

Reconciliation in Timor-Leste and the Role of the Media: The Casa de Produção Audiovisual⁴¹

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Post-independence Timor-Leste struggles to come to terms with its past, to improve the recent situation and to build up its future at the same time. These are enormous tasks which require a lot of attention from all actors involved: the national government, national institutions, individuals as well as national and international civil society. The overall goal is to build a foundation for lasting peace in the country by learning from the mistakes of the past and by investing time, money and good will in the best possible preparation for the future.

In order to come to terms with its past and to be in line with Transitional Justice mechanisms, Timor-Leste has seen several approaches on the national level: the establishment of the Special Panel in combination with the Serious Crimes Unit, the independent Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (*Comissão de Acolhimento, Verdade, e Reconciliação* – CAVR) as well as the bilateral Commission for Truth and Friendship (CTF) with Indonesia. The task of the CAVR was three-fold: first, to establish the truth about the political events and to set up a historical record of the period between 1974 and 1999, second, to facilitate reconciliation at the local level through Community Reconciliation Programmes, and third to produce a final report including recommendations related to the Commission's tasks⁴².

⁴¹ This paper is dedicated to Pater Ruedi Hofmann SJ who suddenly passed away May 28 2008. He set up and was the driving spirit behind the Casa de Producao Audiovisual.

⁴² CAVR. 2005. *Chega!*

Regarding the truth-finding task, it is clear that this was an enormous endeavor, especially considering the time constraints of the CAVR which operated from 2002 to 2005. Individual data was collected as well as seven public hearings organized, the one on the Internal Political Conflict labeled a “*landmark in the history of East Timorese political life*”⁴³. “The Commission was encouraged by the humility of political leaders who testified at the National Public Hearing on the Internal Political Conflict of 1974-76, and the positive community response to their openness. However more needs to be done to heal the deep hurt from this period and to consolidate the development of a pluralistic and peaceful political life in Timor-Leste.”⁴⁴

As a follow-up process on the work of the CAVR, an open national debate on the country’s history as part of a broader nation-building process is needed – this is especially true following the outbreak of violence in fall 2006 and the appearance of frictions within the Timorese society. It appears vital to find a common perception of the brutal events of the past (including taking responsibility for past mistakes) by means of dialogue and open discussions in order to tackle current problems. In this regard, the media can play a very important role in facilitating this dialogue, fostering active participation of the public and promoting a pluralistic society.

In this paper I argue that intended outcome programming media can contribute to reconciliation and social reconstruction as well as peace-building in Timor-Leste. Focusing on the example of the Casa de Produção Audiovisual (CPA), an audiovisual production facility in Dili, I argue that intended outcome media projects can be important actors in the process of rebuilding relationships. By focusing on essential aspects of reconciliation and peace-building such as the search for truth and education, the CPA provides information and educational training as well as a forum for open dialogue and public participation.

The paper proceeds in three sections: First, I will explain how I understand the concept of reconciliation and how the media fit into it. In the second section, I will analyze the work and ambitions of the Casa de Produção Audiovisual by describing the two main foci of work of the

⁴³ Op. Cit. CAVR. 2005. p. 192.

⁴⁴ Op. Cit. CAVR. 2005. p.215.

CPA including their content, objectives and means. Finally, I will summarize my findings.

1 - Reconciliation and the media

When speaking about reconciliation I refer to the rather plain definition of “*a process of relationship-building*” as used by Bloomfield⁴⁵. He distinguishes between an individual or interpersonal process (bottom-up or “*cultural*” reconciliation) and processes of building working political and social relations (top-down or “*structural*” reconciliation). Bloomfield suggests that these two levels are complementary and that they should be linked in order to enhance their strength. He sees the potential for civil society to work as a transmitter between the two levels⁴⁶.

In order to make reconciliation more understandable, I would like to point to the model of Hugo van der Merwe who also sees reconciliation as a process of relationship-building. However, by also defining “*spheres*” – identity, values, attitudes, behavior – and “*components*” – healing, security, truth and justice – he adds two further dimensions to the levels (interpersonal, community, national) used by Bloomfield⁴⁷. Both these additional dimensions, spheres and components, are very helpful in order to analyse actors or initiatives in the field of reconciliation as well as in order to set up such initiatives.

When applying van der Merwe’s model to any reconciliation project, it becomes apparent that the “*spheres*” are to a large extent determined by the respective cultural context. Therefore, culture-related elements in reconciliation initiatives seem to be essential because these are the ones that are very likely unique and distinguishable from other post-conflict situations. In the case of the Casa de Produção Audiovisual, I argue that the CPA’s work primarily addresses both the issues of

⁴⁵ Bloomfield David. 2006. *On good terms: Clarifying reconciliation*, p.28.

⁴⁶ Op. Cit. Bloomfield David. 2006. p.29-30.

⁴⁷ Merwe Hugo van der. 1999. *The truth and reconciliation commission and community reconciliation*.

identity (“spheres”) and truth (“components”). Therefore, I will take a closer look at both issues in the second part of this paper.

In its analysis of reconciliation in Timor-Leste, the CAVR points out in its final report: *“From these experiences with communities, the Commission knows that reconciliation is not a simple or immediate matter. It cannot be achieved in just one step, or a single procedure and people cannot be obliged to reconcile according to the wishes of an institution or a state. But it is also clear that communities, victims and those who have harmed their communities are often open to assistance to help them come together to resolve past problems for the sake of a peaceful future. The Commission also believes that there is more work to do to secure the peace achieved by communities across the country since the end of the conflict.”*⁴⁸

While the media can clearly have devastating effects on peace and stability as we have seen in the case of Ruanda⁴⁹, it can also contribute in a positive way to stability, peace and the creation of a democratic society: *“By practising objective, fact-based reporting that avoids stereotypes or stirring up rumors, individual journalists and the media as a whole have a tremendous potential to contribute to understanding and bridge-building.”*⁵⁰

Such positive intentions towards conflict resolutions are already reflected in the term *“intended outcome media”*. However, this concept as used by Howard goes further than only focusing on objective, fact-based reporting: *“The definition of media is extended to include unconventional channels of communication such as street theatre, posters, radio dramas and comedy or other entertainment. The purpose is to produce information especially designed to influence attitudes towards conflict resolution. The media becomes a facilitator of positive change rather than a professional disinterested observer. This kind of initiative [...] is not journalism as we know it, although it adheres to values such as accuracy, fairness and responsibility.”*⁵¹

The interest of international donors in assistance to the development of media in conflict societies (mainly training for journalists and providing technical equipment), relating to media and peace-building in general and specifically in intended outcome, media

⁴⁸ Op. Cit. CAVR. 2005. p.191.

⁴⁹ See for example Howard Ross. 2004. The media’s role in war and peace-building.

⁵⁰ International Federation of Journalists. 1997. *Reporting diversity: A training and resource manual for journalists on covering minorities, inter-ethnic relations, and other diversity issues.*

⁵¹ Op. Cit. Howard Ross. 2004. p.154-155.

seems to have increased during the last ten years⁵². Practitioners as well as academics have developed guidelines, models and explanations for the role and impact of the media in general and of intended outcome media, particularly in post-conflict societies⁵³. Keeping in mind that the news media in Timor-Leste is still in an early stage of development, one could consider intended outcome media projects such as the CPA as an additional tool that complements the “*traditional*” mass media and, to a certain extent, fills a gap left in the currently underdeveloped media sector.

Intended outcome programming media need to consider the local context, the specific post-conflict situation, the stage of peace-building and to use locally accepted means of communication in order to find acceptance and, finally, to meet their objectives. In the case of Timor-Leste, the Casa de Produção Audiovisual’s series takes into account a variety of local aspects ranging from language (Tetum), content (local legends and history; local music and bands) and way of communication (question-and-answer sessions; statements of witnesses; reading of the letters to the editor) to the early post-conflict period (high illiteracy rate).

2 - The Casa de Produção Audiovisual

The Casa de Produção Audiovisual is an audiovisual production facility based in Dili, Timor-Leste. It was founded in 2002 by the Catholic order of the Jesuits under the leadership of Father Ruedi Hofmann SJ, a Swiss national who came to Timor-Leste in 2000. Father Hofmann had been working in Yogyakarta/Indonesia for more than 30 years, where he was also involved in audiovisual projects.

The CPA is a Jesuit-founded and internationally funded project. First and foremost, it is a media project because its main objective is the production and distribution of its own audiovisual material. And based on the definition developed by Howard, the CPA is an example of

⁵² Op. Cit. Howard Ross. 2004. p.154; and Spurk Christoph. 2002. *Media and Peacebuilding. Concepts. Actors and Challenges*.

⁵³ For further reference on development assistance and challenges for media in peace-building see Spurk 2002.

intended outcome programming media: While adhering to the standards of accuracy, fairness and responsibility in the production of its own programmes, it also has clear-cut objectives regarding its role in conflict resolution.

The CPA has become famous in Timor-Leste mainly due to its programs which are shown on the national TV channel (TVTL) – namely a series on the history, beliefs and traditional wisdom of Timor-Leste. The series “*História ba Futuru*” – from past to future – deals with the history of the country and is widely known by children and adults alike. The 24 staff of the CPA mainly consists of young people who were mostly trained in Timor-Leste and in Yogyakarta/Indonesia, especially for their technical skills. They include nine designers who produce the cartoons used in the series. To improve their knowledge of Portuguese, the CPA offers regular language courses to its entire staff.

The CPA has started to build a new production facility outside of Dili. It is located on top of a hill near the village Kasait and currently consists of two traditionally built huts which were constructed with the help of the local community. The CPA plans to extend this new production site to include a small training centre with a guest house – all with the financial assistance from international donors. The site was inaugurated in September 2006 with a traditional ceremony and a Catholic mass, attended by the whole village. Since then, the CPA has been already using this new site twice a week to produce parts of its other TV series on *Beliefs in Timor-Leste* as well as new episodes of “*História ba Futuru*”.

One of the key objectives of the CPA productions is to provide information on pressing issues such as national history and the search for identity by fostering a culture of peaceful dialogue, discussion and active participation among its audiences. In addition to these main objectives, the CPA also uses its own productions for educational purposes to sensitize teachers to more modern ways of teaching techniques. These are the two main aspects I will analyze in the following section.

3 - Truth seeking

In Timor-Leste's nation-building process, the search for a *common* identity or *for the* binding element in society is essentially linked with the search for "*truth*" about the country's history.⁵⁴ During the fight against the Indonesian occupation, the goal was clear for a majority of the population – independence for Timor-Leste. This goal provided the binding element for them. However, after independence was achieved, Timor-Leste's society is searching for new binding elements in order to develop a genuine *national* identity which goes beyond that of an independent *state*.⁵⁵

This search for historical truth was also part of the CAVR's mandate. By taking statements of victims, witnesses and perpetrators, the CAVR focused on the violent conflict between 1974 and 1999. While the individual statements were taken in private and are kept in the CAVR archive for privacy reasons, the CAVR also held seven national hearings, which were publicly broadcast on TV and on radio.

The hearings started an important process of public debates and a public awareness of the possibility of open discussions – something that was inconceivable under the Indonesian rule. However, many people still feel reluctant to speak out on the past especially when it comes to the internal conflict of 1974-1975. In particular, in light of the outburst of violence in 2006, it is obvious that there still are strongly conflicting perceptions of local history and antagonistic memories regarding the 1974-1999 period of political conflict which need to be addressed within the Timorese society. The question is how to provide a safe forum for people to contribute to this discussion with their own experiences, but

⁵⁴ Of course, the concept of historical truth cannot limit itself to a mere chronological listing of events, but rather includes a reconstruction of the past by interpreting it (see Giordano 2005). Likewise, such an interpretation cannot be achieved by establishing "[...] a single, univocal truth regarding past events and processes, particularly those with strong criminal connotations [...]". (Giordano 2005). Rather, it can be considered as one of the functions of truth finding in post-conflict societies to reconcile formerly antagonistic perceptions of past events.

⁵⁵ For more details on the nation-building and the crisis of 2006 in Timor-Leste see Sahin 2007.

also to make sure that conflicting views can be heard- in tolerance and peace.

In the same vein, the CPA's series on history, beliefs and traditional wisdom focuses on issues relating to the search for "truth" and for a Timorese identity. Its intention is to provide information, but also to stimulate discussion in society about Timor-Leste's values and traditions as well as promoting its fruitful diversity at the same time. This is an ongoing process, and it not only focuses on events from the distant past, but also on the current situation which has been deteriorating since the outbreak of violence in April 2006. Ruedi Hofmann SJ puts it this way: *"In our programs we put up questions in order to help our audience to understand the current situation on the basis of their own symbols and culture."*⁵⁶

"História ba Futuru"

The CPA series *"História ba Futuru"* aims to contribute to the search for a common perception of the country's past. The 47 half-hour episodes cover the period from the early Portuguese Era to Timor-Leste's independence in 2002. 16 episodes (8 double sessions) are dedicated to the work of the CAVR and its mandate. The series was broadcast on the only existing national television channel - TV Timor-Leste (TVTL) - between February 2004 and late 2006. It was shown on a weekly basis, every Wednesday with a rerun the following Sunday. Since 2007, the CPA has reproduced some of the older episodes and added new ones regarding the pre-colonial era and events after 2004, including the crisis of 2006 and its aftermath.

Ruedi Hofmann SJ and his team are constantly looking for historic events that have had an impact on today's life or in some way are still relevant for the understanding of recent developments. The pre-colonial and colonial episodes are mostly based on Portuguese literature⁵⁷, whereas the episodes about the Indonesian invasion until the referendum in 1999 are based on the findings and the report of the CAVR. For episodes on highly sensitive issues such as the events in 1975, the team also invited experts (such as staff of the CAVR) on the

⁵⁶ Translated from: Hofmann Rudi. 2007. Ein Friedenshügel im kriegerischen Osttimor, p.3.

⁵⁷ e.g. FELGAS Hélio A. Esteves. 1956. Timor Português.

respective topic in order to ensure accuracy. As for all episodes, the audience is invited to send letters to the team with their personal opinion on these topics as a way to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the program.

Content

Each programme follows a common structure: It consists of a Timorese legend, local music, an event in Timorese history, and dialogues – all in Tetum, the other official language in Timor-Leste besides Portuguese.

The episodes start with a performance of several local musicians playing songs in a Timor-Leste landscape. Subtitles show the words of the songs. The band plays several songs throughout the program. A speaker introduces the main focus of the program while standing in front of a local building which has a connection with either the subsequent legend or the historic event. The legend is then presented as an animated cartoon and is discussed by a group of six young people. Several of them ask questions about the legend, its meaning and its local perception, and one (being the expert) answers them.

After another performance of the band, the animated cartoon of a historic event is shown. A commentator explains what happened at that event, who was responsible for it, the reasons for the event and its significance for Timor-Leste today. Sometimes a witness of that event is interviewed following the cartoon in order to tell his or her personal story about the event. And, again, a group discussion or rather a question and answer session follows with a group of young people.

At the end of each program, a question is addressed to the audience which relates to the historic event that was covered in the program. Some of the audience's written answers are read in subsequent programs – three weeks after the series was shown. After a short repetition of the main facts of the program, the answers are read out without any additional comments for half an hour.

The overall set up of the series is very simple in terms of the storyboard or the overall outline, but carefully and thoughtfully done. With the balanced mix of music, dialogues, narratives, animated comics, question-and-answer sections and the reading of letters, it is very informative, to some extent emotional, but nevertheless entertaining.

Objective

What is the objective of the CPA programs, and especially of “*História ba Futuru*”? How do these objectives relate to the definition of intended outcome media programming?

First, the CPA can be seen as a provider of information on past and partly on recent events and traditional legends which are otherwise rare to find. Second, the CAP also aims for a discussion about these events and reaches for the active participation of its audience. As a third objective, the educational perspective becomes apparent as well.

However, all three objectives can be seen as elements of another, more mid-term goal: reconciliation of society and establishing a truly pluralistic, tolerant, democratic and peaceful Timor-Leste.

Means

The CPA series are shown in two different ways: Firstly, they are broadcast on TVTL twice a week (one is the rerun); but secondly, they are also distributed on DVD for public viewing. This is due to the fact that TV sets and coverage are not yet widespread in Timor-Leste because of poverty and infrastructural underdevelopment.

An important issue for CPA therefore is how many people are able to watch TV in Timor-Leste. A recent survey among 1200 Timorese presented the following data on radio and TV coverage: *“The daily reach of radio is just under 30%. Weekly reach is just under 50%. Nearly half (47%) have a radio set at home. Two thirds of all radio sets are powered by batteries. Just less than one in five lives in a home with a television. About two in five ever watch television at all. The daily reach of TV is 19%, the weekly reach is 25%. TV use is highest in Dili where the weekly reach is 79% and lowest in Manufahi, Ainaro and Ermera. Three in four daily TV viewers are in Dili. There is a lot of out-of-home TV viewing. Only 45% usually watch TV at their own home. Others watch at friends’ or neighbor’s homes or through various means of communal viewing.”*⁵⁸

Since the TV programs in Timor-Leste do not offer a wide variety of locally produced programmes – during most of the day, Portuguese soap operas or music shows are shown, with some news programs in the

⁵⁸ Soares Eduard, Mytton Graham. 2007. *Timor-Leste National Media Survey. Final Report*, p.2-3.

evening – the series of the CPA are quite popular. The same survey mentioned above states that about 10 percent of the polled people with children under the age of 15 named “*Historia ba Futuru*” as a program that their kids would watch. But the series is not just popular with children (who may also like it because of the cartoons and the music), but also with adults, as the large weekly number of letters to the editor proves.

As the survey shows, the overall percentage of Timorese able to watch TV on a regular basis is quite low, but highest in the capital Dili. Therefore, the CPA started to distribute its series – the actual programs as well as the readings of the letters to the editors – on demand throughout the county. They can then be used for public viewing events, e.g. in villages, church communities or in schools. The DVDs are provided free of charge, but a second DVD is distributed to the same person/community when the first one has been returned. In this way, the cost of distribution does not get out of hand. So far, the programs’ reach had been rather limited. However, in 2007, 900 DVDs were distributed to 45 participants of two workshops on educational use of the CPAs programs. One of the CPA’s goals for the next two years is to establish networks through which the DVDs can be distributed systematically in Timor-Leste.

4. Education

“Educational and youth work is important in phases of conflict latency, in post-conflict situations and in times of peace. Its purpose is two-fold: to prevent conflict; and to encourage a critical reappraisal of the past as a step towards healing and reconciliation”⁵⁹.

With a similar purpose and scope as distributing the series “*História ba Futuru*”, the CPA also commenced a project to sensitize teachers, catechists and development aid workers to new teachings methods regarding the country’s history. This is especially important when teaching school children, but also vital when working with adults who

⁵⁹ Schell-Faucon Stephanie. 2001. Conflict Transformation through Educational and Youth Programme, p.1.

are illiterate. For them the pictures, cartoons and dialogues in Tetum are a perfect tool to get engaged and take part in debates and discussions.

The CPA training project ties in with one of the CAVR's recommendations in its final report: "*The Ministry of Education in the Government of Timor-Leste works with the post-CAVR institution to utilize the Final Report and other Commission materials in the development of curricula and other educational resources related to human rights, reconciliation, history, law, gender studies and other relevant disciplines*"⁶⁰. While it takes time to change curricula and to train teachers how to use them on a national level, initiatives such as the one of the CPA can fill the current need for new ways of addressing difficult issues related to the country's history in schools.⁶¹

Content

By using the series "*História ba Futuru*" for the teachers and catechists trainings programs, CPA makes use of the series' popularity as was shown in the survey. However, because of the weak TV coverage outside Dili, most of the young people in the countryside have not had the opportunity to watch the series. However, due to the use of Tetum, the local music, the animated cartoons, the clear structure, and easy to understand dialogues as well as the comparatively short episodes of half an hour each, the series fits the needs as an educational tool for schools.

Objectives and Means

There are two main objectives in the CPA's educational focus: To sensitize teachers and church workers to new methods of learning and teaching, and to encourage pupils, students and adults to think critically for themselves. In 2007, it already organized two six-day workshops for a total of 45 participants. More training is planned in the coming years.

In 2006, the CPA also organized a one-week training for neophytes in Fatumake. On one day, an episode of the "*História ba Futuru*" series was shown to the pupils and the class teachers. By applying a special teaching method called SOTARA, the teachers learned how to actively

⁶⁰ Op. Cit. CAVR. 2005. p.188.

⁶¹ For more detailed information on the current state of the curriculum development see Leach Michael. 2007. History teaching: challenges and alternatives.

include the pupils in the analysis of the seen episode. The pupils were asked to react to the film by answering certain questions e.g. about the sound of the film, the content, the topic, to give a resume as well as come up with possible follow-up actions. The teacher was asked only to facilitate rather than dominate this process. Overwhelmingly, the teachers stated that they liked this way of teaching. However, more detailed training would be necessary in order to practice this technique more carefully.

As mentioned before, the new production site of the CPA will also include a training centre for interested teachers and others involved in education from the whole country as well as for its own staff. There could be training in teaching methods (both for school teachers and for teachers working in adult education) but also on the usage of audiovisual products for teaching.

Conclusion

The CPA is the most well-known production facility for audiovisual media in Timor-Leste. Its series pick up issues of national interest such as the country's history, its values and its identity. They are broadcast on national TV as well as distributed throughout the country on DVDs. As a second focus, the CPA engages in educational work such as providing training to teachers and pupils.

As an intended outcome programming media, the CPA aims at certain objectives: to provide the Timorese with quality information on pressing issues of the past and at the same time provide a forum to deal with those issues in the present in order to resolve them for a peaceful future. Therefore, both components of the CPA's work towards reconciliation or the re-establishment of social relationships in Timor-Leste. By using locally adopted means of their series (Tetum, local songs and bands, local legends and historical events, dialogues, animated cartoons and the reading of letters to the editor) they are easily understandable for all Timorese and take account of the current social realities of the country. Thus, the CPA's programs can play an essential part in the Timorese reconciliation and peace-building process.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine whether the CPA could function as a binding element between the top-down and bottom-up approaches of reconciliation as Bloomfield suggest⁶²: The broadcasting of the series "*História ba Futuru*" on TV – as a top-down process – could raise awareness of critical issues related to the past and provide a forum for discussion. The public viewing events as well as the screening in schools could be seen as a facilitator for bottom-up processes of reconciliation.

Another interesting task would be an in-depth analysis of the letters to the editors – especially those that relate to the latest episodes like that on the crisis of 2006. Such an analysis would most likely provide a good indication of the state of reconciliation in Timor-Leste.

⁶² Op. Cit. Bloomfield David. 2006.