

Documentary Films for Review

Fambul Tok (Family Talk)



Seven years after the last bullet was fired, a decade of brutal fighting in Sierra Leone finds resolution as people come together to talk around traditional village bonfires. Some had perpetrated terrible crimes against friends or family. Some had faced horrible losses: loved ones murdered, limbs severed. But as they tell their stories, admit their wrongs, forgive, dance, and sing together, true reconciliation begins. This is the story of *Fambul Tok*

(Krio for "family talk"), and it is a story the world needs to hear. The story is told by the people who are living it, guided by human rights activist John Caulker, a Sierra Leonean with a vision of peace for his country as he organizes a grassroots program to help communities hold reconciliation ceremonies — and hold fast to the new peace. He finds his people eager to turn ancient customs towards healing contemporary wounds, and the result is stories viewers will never forget. The film raises questions about efforts to create peace in Africa through Western-based traditions of crime and punishment, challenging the neo-colonial idea that Africa needs to be "saved" by the West. By illuminating a successful peace process that is based on reviving communal traditions of confession, forgiveness, and restorative justice, the film encourages individuals and communities around the world to engage in the kind of grass-roots transformation that leads to peace.

Funeral Season



Funeral Season takes the viewer through the red dust of Cameroon's laterite slopes and into the heart of the Bamileke country, where one funeral flows into the next. These death celebrations provide an opportunity to see elaborate costumes and masks, festive songs and dances, and lavish feasts, while illuminating the communal links which bind the Bamileke as an ethnic group and society. Along the way, the director befriends his guides and becomes increasingly haunted by memories of his own ancestors. At times, the dialogues alienate him from the locals; at other times they bring the two closer together. Like the dead and the living, they belong to two different worlds often mirroring each other.

The Chairman and the Lions



The Chairman and the Lions introduces Frank Kaipai Ikoyo, a charismatic Iparakuyo Maasai who, at thirty-three, is the leader of a Tanzanian village called Lesoit. Hence, this ethnography of Ikoyo's duties as village chairman shows how literacy and insight into the workings of the nation-state are essential for Maasai to combat the many lions, both real and figurative, that beset them: land grabbers, "bush" lawyers, unemployment, out-migration and poverty. The film also depicts Ikoyo contending with the invasion of village land by a non-Maasai farmer, interrogating spies in a lawsuit, persuading mothers to send their daughters to school, navigating the legalese of an exploitative contract, and eliciting help from a renowned elder to train young warriors in the art of lion hunting.

Editor's note: To review any of the above films, contact the *JPAS* Senior Editor at: atjpas@gmail.com.