own work and its importance:

When PBI is here with us, it decreases our fear and the fear of the people who come to the center with the groups we animate. The violence here has gotten inside people; it does not just operate on the outside, just kill the body. It also operates on the inside through fear and kills the spirit of the people. But we see that we are not alone in our struggle, and that helps us overcome that fear. . . . The people see that this work is important and that others care about it.

Whereas PBI offered protection for Selvakumar to prosecute his case and helped him leave when the risks seemed too high, in the case of the Center for Conscientization, PBI's role was reversed. Here PBI's presence was a factor in the decisions exiled leaders made to return and resume their organizing work.

Vincent Bulathsinghala, is the coordinator of the Center, is one of the founders who went into exile. On the anniversary of the disappearance of his brother, he said:

I was convinced by others after my brother disappeared that I must leave. I had done nothing wrong, or nothing illegal in my work, so it was difficult for me to see why I must go. . . . There is no rule of law in Sri Lanka, but the government and the police respect the outsider, especially those with white skin. It is not good; it is an imperialist attitude, but it is true here. So the presence of an international group like PBI gave our group strength.¹⁷ (Bulathsinghala 1993)

Rev. Ben Wasantha (an assumed name) is a Catholic priest long active in nonviolent empowerment projects. A founder of the Center for Conscientization, he also fled Sri Lanka after being threatened by federal Security Forces. When he and his colleagues thought it might be safe for him to return in late 1992, the availability of PBI accompaniment was a factor in his deliberations (Wasantha 1993).

A PBI escort accompanied Wasantha from England to his home village in Sri Lanka for a family visit, and then to his new residence,

17. The roles that ethnicity, skin color, and nation-state citizenship play in PBI's work in Sri Lanka and elsewhere is complex, and problematic for many within PBI. For analysis of these issues, see Coy (1995, 1997).

where he received twenty-four hour accompaniment for two weeks. "It made a tremendous difference for me," he said. "I did not know what to expect, exactly what I would be returning to. So having PBI's escort helped me to deal with the unknown and to keep my fears in check. I felt much safer" (Wasantha 1993).

The Significance of Accompaniment

Assessing the effectiveness of nonviolent actions is difficult because of the complex array of factors that influence events and remain beyond the control of the researcher. Moreover, how success and failure is defined varies among the actors, who often operate with vague long-term goals and who do not always specify concrete objectives. Indeed, the notions of "success" and "failure" are not only vague and restrictive but also fail to exhaust the possible outcomes (McCarthy and Kruegler 1993, 27). PBI members typically lament the assessment dilemma that marks their work; as one team member remarked, "Obviously you can't know—you really can't know how effective you are because you don't know if something would have happened if you weren't there."

There are numerous examples of rough or violent treatment of a local citizen by police or military personnel changing dramatically upon the appearance of a PBI team member carrying a camera and notebook. Every former team member seems able to recount such an experience, and most attribute the behavior change to their presence as international observers. Still, for many the bottom line is whether or not those being accompanied believe that PBI's presence makes a difference in their situation and affects the choices they make.

The data offered here suggest that the Sri Lanka Project of Peace Brigades International, while not determining the behavior of nonviolent activists for human rights, serves to expand the range of choices available to them.¹⁸ Bleiker (1993) has shown that a certain amount of "breathing space" free from the encroachment of the state is required for the expression of regime-critical opinions and their growth into

18. This approach remains incomplete as it does not address whether the escorted individuals know enough about the accompaniment technique and its likely effects in their situation to make solid assessments about the deterrent value of accompaniment. In other words, their increased sense of safety could be false and misplaced, because it depended upon their knowledge of the complex dynamics of accompaniment; how experienced the TSMO is in accompaniment; the foreign aid needs of the country; and whether those doing the threatening clearly understand the role of the escorting organization, including the amount and significance of the international pressure it can generate.

broader forms of popular dissent. Activists in social movement organizations like those profiled here share with social movements across the globe the goal to refashion politics and reclaim political space and relevancy (Falk 1992; Melucci 1989, 227-32). The protection of these activists, and the expansion of the choices available to them through the technique of nonviolent protective accompaniment, seems to bode well for a future marked by more humane forms of politics and governance. In the building of that future, TSMOs are sure to play a significant role.

Although transnational social movement organizations do not determine state behavior, they act within institutional contexts to constrain the range of choices available to states (Leatherman et al. 1993), and they change the decisional latitude of states (Dorsey 1993) by influencing the information environment within which states make decisions (Sikkink 1993). It is reasonable to assume that the role and function of TSMOs will continue to expand in the post-Cold War era. Previously constricted by the bipolar approach to global politics of the Cold War, TSMOs were more easily neutralized or dismissed as a tool of one camp or the other. Now, in the increasingly complex world of today's global politics, TSMO roles are formalized in international agreements. A prominent case in point is the 1992 agreement negotiated by Guatemalan refugees living in exile in Mexico regarding how they would return to Guatemala under the Central American Peace Accords. The refugees insisted that the international agreement stipulate their right to nonviolent protective accompaniment of their own choosing (PBI, Witness for Peace, and others).

Unarmed insurrection and nonviolent resistance against authoritarian regimes has increased dramatically in the past fifteen years (Zunes 1994). International protective accompaniment is only one of many nonviolent techniques that TSMOs and others are refining through manifold applications around the globe. TSMOs are demonstrating that governments may be constrained and dissidents sustained, sometimes in lifesaving ways. These experiments in nonviolence will result in the development of still more techniques useful for others who strive to reclaim their history and fashion their future in a manner less encumbered by the vagaries of violent repression. That is a prospect deserving of the best resources of transnational and domestic social movement organizations the world over.

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