All in the "Fambul": A Case Study of Local/Global Approaches to Peacebuilding and Transitional Justice in Sierra Leone

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Introduction

On May 2, 2009, I sat in the shelter of a palava hut in Moyamba, Sierra Leone, with Fatima, who told me:

> "I will never forget February 1995. … When the rebels came to our village, my husband ran away. Our two children ran after him. When he was captured by the rebels, they cried out for him, so the rebels took them too. They shot my daughter first, then my son. She was three and he was four. Later they killed my husband. All right in front of my eyes. On 23 May 1995, they killed my father. I have a house in that place, but I don't want to go back there. Other people live in the house now. After the war, I decided to live … with my mother's people."[1]

Fatima's story is a narrative typical of the violence that characterized Sierra Leone's civil war in rural areas.

In this case study, I consider how to engage people like Fatima in post-conflict peacebuilding and transitional justice activities. Specifically, I examine the work of Fambul Tok (literally, "Family Talk"), a hybrid local/global organization that works in post-war Sierra Leone. Fambul Tok promotes peacebuilding in rural Sierra Leonean communities through storytelling, ritual, and ongoing reconciliation activities. These efforts build on, and yet are markedly different from, the country's previous transitional justice programs, the Truth & Reconciliation Commission and Special Court, which were largely international and national in their purviews and did little to engage and impact ordinary Sierra Leoneans. While working in local communities, Fambul Tok is nonetheless a global collaboration between peacebuilders in the United States and Sierra Leone. Fambul Tok is also distinguished by its commitment to emergent design, changing and adapting its organizational practices based on its commitment to working with and learning from communities engaged in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Background of Conflict[2]

Located in the Mano River region of West Africa, Sierra Leone was a center of slave trading during the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1787, the coastal area around Freetown was settled as Sierra Leone by freed slaves brought there by a British navy invested in abolitionism. Thirty years later, Sierra Leone was made a Crown Colony. In 1895, the inland area of what is now Sierra Leone was declared a British Protectorate.[3] Sierra Leone achieved independence from the British in 1961, followed by a number of military coups during the next few years. Siaka Stevens began his All People's Congress (APC) party's rule of Sierra Leone in 1968, overseeing the slow decline of Sierra Leone's economic prospects and state services that continued until 1992.

On March 23, 1991, with the help of rebel leader and eventual president of neighboring Liberia, Charles Taylor, fighters from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded Sierra Leone from neighboring Liberia, itself in the midst of a bloody civil war. Two other attachments invaded southeastern Sierra Leone, engaged the Sierra Leone Army, and moved fighting inland. In its attempt to gain control over towns and villages, RUF members informed civilians that they were freedom fighters to save Sierra Leoneans from the APC. Recruitment, both voluntary and forced, of adults and children was a feature of the RUF's strategy from the outset. Training of recruits took place immediately, and the RUF's numbers quickly increased. The wanton killing of civilians was common in nearly every place the RUF occupied, as was the looting of property, which RUF soldiers

often required civilians to steal and transport for them. In addition, the mass rape or sexual enslavement of women and girls was another common feature of the RUF presence.

In places they controlled, the RUF set up informal administrative and security mechanisms—such as implementation of checkpoints and installation of local leaders. In addition, "Taylor's involvement with the movement, the presence of foreign mercenaries in the RUF ranks, and the viciousness of attacks on civilian targets led many Sierra Leoneans … to questions the motives of the RUF."[4] The RUF's continued fighting after deposing the APC government and replacing it with military rule reinforced this view. Despite lack of popular support, in the next two years the RUF made significant inroads in controlling territory in the north, northwestern, and southern parts of the country.

By 1996, foreign and domestic pressure forced the provisional governing council to hold general elections despite the ongoing civil war. Ahmed Tejan Kabbah became the first freely elected President in Sierra Leone in 34 years. He attempted to fight the RUF by strengthening the Sierra Leone Army through inclusion of armed civilian vigilantes, known as Civil Defense Forces (CDF) and sobels (soldier-rebels). Civilians suspected of collaborating with the RUF were often executed by these troops, who also looted to support their personal efforts. Failed peace negotiations with the RUF in Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire, led to continued unrest and violence in the next few years. Meanwhile, the Kabbah government received pressure from the international community and regional leaders to engage the RUF in negotiations. The government of Sierra Leone and the RUF formally signed the peace agreement bringing an end to hostilities in Lomé, Togo, in July, 1999. The agreement granted full amnesty for all crimes related to the civil war and called for the creation of a truth and reconciliation commission. British and United Nations troops enforced the terms of the Lomé Accord and also trained and reformed the military, police, and security forces in Sierra Leone. Severe violence flared up after the peace accord was signed, culminating in the RUF taking 500 United Nations peacekeepers hostage briefly, which was obviously not covered by the terms of the Lomé Accord. In response to the resurgence of violence, two and a half years later after Lomé, the government of Sierra Leone signed an innovative agreement with the United Nations to create the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) to prosecute those bearing greatest responsibility for war crimes.[5] This agreement and the final, full declaration of peace in Sierra Leone came in January 2002.

While the reasons for the Sierra Leonean civil war are still under debate, the severe impact of the violence is not in question. At least half a million civilians lost one or more of their limbs because of amputations. The war was particularly hard on civilians in Sierra Leone. Fighting displaced as many as 2.6 million people (of 4.3 million in total population) during the conflict, either internally or as refugees in neighboring countries.[6] By conservative estimates as many as 70,000 Sierra Leonean lost their lives during the decade-long civil war.[7] While the RUF committed a majority of killings and gross human rights violations, they were certainly not alone in the commission of violent excesses. The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report states plainly, "All the fighting factions targeted civilians. The Commission found the leadership of the Revolutionary United (RUF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the Sierra Leone Army (SLA), and the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) to be responsible for either authorizing or instigating human rights violations against civilians; alternatively for failing to stop such practices or speak out against them. Sierra Leone was systematically plundered and looted by all factions in the conflict."[8] In rural areas of Sierra Leone, where much of the fighting took place, nearly all people and parts of life were directly affected by the war.[9]

The civil war in Sierra Leone was notable, particularly in the international community, for

the young age of its participants.[10] Young men did the majority of the fighting in the civil war. Many joined rebel forces willingly, as a response to the widespread disenfranchisement they experienced in their communities. Youth were particularly marginalized within the chieftaincy system that centralized power within ruling families and lifetime positions.[11] This, coupled with declining economic prospects throughout Sierra Leone, caused many young people to consider fighting a better alternative to their situations. Even when unwilling to join on their own, all sides used forced recruitment of children and adults as a strategy to bolster their numbers.

While diamond mining is often viewed as the cause of the civil war, depicted most prominently in the feature film *Blood Diamond*, it was only one aspect of the overall conflict. No doubt, diamonds helped fund the violence, which itself was in part a response to the uneven benefits of diamond mining in local communities. This inequality of income and economic prospects, coupled with the corruption of political leaders in both Freetown and rural areas, created deep cleavages in communities that left them prone to exploitation by those interested in sowing violent conflict.[12] In addition, it is important to remember that the war began in southeastern Sierra Leone and included many other areas of Sierra Leone which had no connections to diamond extraction. Rather, the proximity of these areas to conflict-ridden Liberia proved a key aspect of the conflict, and many authors have asserted that Sierra Leone's civil war is part of a larger system of Mano River regional conflict involving Liberia, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire, as well.[13] The violence in Sierra Leone also featured formal and informal state forces, international peacekeepers, mercenary troops, and numerous armed factions from within and outside the country.[14]

To deal with the aftermath of these traumatic events and upheaval in people's lives during the civil war, Sierra Leone has been the site of diverse and complementary transitional justice activities. More than eight years after the formal end of conflict, a hybrid criminal tribunal, the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), continues to adjudicate appeals of those prosecuted as leaders of the civil war. While witnesses report a generally positive experience of their participation in the Special Court's work, they desire alternative outlets for expressing and performing their stories for attentive audiences.[15] Testifiers at the Court also critique the silencing of sexual violence in its proceedings.[16] The legal discourse of the Court's prosecutors has attempted to depoliticize the actions of those on trial, which serves to alienate the general population from the judicial process.[17] There has been tremendous attention to engaging and educating Sierra Leoneans about the Special Court's work. Nonetheless, local needs have not driven the Court's overall proceedings.[18]

Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) began its work in 2002. It was mandated to "address impunity, break the cycle of violence, provide a forum for both the victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to tell their story, [and] get a clear picture of the past in order to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation."[19] To do this, it collected written and public testimony about people's personal experiences of the conflict and issued a final report detailing the causes of the war as well as recommendations for the future. After the first year, in which 8,000 statements were taken, 13% of these came from perpetrators.[20] The TRC was critiqued for its weak reach beyond Freetown and major cities. In some places, "survivors and witnesses of the violence agreed together that they would not give statements telling of what they had suffered during the war."[21] In addition, turnout for the public hearings, even those held in district headquarter town, was quite low.[22] The TRC failed to engage most ordinary Sierra Leoneans in these efforts outside of Freetown. There was a pressing need for more direct acknowledgement and recognition of the war, both individually and communally. In particular, there was a call for additional transitional justice activity that "builds upon established practices of healing and social coexistence."[23] While the TRC provided some Sierra Leoneans with an opportunity to discuss the civil war, "other channels for

dialogue, within communities and nationally, need to be created, supported, and their results acted upon while the time is ripe."[24]

Key Parties

The **Sierra Leone People's Party** (SLPP), composed primarily of **Mende** from southern Sierra Leone, and **All People's Congress** (APC), comprised of **Limba** and **Temne** from northern Sierra Leone, have been active since the post-independence period. Political parties have historically been allied with ethnic and geographic groups in Sierra Leone, which has not changed in the post-conflict dispensation. The Mende-oriented SLPP and northern-identified APC continue to dominate political life in post-conflict Sierra Leone. Eight additional political parties participated in the November 2012 elections. One feature these political parties share is their tendency to marginalize **young people** and **women**, as well as **ethnic minorities**.[25] Therefore, it's important to remember that while free and fair multi-party elections are often hailed as the hallmark of democratic consolidation, in Sierra Leone and surrounding countries, they can also heighten political tensions, social divisions, and lead to insecurity and unrest.

After the civil war, there have been sporadic outbreaks of violence in Freetown, Bo, and other cities, due in part to the lack of real reconciliation within the country and the disconnect between political leaders and ordinary Sierra Leoneans. The United Nations estimates that the conflict created approximately 2 million **displaced Sierra Leoneans**. Even after the war, large numbers of people remain displaced within the country. In particular, many of the approximately 10,000 youth **ex-combatants** have been unable or unwilling to return to their home villages after the conflict because of fear of rejection by the families and communities.[26] In addition, national unemployment for youths in the country remains near 50% and income inequality is very high in Sierra Leone. As a result, many ex-combatants inhabit unstable and insecure lives in Freetown and other cities, making them vulnerable to participation in political violence. Young ex-combatants continue to be ignored by the **political elites** who dominate the government, both nationally and regionally, while also using them to foment violence and insecurity on behalf of political parties and power.

Against this backdrop, reconciliation efforts have been focused in Freetown and primarily engaged those who have social and political power. Despite the completion of a **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** and the ongoing work of the **Special Court for Sierra Leone**, ordinary Sierra Leoneans still lacked "grassroots practices of reconciliation, reintegration, and healing" and therefore needed to create and participate in transitional justice processes "that are more locally effective in dealing with the aftermath of conflicts."[27] Starting in 2007, a community-based reconciliation project called **Fambul Tok** began to fill the gap between international and national transitional justice activities and local Sierra Leoneans, particularly in rural areas. **Catalyst for Peace**, headed by President Libby Hoffman, is a United States-based foundation that funds peacebuilding projects internationally. **Forum of Conscience**—a Sierra Leonean nonprofit organization focused on human rights advocacy—was founded and led by Executive Director John Caulker. Fambul Tok began as a jointly administered program by Catalyst for Peace and Forum of Conscience. This arrangement was created so that the Fambul Tok program existed independently from, but with this support of, both organizations.

Fambul Tok is a locally-based and -owned program that brings victims, perpetrators, and witnesses to the country's civil war together through activities that culminate in community-based ceremonies which encourage truth-telling, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The term Fambul Tok is

Krio for "family talk," which locates the process in indigenous symbolic resources of Sierra Leonean culture. It encourages communication among villagers by drawing them together around culturally significant rituals and symbols such as bonfires and cleansing ceremonies.[28] Given the ethnic and regional identification of political parties, as well as their exclusion of youth, women, and minorities, Fambul Tok has worked to ensure that its work is nonpartisan and not allied with, or coopted by, political parties or elected leaders.

Fambul Tok began its work in regional consultations across Sierra Leone in December 2007.[29] At these meetings, Fambul Tok engaged district representatives—including religious and political leaders, women, youth, and others—to discern whether they believed reconciliation was needed in their communities, whether they were interested reconciling, and whether they wanted to participate in Fambul Tok to begin the process of reconciliation. When participants responded affirmatively to the need for reconciliation in their communities, Fambul Tok began its work where the civil war first broke out—in the eastern district of Kailahun.

In organizing its program, Fambul Tok works through Sierra Leone's chieftancy system.[30] Under this system, paramount chiefs are elected for life from among ruling families that existed at independence in 1961.[31] **Paramount chiefs** govern chiefdoms, which are the next level of geopolitical organization below districts. When Fambul Tok considers working in a new district of Sierra Leone, it begins with a consultative process. It holds district consultations with **community members** from **chiefdoms** throughout that district to consider and discuss whether they are interested in reconciling and want to work with Fambul Tok to do so.[32]

If they are, **Fambul Tok national staff** members work to recruit a **district executive** of local leaders to guide the overall implementation of the program within the district. These leadership positions are voluntary in nature and represent a broad cross section of leaders from across the district's chiefdoms—political, such as chiefs; religious, such as pastors and imams; and gender-based, such as mammy queens. The district executive is important for ensuring buy-in across the district, as well as to help tailor the program to the specific customs, characteristics, and needs of the district. To complement and support the work of the district executive, Fambul Tok also hires **district staff** to run and manage the program in the district. These tend to be two to four young men and, to an increasing degree, women from the district who are willing and able to travel extensively and spend time in communities within the district.

Within each chiefdom, there are numerous **sections**, which are governed by section chiefs, under the guidance of paramount chiefs. Sections comprise three to twelve villages and, besides individual villages, are the smallest unit at which communal life is organized in Sierra Leone. The section is the most basic level at which Fambul Tok works with communities to promote reconciliation and build peace. By working at the section level, the Fambul Tok program is tailored to the particularities of existing communities—the level and types of violence that took place there; the religious and spiritual views of the community; as well as the specific needs of stakeholders in the section. This is particularly important for creating a peacebuilding process that responds to the specific needs in that community. In some cases, creating a process that would allow youth ex-combatants to participate and ease their return to their home villages was a top priority. In others, reconciliation was viewed as the means to creating sustainable economic development. Still others wanted to engage in Fambul Tok in order to heal ongoing tensions within villages and amongst neighbors.

The district staff and executive work together to identify specific sections where Fambul Tok can begin to work. In these communities, Fambul Tok holds meetings for **sectional stakeholders**

where, with the help of community members, they identify leaders in the community to constitute a Reconciliation Committee, as well as youth interested in serving on an Outreach Committee for Fambul Tok. Participation on these is voluntary and unpaid. Following a vetting of committee member nominations by district staff, Fambul Tok national staff members organize and train the Reconciliation and Outreach Committee members for the section. Within individual sections, the length and dialogical nature of Fambul Tok's engagement encourages the input of diverse stakeholders within the community. This allows the peacebuilding process to reflect, and respond to, differing needs and interests in the section.

The **Reconciliation Committee** is comprised of a respected cross-section of leaders from the section, including politicians, chiefs, pastors and imams, and women leaders. In 2010, in response to program participants, Fambul Tok staff expanded the membership of Reconciliation Committees to include more "ordinary" men and women who better represent the experiences, needs, and interests of villagers as a counterpoint and complement to the local elites who make up these committees. This committee works to inform people about the purpose and process of Fambul Tok, as well as to create structures to adjudicate conflict within the section. The **Outreach Committee** is a volunteer committee comprised of youths in the section, who work to educate and engage local community members in understanding what Fambul Tok is all about and encourage them to participate.[33] Over the course of several months, these committees work in their local communities to sensitize and prepare people to participate in, as well as raise the requisite resources for, a truth-telling bonfire and ritual cleansing ceremony. Afterward, Reconciliation Committees organize meetings to engage villagers in the section in determining what type of follow-up activities in which they want to organize to continue the process of reconciliation.

In 2008, the organization piloted the implementation of Fambul Tok in 28 communities in Kailahun.[34]After successfully working in Kailuhan, the program expanded to Moyamba and Kono districts in 2009 and Koinandugu in 2010. At the Fambul Tok strategic meetings in August 2009, there was intense discussion of the relationship between Catalyst for Peace and Forum of Conscience in the administration of the program. After lengthy discussions over two days, they adopted a new organizational structure that consolidated the program into an international organization in its own right. Thus, at the beginning of 2010, **Fambul Tok International** incorporated as a United States-based charity organization and an international nonprofit organization registered to work in Sierra Leone.[35] This change gave the program an independent organizational identity and expanded its focus to including advising and implementing similar processes in communities outside of Sierra Leone. In doing so, the organization states it is "grounded in an ongoing commitment to listening, whether it's at the local, national, or even the global level."[36] FTI has recently extended its work to the districts of Pujehun and Bombali.

Results

In this section, I highlight and explain three key achievements of Fambul Tok's work in Sierra Leone.

- Engagement of ordinary Sierra Leoneans, particularly those in rural areas, as participants in processes of transitional justice and peacebuilding

Calling on people in their local communities to participate and organize post-conflict peacebuilding and transitional justice seems like a very simple accomplishment. However, it is a huge departure from previous transitional justice practices in Sierra Leone. Ordinary Sierra

Leoneans were, for the most part, ignored by or passive witnesses to the TRC and the SCSL. At best, they were considered audiences and consumers of the work of these institutions, rather than integral participants. In contrast, Fambul Tok is guided by values of being "consultative, nonpolitical, and community-driven."[37] Since the vast majority of the civil war took place in rural communities of Sierra Leone, amongst neighbors, Fambul Tok targeted its work to reflect the realities of the civil war. Working at the section level grounds the organization's work within existing communities and responds to the needs and issues there. Therefore, rural communities are the central sites of the organization's efforts, localizing processes of peacebuilding and transitional justice as founded upon interpersonal interactions between neighbors.

- Acknowledgement and inclusion of local practices and resources to reckon with the aftermath of the civil war

Fambul Tok aims to deal with the effects of the Sierra Leonean civil war on individuals and in local communities, as well as to foster a culture of peace in these communities in order to prevent future conflict. To accomplish this, it relies on the cultural resources and capacities that are already present in communities in which it works. This reflects the organization's values of "meeting people in their communities to listen and learn" and "walking with communities to find their own answers."[38] The program helps communities organize local ceremonies that include truth-telling bonfires and traditional cleansing ceremonies—practices that many villages have not employed since before the war."[39] Through the program, Sierra Leonean communities reckon with the past—engaging issues of justice, responsibility, and reconciliation. The program's vision is "fostering sustainable peace in Sierra Leone through reviving our communities' traditions and values of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation."[40] Fambul Tok does this by calling upon extant cultural practices and resources, such as storytelling gatherings around bonfires and ritual cleansings, as the basis for their activities. In doing so, the peacebuilding process is tailored to the communities in which it takes place. For example, following the bonfire, many communities choose to offer libations to their ancestors. The timing and performance of this ritual depends on the beliefs and habits of those in the community, with no prescription for this activity by Fambul Tok staff or policies.

- The transformation of rural Sierra Leonean communities in the aftermath of conflict through participation in Fambul Tok activities

As discussed in the previous section, one of Fambul Tok's guiding values is "respect for and revival of traditions and culture." In practice, Fambul Tok also contributes to the transformation of communities in which it works. While Fambul Tok activities are founded on traditional cultural practices and symbols, they are repurposed for the specific exigencies of post-conflict communities in order to deal with the violence that occurred in rural areas. For example, while bonfires were sometimes used to adjudicate small-scale conflict within Sierra Leonean communities, there was no history of using them to reckon with wanton violence and large-scale sociopolitical upheaval. In this way, Fambul Tok not only builds upon traditional culture, but it also transforms this culture through the repurposing of cultural practices to facilitate inclusive methods of peacebuilding.[41] For example, it engages and encourages the participation of those who have often been considered either passive victims of the war (women) or perpetrators of the war (young men). The inclusive and egalitarian composition of Reconciliation Committees demonstrates a distinct departure from existing ways of organizing political life in these communities. In addition, the continuing existence of the committee after the bonfire creates an enduring and entirely new structure that can engage and mediate future conflicts that arise in the community.

Conclusion:

Lessons Learned

The work of Fambul Tok provides four key lessons for peacebuilding and transitional justice practices, which I identify and explore here.

- Peacebuilding and transitional justice activities must attend to the contours of the conflict

Since much of the civil war took place in rural communities of Sierra Leone, amongst neighbors, transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts needed to mirror this conflict. By taking peacebuilding and transitional justice activities to the locales in which violence occurred, Fambul Tok has provided an opportunity to intervene in and transform communities paralyzed by or suppressing the effects of violence committed during the civil war. Because neighbors testify and witness together, they create a community in which the wrongs of the war are acknowledged and openly discussed.

- The promise (and difficulty) of emergent design

Because of its commitment to engage with communities, rather than dictate the terms and timetables of peacebuilding and transitional justice, Fambul Tok's work involves a long process of interaction at district, chiefdom, and section levels that constantly changes and improves the design of organizational practices. For example, in order to counter the perception that Reconciliation Committees were composed primarily of local leaders, at the urging of district staff, the organization expanded the size of these committees in order to represent more ordinary people in the communities. When women in Fambul Tok communities worried about their participation being marginalized or maligned in their communities, their dissatisfaction led Fambul Tok to better integrate gender-sensitive and-inclusive activities into its work.[42] In addition, this also pushed FTI to consider the need for greater participation by women on its national and district staffs. This example shows that emergent design is a two-way, unpredictable process. This approach creates community buy-in and long-term sustainability for its work by including community members as valuable participants in the design and implementation of peacebuilding activities.

Much of Fambul Tok's success with emergent design has been possible because of two factors: it started small and has grown slowly. This runs contrary to prevailing peacebuilding tendencies in post-conflict contexts. By starting in 28 communities in one district of Sierra Leone, Fambul Tok enabled strong and thorough feedback from staff and participants and was able to use this information to change and refine its organizational practices. It has continued this practice even as it has extended its work to additional districts. It operates with small district staff of two to three, and district and national staff meet over a weekend every one to two months in order to share lessons, solve difficulties, and continue to develop and refine organizational practices. By keeping its staff small and connected, the organization is able to monitor how things are going in Fambul Tok communities, while also getting fresh and consistent feedback from the field. Further, it is nimble enough to be able to respond to this information.

- Even local approaches to peacebuilding and transitional justice include sectional, district, national, regional, and international aspects

Fambul Tok seems to be an example of locally oriented peacebuilding. But this characterization

doesn't fully capture the levels at which the organization works. At the district level, the executive creates a structure that supports the peacebuilding process across communities. In Kailahun, the district executive has begun to transform itself into a community-based organization that will be self-supporting. At the national level, Fambul Tok is not a one-off program occurring in one area of the country. Its eventual goal is to work in all willing communities throughout Sierra Leone, thus providing a locally oriented process that nonetheless has national impact. National staff members work to learn from and build on the organization's successes across Sierra Leone. Fambul Tok is also beginning to have at least a limited impact across the Mano River region. People from neighboring Guinea and Liberia have come across the border in order to participate in the truth-telling bonfires in Kailahun district. The development and administration of Fambul Tok is an international enterprise, involving leaders from the United States and Sierra Leone. While the organization is focused on local ownership of peacebuilding activities, its work would not be possible without funding from Catalyst for Peace and other international organizations.

- Localizing peacebuilding and transitional justice is a slow process

Perhaps most fundamental of the lessons that Fambul Tok's example teaches is that reconciliation is not an easy or expeditious enterprise. Rather, it is a long-term process that transcends the will and focus of many peacebuilding and transitional justice programs. While truth-telling bonfires have captured the interest of many practitioners and scholars, it is important to remember that these are not serendipitous or spontaneous events. Rooted in significant aspects of Sierra Leonean culture, the truth-telling bonfires are the culmination of months-long processes of community engagement and organizing by Fambul Tok staff, community members, and the Reconciliation and Outreach Committees. After the bonfire, communities work together to plan and implement follow-up activities to strengthen reconciliation and peace. These activities may take diverse forms, including producing radio programs, developing community farms, or organizing football matches for youths in the community. In some communities, they have held additional bonfire ceremonies in the ensuing years, in order to allow more people to share their stories of the war. So, the work of Fambul Tok continues, even in communities that began these peacebuilding and transitional justice processes years ago. It is a difficult—but important—insight that, in communities that experience violent and protracted civil war, sustainable peace in people's everyday lives is a process that takes years.

Further Considerations

As this case study outlines, the work of Fambul Tok has lessons that are important for practitioners of peacebuilding and transitional justice to reckon with, no matter where their work may take them. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there are not further issues to contemplate when conisdering the lessons of Fambul Tok in Sierra Leone and beyond. First, to what extent is the Fambul Tok model transferable or applicable to other post-conflict contexts? For example, is emergent design an expensive necessity, or an unnecessary luxury in peacebuilding and transitional justice? In many instances, organizations—whether focused on programming such activities or funding them—do not have the patience, orientation, or ability to create peacebuilding programs that develop over years, rather than months and weeks. Further, the staff and resources necessary to engage in and enact emergent design may not be available in all post-conflict contexts. In fact, I would argue the factors that make emergent design possible are unusual, rather than the norm. However, it is also the case that much of what makes Fambul Tok sustainable and successful is due to its being a flexible enterprise. Its ability to engage and listen to its stakeholders, as well as to change and develop organizational practices in response to them, is key to the successes it has had

building peace in local Sierra Leonean communities. However, many peacebuilders and peacefunders may not have the ability or willingness to commit this kind of time to building and sustaining peace and transitional justice over the long term. The months and even years of preparation it takes to lay the ground work for emergently designed peace work may not be feasible or realistic in most post-conflict contexts.

While emergent design permeates the ethos of Fambul Tok, it is also characterized by a commitment to storytelling, forgiveness, and reconciliation between victims and offenders. These characteristics stem from the milieu in which the organization developed. People in Fambul Tok communities often repeated to me the Sierra Leonean saying, "There's no bad bush to throw away a bad child." This spirit of reintegration, forgiveness, and reconciliation seems to be part of the worldview of the communities in which Fambul Tok works. Thus, it's not clear whether or how these aspects of the Fambul Tok model might be adapted to countries and contexts beyond Sierra Leone. The work of the organization rests largely on a model of restorative justice that attempts to reckon with violence by including wrongdoers in the communities where they perpetrated their crimes. In communities, cultures, or countries that embrace more retributive, individualist, and punitive approaches to peacebuilding and justice—or the funding of peacebuilding and justice—the example of Fambul Tok is less clearly applicable.

In addition, while Fambul Tok has successfully engaged and resulted from collaboration at the local, intra-national, national, regional, and international levels, it's not clear that all conflicts can be dealt with in this way. It requires extensive time, commitment, and resources for collaboration across these various levels, which is largely a result of the leaders of FTI. However, this is not to suggest that such collaboration is superfluous to the successes of Famul Tok. The organization's work provides an example of the importance of national, regional, and international support for local efforts to be effective. Without such dedication, it's unlikely that locally-oriented, long-term peace can be created or sustained. Organizations may not have the time, commitment, or resources for this kind of multi-level collaboration, which may limit the effectiveness of peacebuilding work, in terms of local relevance or long-term results.

This leads to another vital question to consider, which is whether the Fambul Tok model is applicable beyond rural communities in Sierra Leone? It remains to be seen whether the Fambul Tok model will be sustainable as Fambul Tok grows into all districts of Sierra Leone, particularly urban areas that do not have the same community structures as rural areas of Sierra Leone. Like the rest of its work, I assume the process of adapting its work to urban Sierra Leone will evolve from consultative practices and emergent design that have characterized the work of Fambul Tok. Similar efforts will also be needed if Fambul Tok is to address the millions were displaced by the violence of the civil war, both within and outside of the country. Thus far, the program, for the most part, works with those who physically reside in the communities in which it works.[43] Therefore, many of those who participated in or were victims of violence and then were displaced, whether voluntarily or not, have not had the opportunity to participate in Fambul Tok activities with their former neighbors. There have been some examples of displaced people returning to their home villages or of offenders returning to villages where they committed atrocities in order to participate in Fambul Tok. These have been initiated by participants and communities themselves; they are not yet a part of official organizational practices. Dealing with the massive displacement that Sierra Leone's civil war created, and its ongoing effects, will be important to Fambul Tok's ability to entrench peace throughout the country.

The stability of Sierra Leone itself is another important variable in Fambul Tok's success. The organization hopes that its work in communities in rural areas will prevent the recurrence of

violent conflict, if actors—whether internal or external—agitate for violence. Sierra Leone just held its third successful national election since the end of the civil war, with incumbent President Ernest Bai Koroma of the All People's Congress elected to a second term. While outside observers from the African Union, Economic Community of West Africa States, the European Union, and others have sanctioned the election as free and fair, the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party has questioned the legitimacy of the results.[44] Further, while the work has been successful in rural area of Sierra Leone, these successes exist within the ongoing, unpredictable volatility of the Mano River region. Guinea has not held parliamentary elections since 2002, and ethnic violence and tensions persist despite that country's first democratic presidential election in 50 years in 2010.[45] Post-election violence resulted in more than 3,000 deaths in Cote d'Ivoire, which continues to be plagued by insecurity and divisions, including "slow security sector reform, stalled political dialogue, a weak ruling coalition, a return to violent discourses, uncovered coup plots, and an apparent lack of political will to promote national reconciliation."[46] While the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and women's peace activitist Leymah Gbowee in 2011 seem to indicate a country on solid footing, Liberia remains riddled with political insecurity, ongoing violence, and lack of reconciliation.[47] The ongoing instability within and around Sierra Leone remains a significant issue that will impact the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of Fambul Tok's work.

Critical Questions

In order to stimulate critical thinking about processes of peacebuilding and transitional justice, this case study addresses questions such as:

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks of innovative, alternative approaches to peacebuilding and transitional justice, such as Fambul Tok?
2. How should local communities be involved in organizing peacebuilding and transitional justice activities?
3. What should be the role of global organizing and actors in peacebuilding and transitional justice processes?
4. Is it important to engage cultural traditions, practices, and symbols (for example, the chieftancy system and bonfires) in peacebuilding and transitional justice activities? What might be some strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
5. To what extent can or should organizations and actors, whether local, national or international, attempt to change culture in the aftermath of violent conflict?
6. What are the challenges and opportunities of adopting local, national, and/or international approaches to peacebuilding and transitional justice?
7. To what extent can emergent design be incorporated into peacebuilding and transitional justice processes?
8. Does Fambul Tok provide insight for peacebuilding and transitional justice processes, internationally or in local communities outside of Sierra Leone? In what ways?

[1] From my field notes, May 2, 2010.
[2] While a complete discussion of the civil war in Sierra Leone is beyond the scope of this case study, there are a number of books that provide thorough discussion and contrasting insights on the conflict. I recommend Ibrahim Abdullah, ed., *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War* (Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA, 2004); David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (New York, James Curry, 2005); Lasana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); John-Peter Pham, *The Sierra Leonean Tragedy: History and Global Dimensions* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2006). The recent volume by Marda Mustapha and Joseph Bangura, eds., *Sierra Leone Beyond the Lomé Peace Accord* (New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010) provides insight into the country's post-conflict dispensation.
[3] Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005), 4.
[4] Danny Hoffman, "Disagreement: Dissent Politics and the War in Sierra Leone," *Africa Today* 52, no. 3 (Spring 2006), 5.
[5] Celina Schocken, "The Special Court for Sierra Leone: Overview and Recommendations," *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 20, no. 2 (2002): 436
[6] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "Executive Summary," Sierra Leone Overview (October 1, 2004).
[7] Gberie, Lansana, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005), 6; Danny Hoffman, "The Civilian Target in Sierra Leone and Liberia: Political Power, Military Strategy, and Humanitarian Intervention," *African Affairs* 103, no. 411 (2004): 211-226.
[8] Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, "Overview," ¶14.
[9] Danny Hoffman, "Disagreement," 5.
[10] This part of the war was made (in)famous in Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2007).
[11] John Bobor Laggah, Joe A. D. Allie, and Roland S. V. Wright, "Sierra Leone," in *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflict: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Governance*, ed. Adebayo Adedeji (London: Zed Books, 1999), 186.
[12] David Keen, "Greedy Elites, Dwindling Resources, Alienated Youths: The Anatomy of Protracted Violence in Sierra Leone," *International Politics and Society* 2 (2003): 67-70.
[13] For more discussion of this, Adekeye Adebajo, *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau* (Boulder: Lynne Reiner Publisher, 2002); David Pratt, "Sierra Leone: Danger and Opportunity in a Regional Conflict," in *Sierra Leone: Current Issues and Background*, ed. Brett Stillinger (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2003), 63-98; Tunde Zack-Williams, "Sierra Leone Beyond Lomé: Challenges and Failures," in *Sierra Leone Beyond the Lomé Peace Accord*, ed. Marda Mustapha and Joseph Bangura (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 17-34.
[14] W. Ofuatey-Kodjoe, "Sierra Leone," In *Dealing with Conflict in Africa: The United Nations and Regional Organizations*, ed. Jane Boulden, (Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 127-152.
[15] Rebecca Horn, Simon Charters, and Saleem Vahidy, "The Victim-Witness Experience in the Special Court for Sierra Leone," *International Review of Victimology* 15 (2009): 277-298; Shanee Stepakoff, "Telling and Showing: Witnesses Represent Sierra Leone's War Atrocities in Court and Onstage," *TDR/The Drama Review* 52, no. 1 (2008): 19.
[16] Michelle Staggs Kelsall and Shanee Stepakoff, "'When we Wanted to Talk about Rape': Silencing Sexual Violence at the Special Court for Sierra Leone," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, no. 3 (2007): 361.
[17] Tim Kelsall, "Politics, Anti-Politics, International Justice: Language and Power in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, " *Review of International Studies* 32, no. 4 (2001): 601-2.
[18] On a ride to the airport with a defense lawyer for the Special Court, he told me, "It's not about Sierra Leone, it's about international law and future conflicts."
[19] Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, Article XXVI.1
[20] Priscilla Hayner, *The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Reviewing the First Year*, (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2004), 4.

[21] Rosalind Shaw, "Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1, no. 2 (2007): 184.
[22] Rosalind Shaw, "Memory Frictions," 184.
[23] Rosalind Shaw and United States Institute of Peace. *Rethinking Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: Lessons from Sierra Leone.* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2005: 2.
[24] Laura Stovel, "'There's no Bad Bush to Throw Away a Bad Child': 'Tradition'- Inspired Reintegration in Post-War Sierra Leone." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 46, no. 2 (2008): 321.
[25] Frances Fortune and Oscar Bloh, "Electing for peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone," *Accord* 23, (London, Conciliation Resources: 2012): 26.
[26] Mustapha Dumbuya, "Sierra Leone Still Suffers Legacy of Child Soldiers," Inter Press Service News Agency (April 25, 2012).
[27] Rosalind Shaw and United States Institute of Peace, 1.
[28] Elisabeth Hoffman, "Reconciliation in Sierra Leone: Local Processes Yield Global Lessons," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2008): 132.
[29] Fambul Tok, *Our First Year*, (Portland, Maine, Catalyst for Peace, 2009), 10.
[30] For more information on the history and current state of the chieftaincy system in Sierra Leone, Paul Jackson, "Reshuffling an Old Deck of Cards? The Politics of Local Government Reform in Sierra Leone," *African Affairs* (2006): 95-111.
[31] Commonwealth Local Government Forum, "Country profile: The local government in Sierra Leone," in *Commonwealth Local Government Handbook* (London: CLGF, 2008), 185-6).
[32] As far as I know, no community has ever not wanted to reconcile or not work with Fambul Tok to do so.
[33] Particularly at the beginning of Fambul Tok's work in a community, the Outreach Committee spends significant time and energy explaining and assuring that participation in the program will not lead to arrest or indictment by the Special Court (SCSL).
[34] Fambul Tok*, Our First Year*, 19.
[35] Caulker and Hoffman, personal communication.
[36] Fambul Tok, *Our Second Year*, (Portland, Maine: Catalyst for Peace, 2010), 5.
[37] Hoffman, personal communication, February 12, 2009.
[38] Fambul Tok, Our Second Year, 26.
[39] Fambul Tok, *Our First Year,* 2.
[40] Fambul Tok, *Our First Year,* 3.
[41] Fambul Tok, *Our Second Year*, (Portland, Maine: Catalyst for Peace, 2010), 22.
[42] For a more extensive discussion of evolving role of women in Fambul Tok, see Courtney E. Cole and Stephanie Norander, "From Sierra Leone to Kosovo: Exploring Possibilities for Gendered Peacebuilding," *Women & Language* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 29-49.
[43] In Koinandugu, a chief's son, who has lived in Freetown since he fled the district during the war, wants to return in order to confront his father about his participation in the war. Offenders—including Savage, the highest-ranking perpetrator to date to participate in Fambul Tok—have returned to the communities in which they committed atrocities in order to confess their misdeeds and apologize to those they wronged. These cases are unusual exceptions to the rule.
[44] Simon Akam, "Defeated Sierra Leone opposition says election flawed," *Reuters* (November 24, 2012); Boima J.V. Boima, "Sierra Leone Elections—Ballot Stuffing Claims Persist," *New Democrat* (November 28, 2012).
[45] James Butty, "Guinea Announces May 2013 Legislative Election Date," *Voice of America News* (December 13, 2012).
[46] International Crisis Group, "Cote d'Ivoire: Defusing Tensions," *Africa Report*, no. 193 (November 23, 2012): Brussels/Dakar.
[47] International Crisis Group, "Liberia: Time for Much-Delayed Reconciliation and Reform, *Africa Briefing*, no. 88 (June 12, 2012): Brussels/Dakar.