

### Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if only we take time to look.

#### Some facts about the makers of the film

- ▶ Executive producer, Libby Hoffman, has been active in peacebuilding for 25 years, with an emphasis on making the link between individual and community transformation. She founded *Catalyst for Peace* in 2003 in order to mobilize and support locally rooted peacebuilding around the world and it was in her capacity as President of *Catalyst for Peace* that she first began working with Sara Terry to document stories of forgiveness and reconciliation in post-conflict Africa. In the course of this work, she met John Caulker and they began the partnership that led to the founding of *FambulTok*, alongside the commitment to document the process in film. With the growth and success of the *FambulTok* programme, and an increasing demand to share the model in other parts of the world, *FambulTok International* was formed in 2009, with Libby Hoffman as president.
- ▶ *FambulTok* is the producer and director, Sara Terry's, first feature-length documentary. She has been involved with photojournalism and documentary photography since the late 1990s, often focussing on post-conflict societies with her first project looking at the aftermath of the war in Bosnia. She is the founder of *The Aftermath Project*, a non-profit grant program that helps photographers cover the aftermath of conflict and builds educational outreach and partnerships around the understanding that "war is only half the story."
- ▶ John Caulker founded and has led the implementation of the *FambulTok* programme since its inception in 2007. He first became a human rights activist as a student leader during the initial years of the civil war. Risking his life to document wartime atrocities, he infiltrated rebel camps disguised as a rebel in order to gather information and stories that he would then pass on to organisations such as *Amnesty International* and *Human Rights Watch*. He founded the *Forum of Conscience* as a human rights NGO in 1996 and as its executive director strove to prevent recurring violence by connecting the root causes of Sierra Leone's brutal conflict to the need for rural community participation in national decision making and the acknowledgement of wrongdoing to victims through the reparations programme. In particular, he has fought to ensure that revenues from the country's natural resources benefit Sierra Leoneans themselves in the form of a special fund for war victims.

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**A chance to watch films together.  
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.  
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

**4th Aug Silver Linings Playbook  
1st Sep Les Misérables  
6th Oct The Hunt  
3rd Nov FambulTok  
8th Dec As it is in heaven  
5th Jan The Angel's Share**

**Films start at 5:30pm  
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchingdon Road  
Islip**

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## Fambul Tok

Between 1991 and 2002, Sierra Leone suffered one of the most brutal civil wars ever seen in Africa. One of the poorest countries in the world, Sierra Leone was plagued with government corruption and an unequal distribution of resources. Feeding on the disillusionment of the people, rebels took on the government for their own ends. Ultimately, three different fighting forces tore the country and its culture apart. Tens of thousands of women were raped; thousands of children were forced to fight as soldiers; ten thousand civilians suffered amputations; two million people were displaced; over fifty thousand people were killed.

When the fighting was over, the top dozen or so leaders were indicted for war crimes and millions of dollars were spent bringing them to trial, not particularly successfully. Everyone else was given a blanket amnesty and many returned to their own villages to live side by side with those they had abused. However, the question remained: how do you bring those communities back together? How do you bring about the healing and reconciliation which is necessary in order for those communities to be able to move on and to live in peace once more?

One group which has been working to do just this is an organisation called *Fambul Tok*, which is Krio for "Family Talk". Building on two African traditions - first, that we are all one big family with responsibilities towards each other, and, second, the practice of sitting around the campfire in the evening and talking through the day's events - *Fambul Tok* has been encouraging communities to do just that: to come together around the campfire to talk about what has happened. This is not so that people can be identified and punished. So many people were involved in so many ways that such an approach would kill the conversation dead. No one would be willing to say anything, fearful of the consequences.

Instead, the aim is much more about healing the wounds. As a result of the conversation, a process of reconciliation begins in which people are brought together, what has happened is openly acknowledged, remorse is shown by the perpetrator and forgiveness is offered by the victim. And so begins a process of healing. For that act of forgiveness helps those who did dreadful things, often only because they were made to by others, deal with the guilt they feel; and it helps the victim lay the issue to rest. Together, they can then put things behind them and move on.

### Some questions to ponder

- What have we in the West, in our own communities, to learn from the methods and philosophy of *Fambul Tok*? What do you think is required to make it work?
- What is the role of remorse in the whole reconciliation process? How does one know it is genuine? Is it possible to forgive without it?
- How big a difference does understanding the other person's story make?
- A lot of the perpetrators on the film said: "I had to do it - the others made me." A similar defence was offered at Nuremberg: "I was only following orders." It is easy to understand, when faced with a choice of doing something reprehensible or being killed, that someone may do things that would sicken them otherwise. On the other hand, the gospel encourages us to absorb evil with good, even if it means putting our life on the line. How do you think you would react? How do you respond to those who have sought to save themselves when placed in that situation?
- Are there things you need to forgive? Are there things for which you need to be forgiven?

[www.fambultok.org](http://www.fambultok.org)

## What people are saying about Fambul Tok

"We have to settle our own disputes rather than depend on others. This can be done through Fambul Tok." [*Ismail Momo, Deputy Chairman, Moyamba District Council*]

"We don't believe in punishing somebody. Because if we say we're going to punish, there were so many, we would end up punishing everybody." [*Musu Swarray, Kailahun District*]

"The youth owe an apology to this nation. Fambul Tok is the only project that will bring peace." [*J.C. Vanjah, Youth Chairman, Moyamba District*]

"Women suffered a lot during the war and now with Fambul Tok in Moyamba, all of us will work together for sustainable peace in our communities." [*Sarah Gbanie, Women's Leader, Moyamba*]

"Paramount Chiefs are grand peacemakers and without them Fambul Tok cannot succeed. Youth are also pillars of Fambul Tok. Therefore if the project should succeed it depends on all of us." [*Paramount Chief Alie Kongomoh, Fakunya chieftom, Moyamba District*]

"I have no regret for moving from such a far distance to listen to Fambul Tok. After the war, plenty people are afraid to return to their homes for fear of revenge. Now that Fambul Tok is creating the platform for victims, witnesses and perpetrators to mediate reconciliation for peaceful co-existence, we have no alternative but to welcome Fambul Tok. I am sure community reconciliation will help us fight poverty." [*Sahr Ngaoja, Lei chieftom, Kono district*]

"Since the end of the war, we were unable to come together as a community and plan development because of our individual differences. The simple fact that Fambul Tok is attempting to reconcile my community, I appreciate their effort in forging unity." [*Elizabeth Lebbie, Kamaa chieftom, Kono district*]

"For the fact that Fambul Tok is talking about community dialogue, the project is highly welcomed in Kono. We witnessed a lot of atrocities in Kono district during the war. Our people have agreed to embrace Fambul Tok as it is the only way we would enjoy our peace. Thanks very much to the management of the project for thinking about reconciling the victims and perpetrators in our communities." [*Aiah Raymond Komba, chieftom speaker, Kamaa chieftom, Kono district*]

"Any wrongdoing you do to anybody, come out plain - 'Madam, I have wronged you. Forgive me.' That will make me feel happy. Without a cent, I will accept it. But when you have wronged me, you roam around, I see you, I know what you have done to me, it pains me. But when you voice it, reconciliation will go and I will be very peaceful. This is what we need here." [*Isata Ndoleh, Mommy Queen, Kailahun District*]

"Most of our brothers and sisters played an active role during the war. Some of them amputated hands, some of them slaughtered women, some split women open to see what baby was in their stomach, but at the ceremony most of them came forward and confessed and asked for forgiveness and we have forgiven them. We have encouraged them, embraced them, we do things together. Even myself, my elder sister was killed during this war. Those that killed her, I knew who they were, but when they confessed, I forgave them." [*Hawah Wurie, Bunumbu, Kailahun District*]