

Seeking Community Reconciliation through Traditional Ceremonies. The Sierra Leonean Experience

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The debate on the role of traditional conflict management and reconciliation practices in modern post-war situations has been around for a while. Throughout Africa, there are many examples of traditional practices being explored and adapted to assist the war-affected societies with the challenges of reintegration and reconciliation.

In Sierra Leone, local traditional conflict management and reconciliation resources have come to play a role in the reconciliation process at different occasions and levels. Tradition-inspired closing ceremonies marked a symbolic end to each of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's district hearings. A number of ceremonies have also been held in many towns as part of the Symbolic Reparation Programme in 2009. Several local and international NGOs included traditional cleansing rituals as part of their child ex-combatants reintegration programmes. Finally, an initiative called Fambul Tok was launched in 2008 by a Sierra Leonean human rights organization Forum of Conscience. This programme encourages and supports local communities in organizing traditional reconciliation ceremonies based on their specific local practice.

The paper looks at the ways in which local communities turn to the traditional resources for dealing with the aftermath of violence and conflict when there is no outside support or leadership as in the above described examples. It discusses some of the instances in which ceremonies were performed at the village level in order to achieve unity and reintegration as well as those that assisted individuals in coming to terms with the past. These „cultural resources“ have been severely impacted by the war. In the processes through which the communities strive for reconstruction and reconciliation also these practices are renewed and reshaped as people appeal to the past as well as adjust to new realities.