

# **Authoring the Living Liberia Fabric: A Generative and Interactive Narrative for Peace, Truth, and Reconciliation**

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## **Abstract**

The Living Liberia Fabric, produced in affiliation with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia, is an interactive, web-based narrative supporting the goal of lasting peace after years of civil war (1979-2003). It links concerns for liberation, dignity, and the future with needs for cultural foundations, human rights, truth, and reconciliation.

Our system is based in Liberia's culture and the specificities of the conflicts, hence representing a *cultural computing* perspective. Our system explores how multiplicitous narratives culturally-aesthetically memorializing experiences of stakeholders involved in the conflict can promote peace.

## **Interface Concept**

Our interface concept is "a living fabric." In general the backdrop resembles batik fabric. Batik fabric, though also famously produced in Indonesia, is a West/Pan African symbol. In batik-making, using a dye-resistant technique, representational and pattern-based images can be achieved.



**Figure 1:** The initial page interface contains clickable images of stakeholders that determine the starting narrative theme.

## **Implementation**

Implemented as a Flash client with Harrell's GRIOT system as a server [8], the user's fabric-themed actions reveal narrative multimedia content in the form of masked video and panning photographs, and text-based quotations from Liberian nationals giving testimony, the TRC final report, post-colonial theory, and narrative transitions. GRIOT simultaneously coordinates content themes, narrative structure, and media assets using visual, media-conventional, and conceptual constraints.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The system is based on an interdisciplinary framework. Research in **interactive narrative** and **sociolinguistic accounts of narrative** aids in adding causal and temporal structure to users' interaction allowing for users' explorations to result in rhetorical effects such as presenting contrasting ideological perspectives [3] and different thematic content [6] and focusing on **narratives of personal experience** [9, 10]. Research in **HCI for Development** aides in designing for economically-marginalized stakeholder groups [1, 2]. **Cultural computing** [7] and **user/value-centered design** [4, 5, 11, 12] practices provide foundations for rooting our designs in traditional culture and ethical concerns and asserting interpretive goals aimed at ideological change.

### **Research/Development Process**

#### *Background Research*

Though we drew upon many resources, the following references were key:

TRC Final Report (unedited): The TRC of Liberia is the first truth and reconciliation commission to include its diaspora citizens in the trc process.

*The Mobile Story Exchange System (MOSES)*: A Georgia Tech-based project led by Dr. Michael Best and Monrovia-based project manager John Etherton, MOSES is an agent-based system that allows people to record videos of themselves sharing their views and experiences of the conflict.

Field Study with the Atlanta Friends of the Liberian TRC: We conducted semi-structured interviews and ran a focus group to elicit the opinions of diaspora Liberians regarding memorialization.



**Figure 2:** People using MOSES in Liberia

Subsequently, we undertook a process encompassing artistic design and subjective exploration of cultural metaphor in conjunction with a research process including a review of peace museums/memorials, user analysis, scenario-based design, needs assessment, stakeholder analysis, requirements assessment, and iterative design/development.

### **Conclusion/Future Work**

The current prototype reflects our design goals and comprises an extensible framework. We envision the possibility of a mobile-physical memorial that can be used to facilitate discussion across Liberia.

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