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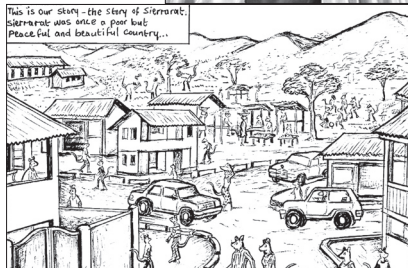
Acompañar a la vida cotidiana

El concepto exitoso de la radio parroquial Enmanuel en Huacàn



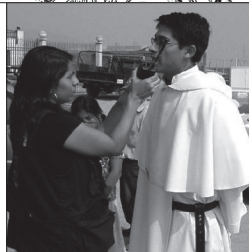
If not Published - It is Lost

The Publisher Irene Staunton on the Relevance of Books and Literature in Zimbabwe



Once upon a time... in Sierrarat

Cartoons explaining Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Report



Acompañar a la vida cotidiana

El concepto exitoso de la radio parroquial Enmanuel

Por José María Roja García

La radio parroquial Enmanuel es la emisora más sintonizada en Huaycán, Lima (Perú). Se destaca tanto por su estrecha ligación con la vida cotidiana de la comunidad como la adaptación a los gustos juveniles y practica un concepto pastoral que responde exitosamente al contexto urbano-marginal. Partiendo de esta experiencia concreta el responsable de Pastoral de la Comunicación de la Diócesis de Lurín (Lima) plantea perspectivas para el futuro de la radio religiosa local.

José María Roja García, sacerdote diocesano español, ha trabajado siempre en sectores urbano-marginales desde su llegada al Perú en 1975 - primero en Chimbote (Costa Norte), luego en Juliaca-Puno (Altiplano) en Ica (Costa Sur) y desde 2005 en Lima Sur. Es, además, Responsable de la Comisión de Pastoral de la Comunicación de la Diócesis de Lurín. Entre 2004 y 2005 hizo una Maestría en Comunicación en la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Bogotá que incluía la investigación aquí presentada.



El payaso y los niños celebran el aniversario de Radio Enmanuel

¿Nos hemos tomado en serio aquello de los “nuevos areópagos” de la *Redemptoris Missio* (Encíclica de Juan Pablo II, publicado en 1990)? ¿No será verdad que por un lado va nuestra teoría y por el otro nuestra práctica?

En 2004 realicé una investigación sobre “*Las audiencias de programación religiosa radial en el Cono Este de Lima-Perú*”^{**} que no se centra en la oferta radial sino en los gustos y programas realmente escuchados en las zonas urbano-marginales. Para este fin comparamos el uso radial en Canto Grande con Huaycán. Canto Grande pertenece al distrito de S. Juan de Lurigancho, el mayor de Lima y el mayor del Perú, con aproximadamente un millón de habitantes. Huaycán, en el mismo Este de Lima, fue creado en 1984 y tiene actualmente unos 150 mil habitantes. Según las 315 entrevistas que hicimos en Canto Grande en mayo 2004 y las 308 entrevistas que realizamos en Huaycán una de cada tres personas mayores de 14 años escucha radio más de cinco horas diarias y una de cada dos la escucha más de tres horas.

En todo el distrito de S. Juan de Lurigancho no había ni una sola emisora

religiosa; tampoco un programa católico, perteneciendo a esta religión el 83 % de la población. No obstante, llegan las ondas de un buen número de emisoras y programas religiosos de Lima metropolitana, de distintas denominaciones o iglesias.

A diferencia de Canto Grande en Huaycán sí hay una emisora parroquial católica - *Radio Enmanuel* - y ello marca significativamente la escucha de programación religiosa radial. En Canto Grande menos del 14% escucha programas religiosos alguna vez a la semana, mientras en Huaycán un 36% de los 308 entrevistados lo hace. *Radio Enmanuel* es la emisora más escuchada en Huaycán, por encima de las grandes cadenas nacionales y compite con éstas hasta en lo noticioso. Así que, si bien los sectores urbano-marginales están de lleno inmersos en la globalización económica y en la “mundialización cultural” (Renato Ortiz) ello no impide el que lo local tenga un gran peso. *Radio Enmanuel* ejerce un gran atractivo y, por tanto, influencia en los sectores populares, gran parte de la población de Huaycán se identifica con ‘su’ emisora.

Radio es sustantivo

Nótese que digo radio religiosa, donde radio es sustantivo y religiosa adjetivo. Se trata de hacer radio, un producto radial y de lo mejor; no de utilizar la radio para hacer religión, trasladando el púlpito o el aula a la cabina de la radio.

Con la experiencia de *Radio Enmanuel* captaremos mejor la impor-

tancia de la radio religiosa. Según sus responsables ni tenía siquiera una programación religiosa muy perfilada, y sin embargo tenía algo esencial: una fuerte identificación con los pobladores. Desde su nacimiento estuvo ligada a los acontecimientos importantes de la vida de esa comunidad barrial y a su vida cotidiana: es 'su' radio, no sólo la radio de la parroquia. Afortunadamente también la parroquia es parte importante de la vida de esos pobladores.

Para nada hay oposición entre programación religiosa propiamente dicha y preocupación por los problemas más sentidos en la población en un amplio sector. Se valora en *Radio Enmanuel* el que haya ido ayudando a formar identidad ciudadana en esos miles de personas migrantes del campo o venidas de otros barrios de la ciudad.

La presencia de sus micrófonos en

las fiestas locales de cada colectivo, el acompañamiento en reclamos por servicios, el animar la fe sencilla con la oración matinal o el rezo del Angelus, el ayudar a encontrar una niña perdida o buscar a un paisano del que sólo se sabe el apellido y su pueblo de origen... Todo eso va fortaleciendo la identidad.

De ahí ya no sorprende constatar que el número de los que escuchan noticias y programas relacionados con valores humanos son significativamente altos en Huaycán.

Mientras tanto, la situación en Canto Grande es bien diferente. Aquí predomina totalmente el interés por la programación musical. A la vez la población reclama cambios. Entre un 20 y 25 % de los encuestados reclamaban mayor relación entre la programación religiosa y la vida cotidiana. Aquella intuición del Vaticano II de recoger "los gozos y las esperanzas, las tristezas y las

angustias de los hombres (y mujeres) de nuestro tiempo, sobre todo de los pobres y de cuantos sufren" (Gaudium et Spes 1) es exigida permanentemente por 1 de cada 4 ó 5 de los oyentes de programación religiosa. Y a la hora de concretar son los problemas más cercanos, los familiares y barriales, como la educación de los hijos, drogadicción, delincuencia, inseguridad ciudadana... los que concitan el interés de ese 20 ó 25 %.

Gustos juveniles

Una preocupación seria surgió en el tiempo de mi investigación en *Radio Enmanuel*: su hora pico de audiencia estaba marcada por un largo espacio musical, más dirigido a la juventud y sin prácticamente otro mensaje que el simple entretenimiento. ¿Acaso no era posible - se preguntaron los responsables de la radio - introducir algunas cuñas, mensajes breves, ... que significaran un valor añadido

Huaycán se solidariza con la población iraquí





La programación se mantiene por la colaboración de más de 20 voluntarios
 Todas las fotos: José María Roja García

a esa programación, sin perder el carácter de entretenimiento y por tanto sin perder audiencia? El reto estaba lanzado.

Los datos de mi encuesta eran contundentes: adolescentes y jóvenes son los que más radio escuchan; los mismos dos grupos, los que menos programación religiosa escuchan. La conclusión se impone: o no están interesados en la temática religiosa o la presentación de esos programas no cuenta con el gusto y aprecio de la juventud. Profundizando la investigación se impuso la segunda hipótesis: los jóvenes rotundamente afirmaban que esos programas *"no son nuestros, no nos sentimos representados, son hechos por otros y sin consultarnos, no recogen ni nuestros gustos ni nuestras sensibilidades..."*

Le dieron a la Programación Religiosa los calificativos de *"pesada, aburrida"* y de que *"esas radios son sólo para dormir"*. Y reclamaban, con razón, *"programas juveniles dirigidos por jóvenes, animados por jóvenes, con espacios para jóvenes,*

con participación (llamadas, consultas...). Y, como es obvio, temas de su interés: *aborto, drogadicción, enamoramiento...*; entre otros.

Si la radio en estos sectores urbanos se perfila fundamentalmente como un medio de entretenimiento, en el caso de jóvenes y adolescentes es mucho más, por lo que la música juega un papel esencial. Pero no cualquier música sino *"la música loca, que nos mueva, que nos haga sentir libres; música y canciones con una letra que nos llene a nosotros, con ritmo alegre"*.

Han sido las iglesias no católicas las que han sabido asumir mejor este reto e introducir ritmos latinos, más calientes, en la música religiosa.

Por otro lado, les gustan los programas en que puedan participar: *"llamadas para conocerse entre ellos, para solicitar temas o canciones, para enviar saludos a alguien, para participar en concursos."* Quieren interactuar, no ser meramente pasivos. Estamos ante una juventud que no es la supercrítica y "revolucionaria" de décadas pasadas, pero tampoco es la pasiva a la que todo le da igual...

Un ejemplo de programa con aceptación juvenil es *Hablando con el padre Pablo* (un religioso católico) domingos tarde en la noche, en base a música romántica y en una emisora comercial de la capital. Así lo describía una joven de Huaycán: *"Habla de todos los jóvenes, historias de amor, historias de fe, historias de sufrimiento... o nos da varias*

enseñanzas. Lo más lindo de él es que en la parte más interesante nos pone la música, hace pasar varios minutos y después... 'esperen un momento que ahorita venimos con la segunda parte'. Y una está pegada para escuchar la segunda parte, la parte más interesante. Después de terminar la historia dice: 'ahorita venimos con el comentario'... y los comentarios que da son lindos... Mayormente son baladas. Hay jóvenes que llaman y el padre les ayuda en sus problemas, da muchas perspectivas, no te hace quedar solo con una idea sino que hace que tu idea tenga otros puntos de salida".

Iría esto ligado a algo más global en cuanto al abanico de edades y en cuanto a temáticas: las audiencias quieren que la radio religiosa siga tocando las fibras más sensibles de la persona, que no sea simplemente adoctrinamiento, que vaya al sentimiento pero que permita participación.

Pistas al futuro

La perspectiva es fortalecer una radio misionera, la que apunta no a un 'público cautivo' sino a un público amplio, con propuestas mucho más abiertas, la que asume una problemática 'menos religiosa' y más incidiendo en la vida real y los problemas de hoy (no una problemática moralista individual), la que tiene un carácter más profético tanto de cuestionamiento del sistema actual y sus manifestaciones como de oferta de propuestas para el compromiso individual y colectivo. Un tipo de radio que piensa menos

en la institución eclesial y sus problemas que en empatar con la vida y las necesidades de las personas y, por supuesto, de un público heterogéneo.

Ese tipo de radio tiene que descartar, así mismo, la óptica o el acento en el adoctrinamiento - y mucho más si es apologético - para asumir el dirigirse a la persona íntegra y desde los recursos que el medio radio exige.

En el relato radial se debe recoger lo íntimo no sólo de las personas sino de los grupos sociales, de los distintos colectivos humanos del entorno. Y lo íntimo empata tanto con los problemas como con el ciclo vital de las personas y el ciclo vital de los pueblos, por lo tanto sus festividades con toda su carga cultural y religiosa. Recoge elementos del pasado, del presente y del futuro; se enraíza en la carga cultural de los miembros, asume la densidad



Padre Jesús Cucho, el director de la radio, en plena entrevista

del presente (gozos y temores, problemas y entretenimiento...) y proyecta los sueños e ilusiones de un futuro mejor, obra individual y colectiva.

Ello comporta una tarea educativa planteada a mediano y largo plazo. Y una educación partiendo de los gustos e intereses de la población, o lo que es lo mismo, de lo afectivo, de los sentimientos, de lo íntimo. Que crezca la autoestima personal y comunitaria, que desaparezcan los complejos, muchas veces causados por el racismo y la discriminación (abiertos o sutilmente disimulados). Una educación para la tolerancia y la democracia donde se valoran las diferencias étnicas, culturales y religiosas y el diálogo es herramienta habitual...

En cuanto a la presentación cobra fuerza el formato "testimonio", si se trata de competir con otro medio - la TV - donde la imagen es su fuerte. La radio debe explotar su carácter de cercana, de próxima y una de las formas es presentando experiencias que la gente pueda identificar fácilmente y tratar de aplicarlo a sus vidas. Más aún, eso invita a la participación al ver que lo común sí es interesante y tiene cabida en las ondas.

No cabe duda que si se piensa en una temática abierta, en la línea de valores humanos - por lo tanto evangélicos - el ecumenismo debería ser una nota esencial de esa radio misionera. Será difícil con la mayoría de los nuevos grupos religiosos, marcadamente fundamentalistas

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y apologéticos, pero fácil entre las iglesias históricas e incluso sectores agnósticos respetuosos y preocupados por una nueva ética en una sociedad pluralista.

**José María Rojo García: Las audiencias de programación religiosa radial en el Cono Este de Lima, Perú. Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Facultad de Comunicación y Lenguaje, 2005, 217 p.*

PERFILE Radio Enmanuel *Radio Enmanuel es una emisora parroquial cuyo objetivo principal es evangelizar a través de la educación, información y entretenimiento. Además de estar comprometido en el desarrollo sostenible y la participación ciudadana en la comunidad de Huaycán (distrito de Ate Vitarte), una de las zonas más pobres de Lima (Perú). Inició su trabajo en 1996, y con una potencia de 500 Watt en FM llega a toda la población de Huaycán con actualmente más de 150 mil habitantes. Tiene una programación variada, con énfasis en música, noticias locales y catequesis. Radio Enmanuel pertenece a la Parroquia San Andrés (Diócesis de Chosica) y está administrada por los padres Monfortianos. El equipo de la radio está conformado por cuatro coordinadores (Director, Evangelización, Prensa y Administración) y 21 conductores y corresponsales, muchos de ellos voluntarios jóvenes. Más información: <http://www.radioenmanuel.com>.*

If not Published — It is Lost

Publisher Irene Staunton on the Relevance of Books and Literature in Zimbabwe

Interview by Annelie Klother*

In August 2006 the Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF) took place in Harare. The ZIBF claims to be “Sub-Saharan Africa’s premier book and publishing fair, showcasing the largest and most diverse annual exhibition of books, magazines, journals”. But is this still true; especially in the present political situation? With the introduction of a new book fair in Cape Town, South Africa – which was a huge success attracting approximately 26.000 people in June this year – the ZIBF seems to lose its relevance. But how important are books and literature in a country like Zimbabwe today? One out of the 400 exhibitors from twenty-six countries at the book fair in Cape Town is Irene Staunton from Zimbabwe. Irene Staunton is the former publishing director of Baobab Books and the present director of Weaver Press (<http://www.weaverpresszimbabwe.com>) The titles of Weaver Press focus on political and social history, media issues, women’s and children’s rights and fiction.

Annelie Klother had the opportunity to interview Mrs. Staunton and found out more about the status and use of books as well as the challenges and importance to publish books from Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans.

AK: Could you describe your reasons and aims to start in 1999 the new publishing house Weaver Press in Zimbabwe?

Staunton: Our objectives at Weaver were: to publish very good fiction out of Zimbabwe – literary fiction – to publish good non-fiction, with a focus on history, politics, social studies, gender issues – be the research done by academics within Zimbabwe or, as it very often happens, by academics who are living abroad. Research on Zimbabwe often never reaches these shores. And if it does, it is usually so expensive that nobody can afford to

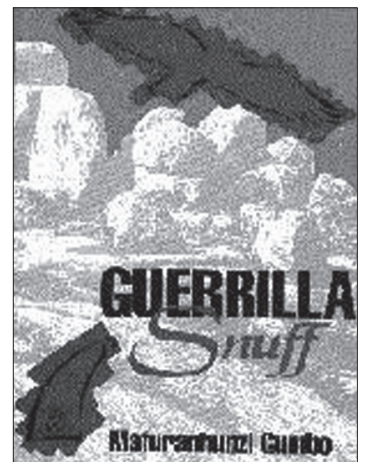
buy it. So we work quite hard with sympathetic publishing houses such as *James Currey Publishers* (UK); and we seek to find grants or subventions through the author to enable us to bring books published in the UK and US into the country.

AK: What are the main difficulties of book-selling in Zimbabwe?

Staunton: It seems a quite simple question, but one with a rather long and difficult answer. It is really hard to know where to begin. From one perspective whether we are generalising about Zimbabwe, the country has never had a book-buying population; and one must distinguish between a book-purchaser and a reader. If you give someone a book, they are almost certain to read it. Chenjerai Hove (one of the best known authors from Zimbabwe) once commented that when someone in Europe buys a book, they read it and it goes on a shelf but if you give someone a book in Zimbabwe, it is read until it falls apart. Publishing, however, depends to a large extent on people buying



Effortless Tears by Alexander Kanengoni



Guerrilla Snuff by Mafuranhunzi Gumbo



books, otherwise we cannot survive to publish more books.

Reading is not Sociable

Zimbabwean culture is very social, and family is hugely important – doing things together as a family. So isolating yourself somewhere to read a book is not a very sociable thing to do. Sharing what has happened to you is more important than slipping away to read quietly by yourself. Thus even in middle-class households where books are (or were) affordable – many people would prefer to sit together and watch television than to hive off and read. In working class households this anyway would be very difficult to do. How do you find solitude if you are living with seventeen other people in a four-roomed house?

Books are not for Leisure

Another factor is that books are always bought for children. Books are

bought for schools. So even teachers very often have very little access to a choice of books, selection is done by the head teacher or the headmaster, and budgets are limited. So there are never ever enough books for everyone, except in the very best schools.

Thus children grow up at worst with one book per classroom, per subject. And the teacher has that one book. And at best, there may be twenty books for thirty pupils. This means there is often punitive association around a book. If you lose it, or damage it, you can be punished, you cannot take it home and make it your own, because it has to go back and be locked up very carefully so that next year's students can use it, and that schoolbook is for exam. If you fail that exam, the book has let you down. So the idea of wandering into a bookshop, making your own choice of a book, have it as your own through school, having a library, having free reading

sessions, being encouraged to read for pleasure as well as for academics is not something that happens very much. In addition we have a whole generation of teachers, who never enjoyed the pleasures of reading or a library either. Education is the only form of social mobility available for everybody – even though today many children have dropped out of school, because they cannot afford it. Nonetheless, if you are poor your only road up is through education. So the pressure on you to pass your exams and not to play is huge. Books are not for leisure, they're for learning.

AK: In your opinion, how could the interest in poetry and books be stimulated?

Staunton: I am not a teacher. If I was minister of culture or minister of education, I would say, "Libraries are one of the most important services in our society". Everybody needs to have access to books and material,

*Irene Staunton during the interview.
Photos: Walter Kropp*

not just from Zimbabwe, but also in the rest of Africa, and not just from Africa, but also in the rest of the world. We need to keep pace with ideas everywhere, we need to discuss, to debate, to refine our own ideas, to explore, discover or renew our own identities by engaging with other cultures. People cannot afford books but we can have libraries. In a dream world, I would put pots of money into libraries and I would have lots of activities in libraries, reading sessions, book club sessions, writing sessions, authors' visits, etc. You could do a great deal around libraries. You could make them very, very vibrant places. You could have computers there with Internet access, you could do all sorts of things. But if you go to any library now, often the last books bought were bought before independence. Sadly books are just not high on our agenda. Over 95% of our education budget is spent on administration (including salaries) and less than 5% on book purchase.

AK: But how many books do you sell?

Staunton: At *Baobab Books* we used to sell approximately 800 copies of a novel a year — it's not bad, it's about average — if, for example, I published an unknown writer for a small publishing house in England, I probably would not expect any more than 800 books a year. But currently we are only selling something like 300 plus copies of a novel a year. It is about 350 in Zimbabwe and 100, 150 outside Zimbabwe. These are very general figures. It could vary

a little bit from one title to another. We could not possibly survive unless we had grants. At the moment our fiction programme is supported by HIVOS, a Dutch NGO, who has helped us to develop it. If HIVOS was not there or had not helped us I doubt we would have published much if any fiction. What happens, when that grant comes to an end, I'm not sure. When we first put the proposal forward in 1998 we said that within five years we would have a strong enough backlist to be able to support the front list. However, under the present circumstances, with inflation — officially it's now about a 1000 percent — people just cannot afford books, and we can hardly afford them either. You know, a reprint should cost much less than the original publication, but reprints now are costing hundreds of times more than the original because of inflation.

AK: Is the small rich elite in the country not interested in buying books?

Staunton: I think the majority of people who have the money to buy books are not very interested. Money buys all sorts of things, big houses, smart cars, video and DVD players, satellite dishes, swimming pools, tennis courts, jewels, status symbols. I have a friend who supplies chemicals for tennis courts — her business has never been better.

The Value of Fiction

With a book you cannot impress anybody but fiction is of very great value. In my view it is as important

as history. The truth is told about complex situations through fiction in a different way. History provides us with facts and theories. But how people actually survived in certain situations, the complexities, ambiguities, ambivalences, half-truths and passions. If you look at the literature we published on the Zimbabwean liberation war at *Baobab Books* — *Bones, Shadows, Pawns, Effortless Tears, Echoing Silences, Without a Name, Guerrilla Snuff, White Man, Black War, Kandaya* — together all these books provide a multi-faceted perspective on the liberation struggle, that does not come easily through a history text. This fiction provides a complex picture of right and wrong, compromise and fear and pain, which you do not feel in a history book. In the latter they might tell us that ten thousand people died, in fiction you learn what it was like to be there, when the bombs came raining down. Of course, I know historians would probably disagree with me but it is a

Annelie Klother is a member of two German NGOs, the Zimbabwe Network and BAOBAB Afrikaprojekte. Both organisations aim to strengthen the Civil Society in Zimbabwe and to inform the German public about this Southern African country. For further information see: <http://www.zimbabwennetzwerk.de> and <http://www.afrikaprojekte.de>.



Bones ...

good debate. It is hugely important for a society and for the development of that society to have access to its fiction. If it is not published, it is lost. Even if it does not sell, a good book provides a singular record. If it is good enough, it will last. It will be there for posterity to show us what people lived through and how they felt about it at the time.

AK: So can literature change people and politics?

Staunton: I think it does sometimes but over an extended period. Good literature can open your mind to a perspective that you have not understood before. If we had a well written sensitive book in which the heroine was a lesbian Zimbabwean woman, it would alter some people's perspectives towards the homosexual community. It would not change them but it would maybe make them a little bit more sympathetic to it. Changing or altering perspectives takes time and it also depends on how you have



by Chenjerai Hove

been shown to read literature. Traditionally, in Europe, it was a vehicle for explaining aspects of reality. I was brought up with lots of Victorian children stories — there was the goody and the baddy: good little girls did this and this and bad little girls did that and that. Some people here read literature with an expectation, that they are going to be given a homily and not ambivalence. So it also depends on how you have been taught to read and to see things. Certainly the majority of unsolicited manuscripts that we receive are by people using their work as a vehicle for preaching their ideas, and generally there are good people (often men), bad people (often women) and terrible people (thieves, murderers and corrupt politicians). These manuscripts we do not publish.

AK: Based on the present political circumstances in the country, did you experience any restrictions or limitations by the Zimbabwean government so far?

Staunton: We don't have and have never had any problems. Our print runs are small, never more than a thousand. This is nothing in a country of over ten million, even if over half of them are children. If I were to publish a contentious political pamphlet in an indigenous language in hundreds of thousands, then this would be a concern for the government. But an expensive book, hidden away in a bookshop. No, I do not think so. The government has so much else to worry about. Sometimes I get anxious and think: "Oh, my goodness somebody might not like this," but that's on a bad day. Anxiety differs from fear. It has no object. So one has to ask how much a particular worry has to do with your own self and not with the objective situation. But people are afraid. Everyone has different thresholds of fear but many people feel that fear has become more tangible within our society at the moment. I really do not want to go into it. . .

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Once upon a time ... in Sierrarat

Cartoons explaining Sierra Leone's TRC-Report

By Juliane Westphal

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) were established around the globe, in South Africa, Peru or East Timor. In Sierra Leone the TRC was set up in 2002 and published in 2005 its respective report comprising four volumes of almost 2000 pages. But how can such complex contents be made accessible to a wider public? The Truth and Reconciliation Working Group (TRWG) successfully used two different means to communicate them: for Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) the TRC report was worked out in the form of fictional cartoons with animal characters. To adults in rural areas the content was presented by storytellers. Juliane Westphal, a member of the TRWG, summarises for MEDIAFORUM some of her experiences and insights.

Juliane Westphal is a media consultant who has followed the peacebuilding process in Sierra Leone since 2001, as a radio documentary producer, trainer for broadcasting and print media.

Ten months after the official end of eleven years of civil war in Sierra Leone, December 2002, a *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) started collecting testimonies all over the country. Set up similar to the South African TRC, it was operating in quite a different situation. The Lomé Peace Accord (peace agreement from 1999 between the government of Sierra Leone and the *Revolutionary United Front*) granted all fighting forces a blanket amnesty. Consequently the TRC depended on the good will of perpetrators to give statements. The UN had always insisted that there cannot be an amnesty for grave crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes and therefore established the Special Court together with the Sierra Leonean Government for those who bear the greatest responsibility for crimes committed in the course of the war. Operating simultaneously with the Special Court made the work of the TRC a complicated task. Most people found it difficult to differentiate between the two bodies of transitional justice. Despite these problems and the very short time given for statement taking and public hearings,

a very good report was eventually published in 2005, compiling the findings and recommendations of the TRC on 2000 pages.

Make the Report Accessible

The main causes of the war in Sierra Leone remain unchanged: The extreme poverty, bad healthcare and education for the majority of the population while elites and foreign companies enrich themselves by exploiting the country's mineral resources – especially diamonds – and foreign aid. That makes it even more important that the public gets information about the causes of the war and the recommendations the TRC made to improve the situation. The work of the TRC should not be considered as a single event but rather as part of a national healing process continuing long after the Commission has concluded its work. It can only be considered a success if its key findings and recommendations become part of Sierra Leone's history and consciousness, thereby destroying any remaining myths about the recent past.

The Story of Sierrarat

The *Truth and Reconciliation Working Group*, TRWG, (a civil society network of Sierra Leonean NGOs) with me as a media consultant developed communication tools that allow Sierra Leoneans to familiarise themselves with the key findings and recommendations of the TRC report. Within eight months in 2005 we produced *The Senior Secondary School (SSS) Version of the TRC report*(1).

It allows students – a lot of them preparing for academic education and to take over responsible roles in society – to familiarise themselves with the contents of the report and to strengthen their skills to reflect, discuss and state their opinion. These are important prerequisites for human rights protection.

The project started with a brainstorming workshop on the concept for the book with teachers from all districts in Sierra Leone. It has been written by two Sierra Leonean authors, Mohamed Sheriff and Elvira M. Bobson Kamara. Each chapter contains a fictional animal cartoon story (set in “the poor but peaceful and beautiful” country *Sierrarat*) drawn by Simeon Sesay, illustrating the history of the war and its aftermath in Sierra Leone. The theme

of each story reflects the content of the chapter to which it belongs. The use of animal characters allows the story to talk about incidents that happened during the war without referring or seeming to refer to individual persons. Another key factor of the book is the exercises at the end of each chapter, designed to encourage students to develop and express their ideas about what they have read. 200 copies of the book have been distributed in assemblies to each senior secondary school in Sierra Leone. The high text quality and its appropriate style for secondary school students as well as the quality of the cartoons make a very attractive history book. Especially, as there are very few explicitly Sierra Leonean schoolbooks. Fortunately, this one has officially been launched by the Minister of

Education, Alpha Wurie, which makes it likely to be widely used in classrooms. Additionally we have consulted the Ministry of Education to include the book in the curriculum. The feedback we got from students, teachers and colleagues so far has been extremely positive, and the 40.000 copies we were able to provide are not enough to cater for the huge demand for printed copies. The book can, however, be downloaded also as a pdf from the official website of Sierra Leone’s TRC under: www.trcsierraleone.org.

Storytelling

Last year the TRWG conducted also a storytelling project for a target group that is easily forgotten about: grassroot people from small communities in all districts of the

Source: TRC Report. A Senior Secondary School Version. By Mohamed Sheriff/Elvira M.J. Bobson-Kamara. Illustrations by Simeon Sesay. Cartoon Stories by Mohamed Sheriff. Sierra Leone (TRWG) 2005



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country, a lot of them not being able to read and to write. Some of them don't have regular access to the radio, quite a number of them don't understand Krio well. That is where the storytelling came in very effectively. The storytellers, 150 actors and community activists, worked in the areas of their origin which means they were able to tell the stories we designed about the content of the TRC report and facilitate discussions in the language people speak in the communities visited. Due to prior training by the TRWG and a community theatre director, the storytellers were able to answer the questions arising and they listened to what people had to say. In all cases monitored by us vivid discussions followed the storytelling itself. People in remote areas expressed that although they were forced to flee their homes several times, they never found out before what actually caused the war.

Listen, Talk and See

The storytellers posted a set of eight posters showing part of the animal cartoon story used in the SSS version book at a public venue in each of the villages of the 149 chiefdoms. This was to promote that people recapture the story of the war and the recommendations of the TRC after the storyteller has left. Here again, the popularity of the animal story helped to keep up the discussion for some time.

Not Mere Consumers

The two approaches have one im-

portant common factor: both media were used in direct contact with the recipients, the students and people in the communities were not left alone with the information they received but had the opportunity to react and to discuss with the teacher and the storyteller. This made them active parts in the process and not mere consumers – an important prerequisite for civil conflict management. We provided an opportunity for people to relate historical facts and findings to their own experiences and to give them the information and skills to be able to monitor the government fulfilling recommendations – recommendations that if fulfilled will significantly change Sierra Leone.

(1) The project was funded by the Federal Foreign Office of Germany and the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa) of Germany.

*Storyteller in a Sierra Leonean Village
Photo: Juliane Westphal*

