Chapter 7
Conclusion: The Journey Continues

Yet, today I call you to my riverside,
If you will study war no more. Come,
Clad in peace and I will sing the songs
The Creator gave to me when I and the
Tree and the stone were one…
The River sang and sings on.
Maya Angelou, 'On the Pulse of the Morning', 1993

7.1   The Other Side of the River

In Talia's next dream, she found she had finally crossed the river, and was standing at the edge on the other side! The journey across the river had not been easy. Her pursuer, and many others, old and young, from different sides of the warring tribes, had joined them in the safety boat. The journey took many days, and the waters were turbulent most of the time. On a few occasions, a crocodile reared its head near their boat threatening to attack, but they had concertedly struck the animal with sticks, poles, and oars, and sometimes used the very weapons they had used against one another on the other side of the river. They were all called upon to row the boat to safety, a number of them in turn, and they had to learn how to do it right and arrange appropriate schedules that worked for everyone. The owners of the boat could not provide enough food for everyone, and Talia and her companions had to share the little they had and take particular care for the oldest, the weakest and youngest. The owners of the boat were focused on getting the boat to the other side. They had to be right on schedule. Talia and her companions sang songs, told stories of their past experiences, and created new stories of what they imagined could be. Finally they got to the other side. Talia found herself standing on the edge of the river, looking ahead, at the expansive plain that spread out before her. This was not the end after all! She and her companions were only just beginning another journey…

7.2   The Encounter

In tracing the journey of the South Sudanese survivors of conflict and mass violence from their country of origin to Kakuma refugee camp, we encounter the various ways in which the survivors experienced the consequences of the war, back in South Sudan, on their journey to the camp, and now in the camp. Of particular note is the pain of witnessing loved ones being tortured and killed, and the associated dehumanization in the hands of the perpetrators, the separation from loved ones and resultant loneliness, and the loss of security that forced the survivors to flee for refuge in Kakuma. The long journey the survivors took seeking refuge, which was not uniform but rather tended to take divergent forms for different refugees, was also seen as a journey in search of the identity they lost in leaving their country of origin and being deprived of citizenship. This was seen in their desire to identify with the notion of 'The Lost Boys' who gained much acclaim from their story of having walked for very long distances in search of refuge, and a recognized and respected identity.

Within the camp, the refugees were found to continue to experience distressing circumstances, as disease and death continued to be a reality, as well as scarcity of provisions. In this respect, some of the survivors seemed to have lost all vitality of life and seemed to be drifting along, resigned to whatever may come their way. Dependency on UNHCR for all provisions, despondency attitudes, and a lack of agency ensued in these survivors. These, combined with the PTSD symptoms portrayed by some of the survivors in the form of intrusive memories of their past pain, torture and killing of loved ones, as well as avoidance of the happenings, made it very difficult to envision the possibility of peacebuilding and the realization of peace for the survivors. As Talia and her companions experienced in the dream *… the waters were turbulent most of the time … a crocodile reared its head near their boat threatening to attack …*

Further, we encounter the gendered ways in which the participants of this study were impacted by the traumatic experiences, and how these gendered ways complicated the path to peacebuilding for the survivors. The threat and experience of rape for the women survivors in particular marked a significant meandering of their path to peace. UNHCR and its partnering agencies are not adequately able to protect the women survivors in the camp from the threat of rape. Further, the identity of these women survivors is subsumed in their label as refugee women, thus rendering them vulnerable and unable to express their other identities as they negotiate their path to peace. The interconnectedness of rape with conflict and mass violence further tends to treat rape in war and rape in peace as two separate entities, seemingly suggesting that rape in certain circumstances is not as atrocious a crime, as in others. Yet, rape at all times is a human rights violation aimed at degrading the victim's identity, dominating and dehumanising her. The threat and occurrence of rape in war mixes up with other traumas experienced by survivors of conflict and mass violence thus further complicating the terrain of the journey to peace.

The disruption of the family systems as a result of death and separation of members of family units led to disorganization and reorganization of the traditional roles of different members of the family. Death in war had for instance resulted in high numbers of widows in the camp, who had to take up roles traditionally held by men, such as constructing houses for their families. Further, the dependency on UNHCR for food rations in the camp had disrupted the dynamic of men fending for their families, resulting in a feeling of uselessness that led some men to seek solace in illicit brew in the camp. As a consequence, more and more women had taken on the responsibility of taking care of their families in the camp, demonstrating a role reversal. The gendered effects are thus interwoven with the effects of the traumatic experiences on the culture of the South Sudanese, forming an overarching situation in which the survivors find themselves disoriented and unable to meet the challenges of peacebuilding.

On examining the interventions the South Sudanese survivors of the conflict received in Kakuma to cope with their traumatic experiences, we find that interventions that are trauma- and culture-sensitive, taking into consideration the complex and multifaceted ways in which the survivors experienced and responded to the traumatic events, contribute to helping the survivors in recovery from trauma, prevent a recurrence of violence, and help facilitate peacebuilding. Trauma-sensitivity in the process of offering basic necessities such as food, shelter and health facilities in the camp entails a recognition that the basic necessities are important in recovery for the survivors not only at the physical level, but the psychological level as well. The manner in which the basic necessities are offered to the survivors is therefore of crucial importance and may serve to either accentuate the survivors' feelings of helplessness and eventual apathy, or may help to empower and encourage them on the path to peace.

Trauma-sensitivity involves taking into consideration the ways in which the interventions serve to humanize, where the survivors were dehumanized, rebuild connections where they were destroyed by violence and displacement, and restore a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose where these were shattered during the mass violence. This sensitivity involves a recognition of the social realities of the survivors, including the gendered ways in which they are affected in receiving the interventions.

Further, interventions offered to the survivors in the camp may be more effective if they are cognizant of, and promote the capacity of the survivors to recover and be well on the path to peacebuilding. This capacity is found in some of the participants who portrayed a positive attitude, reliance on community support, a long term vision and mission, selflessness, faith in God, personal initiative and agency, and inner strength. These interconnected aspects denote resilience in these participants who were able to withstand the negative consequences of their traumatic experiences, bounce back and demonstrate enthusiasm, commitment and engagement in productive tasks, and thrive. Of particular relevance to the South Sudanese refugees is the concept of community resilience, which resonates with the

community-oriented ways in which they experience life. Community resilience is understood to mean a community's capacity to withstand collective trauma, identify and mobilize its resources to cope with traumatic experiences and engage in positive outcomes, which include peacebuilding activities. In the dream, Talia and her companions had *concertedly struck the animal with sticks, poles, and oars, and sometimes used the very weapons they had used against one another on the other side of the river.*

On reflecting on the participants' perceptions and definitions of peace, we find that some participants conceive of peace as an assumed state, meaning that it is nonexistent in reality, and its seeming appearance is devoid of substance. This peace has the characteristics of avoiding the real state of things and dwelling on the surface. It sometimes takes the form of the officially constructed peace, and manifests as peaceful co-existence amongst warring groups. The emptiness of this peace demonstrates the gap that needs to be filled in envisioning peace for the survivors of conflict and mass violence. This emptiness is reminiscent of the empty void experienced and expressed by some of the participants in relating their traumatic experiences. The emptiness however does not discourage the participants of this study from being part of this peace. An exploration of the assumed peace as described by the participants revealed that there is value in this type of peace, empty as it may seem, insofar as it translates into an imagination of what peace can look like, if it were real. An imagined peace can translate into a possible, real peace, if efforts are made to make the imagined concrete.

Advancing on the path to peace reveals the ineptness of isolation and the efficacy of relationships with others, for steady progress on the journey. Relationships are seen to be the core of peacebuilding. The stories most of the participants told about their experiences of trauma, the interventions they had received, and their perceptions of peace, emphasized the interconnectedness of the survivors with one another. Martin Buber's 'I-Thou' concept, and the African perspectives of peace discussed, all underscore the centrality of relationships in understanding peace and implementing peacebuilding. Considering the culturally-embedded ways in which people experience reality, this centrality of relationships reveals the community-oriented ways in which the South Sudanese experienced their lives, and consequently points to the appropriateness of community-oriented interventions to help the survivors work through their traumatic experiences.

A further exploration reveals the connection between relationships and the recovery from trauma. Recovery from trauma takes place in the context of relationships, as the survivor is helped to re-create the capacities of trust, initiative, competence and identity that were shattered during the traumatic event, through renewed connections with other people. This restoration of the survivors' previously shattered capacities is found to contribute to their ability to engage in peacebuilding activities, which correspondingly depend on relationships in terms of community mobilization and participation, for their success.

It emerges that this journey towards understanding of the role of trauma-sensitivity in peacebuilding is a journey towards discovery of what

comprises 'a whole life, complete life' for the survivors, as Patrick,[1] one of the participants in the research, remarked in defining peace. The various aspects of this 'complete life' for the survivors, which include security, citizenship, and freedom from direct, structural and cultural violence, are all intertwined with the traumas the survivors of conflict and mass violence experience. Thus, in considering interventions that are trauma-sensitive, addressing these aspects becomes essential. This calls for the application of a wide array of approaches to effectively address the various aspects, and points to the continuous nature of the path of discovery of what would work for the best interests of the survivors of conflict and mass violence. The exploratory journey continues.

The efforts and possibilities of making the imagined peace concrete are identified further in the participants' expressions of hope and courage, which entail going beyond the conventional, the experienced and the known. On exploration of some of the participants' perceptions, taking steps to go beyond the conventional image of the vulnerable, dependent and helpless refugee revealed the resilient individual who believed that she could make it against all odds, overcome and prevail over her traumatic experiences, and emerge as an enthusiastic, committed and productive member of her community, ready to help others. This discovery presents a possibility of going beyond an imagined peace to a possible, real, peace.

This exploratory journey also involves taking a risk and stepping out into the unknown, and leaving room for the unexpected to happen along the way. Some participants demonstrated this courage, through their faith and determination, and hope that things would turn out positive. There is value in taking this risk and daring to imagine making a difference by embracing the traumas experienced and working with what has been suffered to craft a better, more peaceful future. Interventions that demonstrate and encourage taking this valuable risk are seen to be trauma-sensitive.

An appreciation of the complex and differentiated realities of the survivors, and adapting a holistic integrated approach in the interventions they receive is seen to have potential to facilitate sustainable peace. Aligning the interventions to the realities of the survivors is considered to be a demonstration of respect for the survivors as individuals, and to protect their human dignity.

Further, an adventurous turn in the exploration of these possibilities considers the potential for transformation that is achievable through the creative arts. The arts are seen to take the survivors, and all of us who are concerned, beyond what is experienced to what is desired, in this case peace. By employing symbolic acts and rituals, and drawing on the culture of the South Sudanese which is rich in dance, drama, music and poetry, interventions can go beyond what the survivors have experienced and expressed, reinstate meaning where it has been lost, dramatize possibilities where none seem apparent, and contribute to a transformation from an assumption to a reality of peace. *Talia and her companions sang songs, told stories of their past experiences, and created new stories of what they imagined could be.*

---

[1]Interview with Patrick, KRM43 on 15 and 16 July 2013. See Appendix 7.1.

7.3 The Discovery

There is need to revisit the theoretical basis of the provision of these interventions. It is particularly important to put into detailed consideration *what* traumatic experiences the survivors have gone through, and *how* they have experienced them, in designing and providing interventions for the survivors. The scope of understanding these experiences, and the manner in which they are experienced, determine the extent to which the interventions provided for the survivors facilitate peacebuilding. A lack of sensitivity to the trauma experienced by the survivors and how they experience it leads to interventions that are at best removed, and at worst detrimental to the welfare of the survivors. The various interventions should thus not be seen as compartmentalized, each working on its own to meet a particular need, but all functioning together to help the survivor towards experiencing peace.

This argument is consistent with Hart's (2008) conception of the 'Peacebuilding Wheel' discussed in Chap. 2. The wheel consists of 'tangible' elements such as food, shelter, infrastructure and peace agreements, and 'intangible' elements such as psychological and spiritual needs, and Hart argues that the tangible elements need to be seen to have psychological importance if they are to contribute to peacebuilding. Trauma-sensitivity is necessary in attending to the tangible elements of the peacebuilding wheel, for peace to be sustainable.

The argument is also consistent with Yoder's (2013) concept of being trauma-informed in working with trauma survivors, which entails being cognizant of the multifaceted and culturally-embedded ways survivors are impacted by trauma, and the need to engage different approaches in addressing this trauma. We see how survivors are impacted by the traumatic experiences in differentiated ways, and the relationship of the interventions they receive to their recovery from trauma and engagement in peacebuilding. This book adds to the repertoire of other studies exploring the landscape of the link between mental health and psychosocial support services and peacebuilding.

The discovery disrupts the conventional image of the refugee. As argued by various authors in refugee studies and discussed in this book, the image of the refugee presented to the world is one of 'the suffering stranger' (Butt 2002: 6), a person 'reduced to bare life' (Agamben 1998: 171), the individual 'deprived of citizenship and dependent on the goodwill and moral responsibility of strangers' (Humphrey 2002: 118), 'helpless and vulnerable' (Harrell-Bond 1999: 153), and as a group, 'homogeneous, undifferentiated masses' (Harrell-Bond 1999: 140). Listening to the stories of the survivors, about their lives before coming to the camp, the traumatic experiences that led them to come to the camp, and their lives in the camp, reveals individuals who are beyond the label of 'refugee' placed on them, and whose lives take on diverse and deep meanings in other contexts besides the refugee context.

Sadly, their identities have been subsumed by this refugee label, which makes it difficult for them to express their other identities and complicates negotiating the challenges that they face. Their status as refugees requires of them to be suffering,

deprived, helpless and vulnerable. Yet, the exploration of the ways the participants of the research coped with traumatic experiences reveals the resilience portrayed by some of them in their attitude, faith, community engagement, having a vision and taking personal initiative. The ability to step beyond the conventional and the expected, and a willingness to take the risk to step into the unknown, reveals the potential for peacebuilding that the survivors have.

The discovery further reveals a symbiotic relationship between traumatic experiences of survivors of conflict and mass violence, recovery from trauma, peacebuilding and peace. It establishes relationships as the nexus, as shown in Fig. 7.1.

From the stories they told during the interviews, it emerges that the survivors were living in a state of relative peace before violence erupted in their country of origin. One of the key traumatic experiences the participants of the research related, as discussed in Chap. 4, was the separation from loved ones, sometimes through death, and sometimes after members of families dispersed to different locations for safety. The disconnection with loved ones resulted in a sense of disorientation, thus underscoring the importance of relationships in their lives. To recover from this sense of disconnection and disorientation and begin to make meaning of their lives once again, correspondingly depends on making renewed connections. This is seen in the participants' emphasis on community support in discussing the interventions to cope with traumatic experiences, and the relevance of a community-oriented model of intervention as discussed in Chap. 5. The recovery from trauma, predominantly based on the reestablished connections, helps restore the survivors' capacities for productive activities, which include engagement in peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is similarly seen to rely heavily on the synergetic energy of relationships. Finally peace itself is perceived as relationship, as seen in the participants' expressions in defining peace, discussed in Chap. 6. This centrality of relationships is key to the link between trauma and peacebuilding.

Fig. 7.1 The Nexus: Relationships. *Source* The author
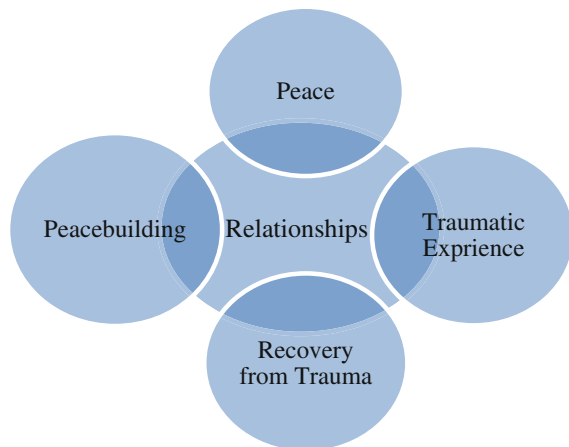
Policies applied by groups and organizations working with survivors of conflict and mass violence could benefit from a specific attention to the survivors, their particular experiences of trauma, and their perceptions of what works best for them, in envisioning a future of peace. This involves seeking to grasp the experiential world of the participants and how they are making sense of it. The search reveals the complex and diverse ways the survivors are impacted by the traumatic events, and how the type of interventions and manner of provision of these interventions need to be sensitive to these realities.

Further, a focus on the survivors, letting them tell their story, allows for surprises and lets the survivors who go beyond the orthodox image of the vulnerable, helpless and dependent refugee to emerge. It also allows opportunity for the potential for peacebuilding that exists in these resilient survivors to be realized. Thus, groups and organizations working for peacebuilding in the context of mass violence could benefit from programs that emphasize trauma-awareness, encourage capacities for resilience in the survivors, engage the arts in peacebuilding to help go beyond what the survivors have experienced, underscore the centrality of relationships, and employ a variety of approaches to address the wide range of aspects that entail peace for the survivors.

7.4   Future Journeys

In exploring the gendered ways in which the participants are impacted by the traumatic experiences, it emerges that there is a limited focus on the ways in which men in particular were impacted. Many authors exploring the landscape of conflict and mass violence focus extensively on women, particularly on the topic of rape in war. While this focus is understandable, especially given the egregious nature of rape as a human rights violation both in war and in peace, an investigation of the ways men are particularly impacted and the ramifications of the findings to the work of peacebuilding after mass violence is worthwhile, as a topic for future research. This investigation would not only serve to balance the apparent particular focus on how women are impacted, but would also be an important contribution to the array of approaches necessary for addressing the various aspects of peace after mass violence.

Secondly, the investigation of the participants' literal journey from South Sudan to Kakuma highlights the issue of the survivors' identity with an interesting allusion to the effect the journey had on their feet, and the story of The Lost Boys. In this way, their search for identity is implied, but not thoroughly explored or clearly expressed. Yet, the issue of identity is seen to have ramifications for the work of peacebuilding, as seen in participants who seemed to have taken up the identity of a resigned and helpless refugee who needs to be rescued, in contrast to those who exuded a more positive, enthusiastic view of themselves. It would be worthwhile to

investigate in more detail, in further research, this search for and formation of the survivors' identity.

Related to the topic of identity is the overarching concern of the gap that exists between the survivors of mass violence (the helped), and the interveners (the helpers). This book has shown that this yawning gap continues to threaten the possibilities of envisioning and realizing a peace for the survivors, insofar as the 'Us' versus 'Them' mentality prevails. This gap allows for the perception of the realities of the survivors as removed from, and unidentifiable with, the realities of those offering the interventions. As such, it seems the two groups are operating on two different sides of humanity, rather than on one which they share in actual sense. This gap is particularly visible when one considers the existence and expansion of the humanitarian industry, which seems to thrive on the presence and upsurge of victims of violence. Beyond revealing the existence of this gap and some of the ramifications it has for peacebuilding, this book did not address how this gap can be alleviated. Further research can investigate the nature of this gap, and explore ways of closing it, to allow for deeper possibilities of peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding mechanisms aimed at the macro-level and focusing on the economic, political and security structures while paying little or no attention to the micro-level psychosocial approaches have proven to be inadequate in situations of conflict and mass violence and peace has remained elusive for survivors of mass violence, as the case of South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma demonstrates. This inadequacy has highlighted the need to shift focus and explore mechanisms that pay more attention to the people most directly affected by the violence. This shift is particularly notable in the growing field of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) and its link to peacebuilding.

With this regard, this book has explored the interventions that the South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma receive, and the link of these interventions to peacebuilding. The book has identified trauma-sensitivity as a significant element in the interventions, and demonstrated how trauma-sensitivity in the interventions the survivors receive, supports peacebuilding. This sensitivity entails taking into consideration the complex and multifaceted ways in which the survivors experience and respond to the traumatic events, encouraging capacities for resilience in the survivors, engaging the creative arts, and emphasising the centrality of relationships.

In this way, this book contributes to the identification of the various pieces of the puzzle that are needed for building sustainable peace after mass violence. There are more pieces to the puzzle. A new journey of exploration is called for. As Talia observed when she got to the other side of the river, looked ahead and saw the expansive plain spreading out before her, *this was not the end after all! She and her companions were only just beginning another journey…*

Appendix 7.1

Pseudonym	M/F	Ethnic group	Age	Duration of stay in the camp	Brief details	Date of interview
Patrick	M	Murle	40	5 months	People from the Nuer Community attacked his village and killed many people, his wife and children ran to the bush where his wife delivered their last child. SPLA soldiers attacked his village, many people were killed and he sustained injuries. Worked as a Livestock officer. In the Reconciliation committee between the Murle and the Nuer in the camp	15th and 16th July 2013

References

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Butt, L. (2002). 'The Suffering Stranger: Medical Anthropology and International Morality'. In *Medical Anthropology* Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 1–24.

Harrell-Bond, B. (1999). 'The Experience of Refugees as Recipients of Aid'. In Ager, A. (Ed.) *Refugees: Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration*. London: Continuum, pp. 136–168.

Hart, B. (2008). 'Introduction'. In Hart, B. (Ed.) *Peacebuilding in Traumatized Societies.* New York: University Press of America, pp. vii–xi.

Humphrey, M. (2002). 'Humanitarianism, Terrorism and the Transnational Border'. *Social Analysis.* Vol. 46. No. 1, pp. 117–122.

Yoder, C. (2013). 'Trauma-Sensitive Development and Humanitarian Aid'. In *Peacebuilder*. Eastern Mennonite University: Centre for Justice and Peacebuilding, pp. 1–2. Retrieved 13 July 2015 from: http://emu.edu/now/peacebuilder/2013/03/trauma-sensitive-acknowledging-peoples-difficult-experiences-can-help-them-move-forward/.