
by

Mavis N. Matenge

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg

Copyright © 2013 by Mavis N. Matenge
Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES, IMAGES AND MAPS..........................................................................................v
ACRONYMS..............................................................................................................................vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..........................................................................................................vii
DEDICATION...........................................................................................................................viii
ABSTRACT..............................................................................................................................ix

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION.............................................................................................1
INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................1
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE.....................................................................................................5
RESEARCH QUESTIONS..........................................................................................................5
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY..................................................................................................6
STUDY LIMITATIONS............................................................................................................8
CHAPTERS OVERVIEW............................................................................................................9
CONCLUSION.........................................................................................................................10

CHAPTER 2 – CONTEXT - VIOLENT CONFLICTS, TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION
COMMISSIONS AND REFUGEE MOVEMENTS.................................................................11
INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................11
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA’S POST-COLONIAL VIOLENT CONFLICTS......................................12
A continent at war with itself ................................................................................................12
AFRICA’S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSIONS...............................................16
Transitioning towards Peace and Justice .............................................................................16
Defining Truth and Reconciliation Commissions .................................................................19
Operationalizing Africa’s Truth Commissions......................................................................20
Participation of Refugee Communities in Truth Commissions.............................................24
Steps Taken by the Liberian and Kenyan Commissions to Document Refugees’ Human Rights Stories ..................................................................................................................24
The case of Liberia ...............................................................................................................25
Benefits of participation - Liberian refugees in Ghana ............................................................28
Inclusion of refugees - implications for the Liberian commission .........................................30
The case of Kenya ................................................................................................................30
Benefits of participation – Kenyan refugees in Uganda ..........................................................33
Inclusion of refugees - implications for the Kenyan commission ..........................................34
Lessons from the Liberian and Kenyan experiences .............................................................35
THE HUMAN RIGHTS REALITY OF REFUGEES................................................................37
Violence and the Human Rights Reality of Refugees ............................................................37
Global Refugee Framework ....................................................................................................38
African Refugee Framework .................................................................................................39
SOUTHERN AFRICAN REFUGEE MOVEMENTS, BOTSWANA AND DUKWI REFUGEE
CAMP..................................................................................................................................40
Evolution of Refugee Movements in Southern Africa and Botswana ....................................41
A Country of Refuge - Botswana and Dukwi Refugee Camp ................................................42
Demographic Profile of the Refugee Camp Population in Botswana ....................................43
CONCLUSION.........................................................................................................................46

CHAPTER 3 – LITERATURE REVIEW..................................................................................48
INTRODUCTION.....................................................................................................................48
TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE....................................................................................................49
Defining Transitional Justice ...............................................................................................49
Relationship between Transitional Justice and Human Rights ..........................................50
The Origin, Evolution and Application of Transitional Justice ............................................53
Mechanisms of Transitional Justice ....................................................................................57
Dilemma for Transitional Justice – The Debate between Peace and Justice .......................59
# The Case for Transitional Justice

## TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSIONS

- Defining Truth Commissions
  - Establishing Authorities of Commissions
  - Purpose and Objectives of Truth Commissions
  - Places Where Truth Commissions Have Been Used
  - Truth Commissions as Instruments that Promote Reconciliation, Forgiveness and Healing

## STORYTELLING

- Defining Storytelling
- Storytelling and Truth Commissions
- Storytelling and Peacebuilding

## PEACEBUILDING AND POST-VIOLENCE SOCIETIES

- Defining Peacebuilding
- Peacebuilding in Post-violence Societies

## CONCLUSION

## CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY

### INTRODUCTION

### RESEARCH STRATEGY

- Qualitative Research Strategy
- Narrative Methodology
- Rationale for Methodology

### PARTICIPANTS AND LOCATION

- Location
- Participants Demography

### PROCEDURES

- Selection of Participants
- Data Gathering Techniques
- Research Instruments
- Data Analysis
- Ethics Approval and Maintaining Confidentiality
- Validation and Reliability

### ROLE OF RESEARCHER AND MY REFLECTIONS

- The Researcher’s Role
- Personal Reflection of My Field Work Journey

## CHAPTER 5 - REFUGEES’ HUMAN RIGHTS NARRATIVES AND THEIR LIVED CAMP EXPERIENCES

### INTRODUCTION

### HUMAN RIGHTS JOURNEYS

- Life Before Persecution
- Encountering Persecution
- Types of Persecution Faced
- Fleeing Persecution

### LIVED EXPERIENCES AS CAMP REFUGEES

- Life after Persecution in Countries of Origin
- Living as camp refugees
List of Tables, Images and Maps

List of Tables

Table 1: List of Truth Commissions in Africa: 1986 to Present.................................20
Table 2: List of Commissions of Inquiry in Africa: 1974 to Present..............................21
Table 3: Dukwi Refugee Camp: Population of Concern by Nationality and Gender........44
Table 4: Dukwi Refugee Camp: Summary of Demographic Profile by Nationality.........44
Table 5: Profile of Research Participants......................................................................111

List of Images

Image 1: Photo of Main Area of the Camp where stakeholders Offices are Located........109
Image 2: Photo Illustrating an Example of the Accommodation Structures in the Camp.....111
Image 3: Photo of the Office I used to Conduct Face-to-Face Interviews........................116
Image 4: Photo Taken of Me outside the Office where I Conducted Face-to-Face Interviews..116
Image 5: Photo of Building where the Focus Group and Workshop Session Took Place.....117

List of Maps

Map 1: Map of Africa........................................................................................................12
Map 2: Map of Southern Africa.........................................................................................40
Map 3: Map of Botswana..................................................................................................42
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronyms</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACHPR</td>
<td>Africa Charter on Human and People’s Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRCS</td>
<td>Botswana Red Cross Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWS</td>
<td>Early Warning System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTR</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTY</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDC</td>
<td>Movement for Democratic Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDJS</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence Justice and Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Organisation of African Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Peace and Security Protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATRC</td>
<td>South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGBV</td>
<td>Sexual and Gender-Based Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDP</td>
<td>Union for Democracy and Social Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I have many people to thank for the support that they gave me throughout this chapter of my life as a student in the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) graduate Ph.D. program. I will only be able to name a few in these acknowledgements. I am thankful to the participants of this research project because without their participation the study would not have been possible. I am grateful that they were willing and trusting to invite me into their lives by sharing their human rights stories of struggle and resiliency. These personal narratives taught me much about the importance of providing survivors of persecution the opportunity to give voice to their lived experiences. My hope is that this study has honoured their stories. And, I thank the Dukwi camp refugee community as a whole. You have inspired me in so many ways and have influenced me to strive to live a life that promotes social justice, peace and basic human rights. I am also thankful to the Government of Botswana’s Office of the President (OP) and the Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security (MDJS) for giving me the permission to undertake this study at Dukwi Refugee Camp. I appreciate the assistance that I received from the stakeholders’ staff working with the refugee community, namely, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Botswana Red Cross Society (BRCs), MDJS, and Skillshare International Botswana.

In addition, I am indebted to Dr. Sean Byrne, the Director of the Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice. It has been such an honour and privilege to be his student and have him as my advisor. I have appreciated the way I’ve felt challenged and encouraged by him to grow and strive for excellence in my work. His guidance and mentorship has been invaluable. Equally invaluable are the lessons that he imparted throughout my studies such as those pertaining to the value of advancing and nurturing grassroots peacebuilding in peace work. Alongside Dr. Byrne, I have had an extremely supportive advisory committee composed of Dr. Peter Kulchyiski, Dr. Mark Libin and Dr. Ismael Mutingi. I’ve benefitted greatly from their counsel, wealth of knowledge and encouragement. I am also thankful for the support I received from Dr. Jessica Senehi who introduced me to the theory and practice of storytelling in the PACS field. Her creative, transformational and empowering pedagogy equipped and enabled me to use the tool of storytelling to conduct this study. I would also like to thank my friend and colleague Dr. Lloyd Kornelson, for reading a previous draft of this thesis.

Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge my sponsors who enabled me to pursue my studies. In this regard, I thank the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship Program for awarding me a Commonwealth Scholarship to undertake my studies in the PACS field. I am also grateful to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)/Keizo Obuchi Research Fellowship Program for awarding me a fellowship to carry out my research.

Throughout this academic journey, my spiritual faith kept me grounded, focussed and motivated. Though some days were challenging, I was able to press on each day anchored in God – my Rock, Strength, Peace, Grace, Love and Hope, my All – thank you. Finally, I thank my friends and colleagues in Winnipeg and other parts of Canada, Botswana and the USA for all of their support. I thank my family for journeying with me and cheering me on every step of the way. I am a very blessed woman to have the kind of loving family that I have. My parents, Daniel and Patricia, my brother Thapelo, sisters Sethunya and Chawa, my brother-in-law Rowan, and nieces Nametso and Ashanti, you are my priceless, life-giving gifts of joy, love, friendship, refuge, inspiration and support. Mum and Dad, thank you for everything, you are my champions.
Dedication

In Loving Memory of Dr. Peter John Grothe
May 28, 1931 – June 16, 2012

I first met Peter in August 1999 at the Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS) as an international student from Botswana. Since then, he became a father figure, a dear friend and mentor to me. He was someone who believed in me and was a constant source of encouragement and inspiration. The day we first met, he was standing in the corridor next to his old office where he also served as an advisor to international students. I introduced myself and mentioned that I was from Botswana. He responded excitedly, “Ah Botswana! I was just there this summer and was almost killed by a one-tusked elephant. Come, come into my office.”

In his office he soon learned that I had arrived by faith in Monterey, equipped with a strong desire to continue my studies, but that I did not have much in terms of financial resources. I had arrived on a one way plane ticket because that is what I could afford. I had partial tuition aid and had no money for food, accommodation and transport. Basically at that moment, I had $1.50 in my pocket. In the midst of my lack of resources, Peter reached out and responded with empathy, thoughtfulness, kindness, compassion, and expressed his willingness to assist me financially throughout my time at MIIS. He thus empowered me to realise my dream of furthering my studies. This was Peter, forever creating opportunities for others – creating opportunities for learning, growth and development for students.

He believed in the right to education. He believed in the empowering and transformative power of education. And, he believed in making education accessible to all people no matter which corner of the world they came from. In many ways I am where I am today in life because of Peter. His very selfless nature opened the door of opportunity for me at MIIS and beyond. Post MIIS, I’ve been able to pursue my passion of working with war affected communities in the African region. I’ve engaged in politics and diplomacy work in Southern Africa, and I’ve been blessed with this opportunity to further my studies in the Ph.D. Program in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba. This is all because a person like Peter chose to care. He lived to care about other people. He lived to make a difference in people’s lives. He lived to enable others to realise their fullest potential and their dreams.

As a man of faith, he lived out his Christian values close to his heart – those of unconditional acceptance and love, being merciful and just. And he lived to promote communities that were more cross-culturally sensitive and humane. The very essence of his nature at times seemed like a classroom of life. I remember one lesson that he often shared with me which was; that in life when you see someone drowning from life’s circumstances reach out and help that person. Use your God-given abilities, gifts and resources to make a difference in lives. Be a daily instrument of goodness.

No other human being has had such a profound impact on my life like Peter has. Whenever I share stories about him, I always say to people, if there truly are angels on earth – angels in our midst, then surely Peter was an angel who graced us with his presence. Thank you Peter, my life is forever changed because God allowed our paths to meet and journey together. You will always be my God-sent angel.
Abstract

Post-violence periods present sub-Saharan African countries emerging from violence with the challenges of social reconstruction, the rebuilding of peace and the redressing of legacies of human rights violations. To respond to these challenges, these countries are increasingly utilising truth and reconciliation commissions. To date ten truth commissions have been established in the sub-Saharan African region. With varying mandates, the truth commissions have in their specific contexts provided public spaces to survivors of human rights violations to give voice to their personal narratives, and shed light on the forms of persecution they faced. Often missing from the work of these commissions are stories of refugees living in camps. This is an unfortunate exclusion by a transitional justice process because refugees represent a group adversely affected by rights violations.

So far in sub-Saharan Africa only the Kenyan, Liberian and Sierra Leonean commissions have incorporated some of their refugee populations in their proceedings. Driven away from their homes and countries by armed strife and other forms of persecution, the stories of sub-Saharan African refugees continue to bear witness to their human rights plight. Their exclusion in the proceedings of most truth commissions is a glaring omission in the work set to champion human rights and consolidate post-violence peace and justice initiatives.

Therefore, working with 33 male and female adult refugees living in Dukwi Refugee Camp in Botswana, this narrative study sought to find answers to this exclusion by exploring avenues of inclusion of refugees’ voices, perspectives and lived human rights experiences in the work of truth commissions. Participants came from sub-Saharan African countries which included DR Congo, Somalia and Zimbabwe. An analysis of the interview narratives revealed
several key findings. Among others, these findings included the importance of recognising refugees as co-partners in peacebuilding. They also underscored the importance of having responsible democratic leadership promote a culture of peace and human rights and combat perpetrators impunity in post-violence African countries. The study demonstrated that future truth commissions can create opportunities to incorporate refugees’ human rights narratives and give refugees the space to offer solutions for the redress of rights violations and suggestions for promoting durable peace.
Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Africa as most people are aware, has endured a tortured history, and continues to persevere under the burden of political instability and religious, social, racial and ethnic strife. Many chroniclers of the African condition often find Africa overwhelming. As R.K. Narayan once said about new stories: ‘there are often too many stories out there to be told,’ the writer is often faced with two choices: turn away from the reality of Africa’s intimidating complexity, or conquer the mystery of Africa by recognising the humanity of African people.¹

The latter part of the words captured above by one of Africa’s most famous writer, Chinua Achebe, suggest that through story, the face of humanity can be revealed. As we listen to and exchange personal stories, we create opportunities that allow us to recognise our common humanity and embrace avenues for dialogue and understanding of our lived experiences. Views similar to those of Achebe are echoed by peace scholar Jessica Senehi, who has written widely on constructive storytelling. Among other aspects, she believes that constructive storytelling provides humanity the opportunity to recognise the “dignity and experiences of the other.”² I believe that both Achebe and Senehi speak to the power of the storytelling medium and the lessons it brings to both listener and bearer of story. I base this belief on the lessons that I have learned from personal stories of human rights struggles and survival shared with me some years back by extraordinary men, women and youth forcibly and unjustly displaced from their homes and countries by acts of persecution.

Some of the stories shared include the story of a young Somali man I met in Detroit, Michigan who narrated how armed conflict forced him to flee his country. What I distinctly

remember about his story was his reflection on how, while caught in the conflict, he learned to befriend and survive hunger – and what it meant living this reality of hunger and war-inflicted poverty. I also recall a story of a Ugandan mother who, together with her young son, was abducted by Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Not long after the abduction she helplessly watched in horror as her son was brutally beaten to death by members of the LRA.

Then there is the story of my dear friend George whom I met in College. Parts of his narrative included surviving Liberia’s conflict by finding work collecting dead bodies from the streets in order to receive, as pay, small cups of rice with which to feed his mum and sisters. There were also the stories shared by different members of the Dukwi Refugee Camp Community in Botswana when I first worked with them in 2004. Their narratives revealed a desperate quest and hope for survival and right to life, security and safety.

I believe that in all these stories, different faces of humanity are recognised. There is the human face of suffering and resiliency found in the plight of those surviving life as refugees – a life they did not choose to live. Then there is the other face of humanity – the one that causes the senseless, inhumane atrocities. It is this dark side of humanity that robs another of life, human dignity and sense of self-worth. It is indiscriminate as it attacks innocent men, women and children. In many ways these faces of humanity opened my eyes to existing social injustices and the ongoing struggles for human rights for all. In particular, they drew my attention to the plight of refugees in the African region and the causes of their plight. This is the power of story.

Personal narratives have the powerful ability to inform, raise awareness, and encourage a constructive response to social concerns. In essence it is these personal stories and the lessons they yield that influenced my decision to undertake this study of exploring the human rights stories of refugees in the African region. I really believe that as post-violence societies in this
region redress past human rights wrongs, the voices of refugees living in camp situations need to be heard, particularly in the work of truth commissions and post-violence peacebuilding activities. I believe that this study undertaken with participants from Dukwi Refugee Camp allows me to explore this notion of inclusion and representation of human rights survivors.

Currently in sub-Saharan Africa, truth commissions appear to have increasingly become the preferred transitional justice approach of the international community. From South Africa to Uganda, truth commissions have been used as alternatives to retributive justice in the aftermath of atrocious human rights violations. With varying mandates, these bodies have, in their specific contexts, provided public spaces for dealing with legacies of the past and for creating opportunities for the rebuilding of societies that safeguard human rights and democratic governance. In particular, these bodies have provided survivors of gross human rights abuses the platform to give voice to their personal narratives, and shed light on the forms of persecution they have faced. Often missing from this national narrative are the stories of those forced by persecution to live in exile as refugees. This is an unfortunate exclusion by a transitional justice process because forcibly displaced persons constitute a group that is adversely affected by rights violations and their stories can inform the work of truth commissions.

According to the 2012 statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were an estimated 2.8 million refugees in sub-Saharan Africa who

---


fled “insecurity, political unrest and persecution.”

During this period, East African countries such as Sudan and Somalia remained refugee producing countries. Violent clashes in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States of Sudan caused over 100,000 people to flee into the neighboring countries of South Sudan and Ethiopia. According to the UN Refugee Agency, the “one millionth Somali refugee” was registered in 2012. Instability also remained a push factor in Central Africa and the Great Lakes region. In the eastern parts of DR Congo massive displacement occurred as a result of targeted armed attacks against civilians and sexual violence directed against women and girls. Similarly in the Central African Republic (CAR), “a resurgence of rebel activity” resulted in the displacement of hundreds of people. Insecurity also remained a push factor in the West African country of Mali.

This narrative of insecurity, persecution and forced displacement in sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates ongoing patterns of human rights violations in some parts of the region that still affect scores of people. Looking onwards, as Africa’s truth commissions investigate past human rights abuses by responding to human rights stories of affected groups, a similar response and commitment is needed for refugees. The matter of inclusion of refugees in the discourse of truth commissions and post-violence peacebuilding is at the crux of this study.

---

7 Ibid.
8 In the context of forced displacement, push factors are factors that cause individuals to forcibly flee from their homes and countries. An example of a push factor is armed conflict.
Statement of Purpose

As already outlined above, using narrative inquiry as a research method, this study explores how human rights stories of refugees can be included in a transitional justice and peacebuilding process in their countries of origin. The rationale for using this inquiry emanates from the storytelling component of truth commissions that allows survivors to personally narrate the human rights atrocities they faced. Since the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC), the use of human rights narratives as a truth-telling tool has become common in the procedures of truth commissions. Similarly, in post-violence peacebuilding, constructive storytelling has been used as a peacebuilding and community building tool to positively transform social conflicts. For example, Senehi asserts that as a peace tool, storytelling allows for inclusiveness, dialogue, human understanding and awareness. As she states, “[storytelling] is a powerful means of community building that can help create bonds among people during post-conflict peacebuilding.”

Research Questions

This study explores avenues for the inclusion of refugees’ voices, perspectives and lived experiences in the work of truth commissions and post-violence peacebuilding initiatives. To achieve this exploration, the following questions guide the research. What are your lived human rights experiences? In what ways can human rights stories of refugees be part of transitional justice and peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin? The employment of narrative methodology is used to enable participants to share detailed accounts of their experiences and achievements.

---

perspectives towards building peace and redressing human rights wrongs in a post-violence climate.

In sum, the qualitative research design involved 18 male and 15 female refugee participants living in Dukwi Refugee Camp. The study explored the following: (1) the lived experiences of refugees and the relevance of their human rights stories to truth-telling or storytelling process of truth commissions in their countries of origin; and (2) (i) the perceptions of refugees on the use of truth commissions as a conflict transformational tool that promotes post-violence peacebuilding and reconciliation in their countries of origin, (ii) their views on how refugees could contribute towards peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin, and (iii) their hopes and dreams of living as a members of a transitional community in a refugee camp setting.

Objectives of the Study

The research explores concerns of exclusion and inclusion that exist when legacies of human rights violations are addressed. As already mentioned, despite the large number of forcibly displaced persons in the Sub-Saharan African region, refugees remain sidelined in the broader transitional justice and peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin. Yet, their stories continue to bear witness to their human rights plight. Therefore, this research commits to providing a space for refugees to give voice to their human rights journeys and lived camp experiences. It aims to gain understanding of their post-violence peacebuilding and transitional justice related issues. It also aims to gain insight into what these processes mean to them and how they view them in relation to post-violence peace and social justice work in their home countries. Scholar-practitioners like Megan Bradley have argued that the establishment of post-violence initiatives such as truth commissions warrant consultation with survivors. Bradley
further states that the status quo of creating and operating truth commissions and other transitional initiatives while leaving out internally displaced persons, refugees, and other members of the diaspora requires attention. By providing a platform for displaced voices and perspectives of survivors from Duwki Camp, this study reiterates the importance of consulting survivors of injustice when steps are taken to help post-violence communities heal, reconcile, reconstruct and build durable national peace. It also reiterates the significance of acknowledging the human rights testimonies of refugees and allowing for the restoration of their dignity and self-worth. By embracing this approach of giving space to the voices of refugees, the study aims to underscore that post-violence peacebuilding and access to justice ought to represent all groups, for it does take members of an entire nation to build a nation-state.

Furthermore, the literature and research linking sub-Saharan Africa’s refugees to transitional justice and peacebuilding remains scant. This study aims to contribute to this scholarship particularly in Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS). Therefore, given the use of storytelling as a research method, the study aims to contribute towards enhancing and solidifying the storytelling pedagogy in the PACS field. It aims to demonstrate that storytelling has an instrumental role to play theoretically and practically in peacebuilding, human rights and social justice work. By highlighting the linkages between refugees, peacebuilding and transitional justice, the study also aims to contribute towards policy development and management in a post-violence context. Contribution to policy is particularly important at national levels because most of these post-violence initiatives are predominately state-sanctioned and implemented from a top-down approach (Mac Ginty 2013, 2011, 2008). In this regard, the study demonstrates that

from the stories and perspectives shared with me, there can be opportunities for policymakers to consider how stories of those forcibly displaced can be integrated into the broader national truth commission and peacebuilding narrative thus allowing displaced communities to have an integral role in peace processes. As survivors of rights abuse, these communities understand issues of human rights violations; therefore they ought to be given the space to offer solutions for the redress of rights violations and suggestions for harnessing durable peace.

**Study Limitations**

There were some limitations associated with this study. Focussing on national transitional justice and peacebuilding initiatives requires access to policymakers and politicians involved in their creation and operation. Due to limited research funding, time and accessibility constraints, the data solely represents the voices of refugees and does not provide insight into why at the national political level decision makers in sub-Saharan Africa’s post-violence countries have for the most part, not included refugees living in exile as key stakeholders in transitional processes. For further research, it would be worth including a sample of policymakers directly involved in the procedural aspects of truth commissions, by giving them the space to respond to issues of inclusion and exclusion in respect to refugees’ human rights stories. Moreover, the study also relied on participants that spoke English. In this regard the use of English may have discouraged some prospective participants from participating. Not all perspectives could be covered by this study and as a result there may also be a limitation due to the absence of youth voices. Future research could focus on the stories of young people and explore their lived human rights experiences and perspectives on conflict, transitional justice and peacebuilding processes.
Chapters Overview

The research is divided into seven chapters. The first half of the study outlines the context and its theoretical framework. The second focuses on the research methods, findings, and recommendations. Chapter 1 has provided an overview of the study by introducing the statement of the problem, rationale for the study, and key questions that guide the research. Chapter 2 presents the context that reviews violent causes of conflict that have contributed to the refugee movement in Sub-Saharan Africa. Because the study is situated in Botswana, it acutely documents refugee movements in Southern Africa and provides a contextual background on the refugee community living in Dukwi Refugee Camp in Botswana. Next it looks at the response to the use of truth commissions as a peacebuilding tool for redressing violence and its impact on human rights.

Chapter 3 provides a review of the academic literature on transitional justice, storytelling and peacebuilding theories. In the review, theories of truth commissions are presented with particular attention placed on the prominent features often associated with these bodies, namely, the processes of forgiveness and reconciliation and their relationship to the narratives of survivors of human rights violations. Chapter 4 explores the methodology used in this study. It covers research instruments and data collection, study participants\(^\text{12}\), ethical considerations and personal reflections from the field. The subsequent two chapters present the research findings. Chapter 5 presents the human rights narratives of refugee women and men living in Dukwi refugee camp – their human rights experiences of persecution and their lived experiences as camp refugees. The chapter draws out the linkages between refugees’ human rights experiences

\(^{12}\)To protect the identity of the study participants and preserve confidentiality, all of the participants are identified by pseudonyms.
and the work of truth commissions. Given the focus on lived experiences, the participants’ narratives are further explored to draw out their fears, hopes and dreams as survivors of human rights violations. Chapter 6 focuses on the linkages between participants’ human rights stories and processes related to the work of truth commissions namely forgiveness, healing and national reconciliation. The chapter presents findings on the participants’ perceptions of truth commissions and aforementioned processes. It gets at the crux of what issues of transitional justice and peacebuilding mean to refugees. For example, what does justice and peace mean to them? Have they healed from their past? Are they able to forgive their persecutors? As survivors of injustice, do they believe that truth commissions can effectively redress wrongs of the past and accommodate the testimonies of refugees? Can these bodies help national reconciliation efforts in their countries and enable them to transition towards durable peace? The gist of this dialogue with the participants demonstrates how essential their voices are to post-violence peacebuilding activities particularly as it is the grassroots that often bear the brunt of violence in armed conflicts. Chapter 7 concludes the study by outlining key findings, making policy recommendations and suggestions for further research in the PACS field.

**Conclusion**

The goals of this research are to explore opportunities of inclusion for refugees in truth commissions and post-violence peacebuilding initiatives in their countries of origin. To realise these goals, this study relies on the perspectives of the participants of these initiatives and their personal stories about their human rights journeys. It is a study that gives opportunities to the voices of refugees to meaningfully engage in advocating for the inclusiveness of refugees lived experiences in the post-violence climate, for access to and active participation in peace-support interventions.
Chapter Two: Context – Violent Conflicts, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions and Refugee Movements

Introduction

Forcibly displaced communities must be seen as being part and parcel of efforts to create stable and peaceful societies after conflicts have been brought to an end.\(^{13}\)

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) are increasingly utilised by post-violent sub-Saharan African societies to redress past human rights atrocities and acknowledge the testimonies of survivors. However, unlike other human rights survivors, refugees living in camps do not have access to these truth-telling bodies. Their exclusion is a glaring omission in the work set to champion human rights, consolidate post-violence peace and justice initiatives, and to promote national healing and reconciliation.

In order to understand the relationship between refugees, human rights and TRCs in sub-Saharan Africa, this chapter provides a brief overview of the region’s post-colonial violent ethnopolitical conflicts that have contributed to human rights violations and forced people’s displacements. It provides a brief overview of African truth commissions and examples of violations they investigated as victim-centered bodies mandated to redress human rights atrocities. The chapter further explores the human rights reality of refugees by providing an overview of the global and African refugee situations. In particular the chapter explores the Dukwi Refugee Camp community in Botswana, where respondents of this study reside. The terms truth commissions, TRCs, and commissions, are used interchangeably in the thesis.

Sub-Saharan Africa’s Post-colonial Violent Conflicts

Map 1: Map of Africa

A Continent at War with Itself

Post-colonial violent conflicts have had a devastating impact on African societies. The causes of the conflicts vary from socio-economic, political, cultural challenges, undemocratic leadership and colonial legacies. The conflicts have given the continent the “uncanny reputation of being the world’s leading theatre of conflict ... poverty ... and instability.” Since 1970 more than 30 violent conflicts have engulfed the continent and in “1996 alone, 14 out of 53 countries of Africa were afflicted by armed conflicts accounting for more than half of all war-related...”

deaths worldwide and resulting in more than 8 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons.”

These ethnopolitical conflicts have ranged from violent ethnic conflicts in Rwanda and Sudan to politically motivated conflicts in Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique. According to the Human Security Report Project, at the turn of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century most armed conflicts were situated in sub-Saharan Africa and it was also in this region of the world where globally most people were killed. The violent conflicts have served as impediments to development, inflicted human suffering and destroyed people’s livelihoods. As Adedjei observes:

Africa’s track record on civil war, violent conflict, strife and political instability has, with a large measure of justification, earned it the appellation of a continent at war against itself, with war-torn polities, pauperised and divided societies. More than 2 million people have been killed in civil wars, strife and political uprisings in the course of the past decade while about 10 million have been victims of forced migration and starvation.

In consideration of the observations outlined above by Adedjei, it is important to highlight the role that colonialism and its legacies have played in Africa’s post-colonial violent conflicts. In his writing on ethnic conflicts, Donald Horowitz addresses the role that colonial powers played in deepening ethnic differences in territories that they controlled. Horowitz asserts that colonial

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} Sean Byrne and Cynthia Irvin, (eds.) Paul Dixon, Brian Polkinghorn and Jessica Senehi (assoc. eds.) \textit{Reconcilable Difference – Turning Points in Ethnopolitical Conflict}, (Kumarian Press: West Hartford, 2000). The concept of ethnopolitical conflicts refers to ethnic conflict. Byrne and Irvin suggest that Donald Horowitz used the concept of ethnopolitical conflicts to demonstrate that “ethnic conflict is at the centre of politics in divided societies.”
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
policies are implicated as one of the prevailing sources of ethnic conflicts.\textsuperscript{22} This assertion is also shared by Jeremy Sarkin who states that “colonial racist ideology used ethnicity as a means of political manipulation for strategic purposes. This is a major cause of ongoing tension in the region. Racist policies eroded the pre-colonial flexibility on issues of ethnic identity and established rigid boundaries between people based on ethnicity.”\textsuperscript{23} For example, the former Belgian colonial authority in Rwanda is often cited as a case that demonstrates the way in which a colonial power fuelled ethnic distinctions between Hutu and Tutsi through various measures such as the use of identity cards that revealed ones ethnicity.\textsuperscript{24} Actions like these served as undercurrents in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Moreover, according to Stephen Wolff, “colonial legacies undergird the current structural, political, socio-economic contributions of ethnic conflict such as discriminatory political institutions and economic systems … forced cultural assimilation of minority groups and intra-group and intergroup politics.”\textsuperscript{25} For example this was evident in South Africa following the establishment of the apartheid regime in 1948. The regime introduced apartheid laws that institutionalised racial discrimination in South Africa. The apartheid ideology aimed to promote the aspirations of the Afrikaner Volk which supported the protection of the “ethnic purity of Afrikaners” from the inferior indigenous races.”\textsuperscript{26} The long-lasting adverse impact of colonial policies and techniques was acknowledged in the Declaration of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related

\textsuperscript{22} Donald Horowitz, \textit{Ethnic Groups in Conflict} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 149-150.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
Intolerance which was held in 2001 in Durban South Africa. Under the Declaration’s General Issues section, Article 14 reads:

We recognise that colonialism has led to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, and people of Asian descent and indigenous people were victims of colonialism and continue to be victims of its consequences. We acknowledge the suffering caused by colonialism and affirm that, wherever and whenever it occurred, it must be condemned and its reoccurrence prevented. We further regret that the effects and persistence of these structures and practices have been among the factors contributing to lasting social and economic inequalities in many parts of the world.\(^{27}\)

Thus to date the impact of “historical injustices” of colonialism in Africa continues through cycles of violent ethnopolitical conflicts and other rights abuses. It is key though to note that although colonial policies such as those of “divide and conquer” have adversely affected Africa’s socio-political landscape, “blame must also be laid at the door of [some of the post-colonial] African leaders who [since independence] have done little to promote [nation building], democracy, good governance, rule of law and human rights.”\(^{28}\) Writing about Africa’s undemocratic leadership, electoral violence and the toll it is having on Africa’s citizenry, Matenge writes:

Africa’s electoral tug-of-war episodes suggest that there are some undemocratic leaders in the continent that seem bent on turning presidential offices into permanent posts, as opposed to honouring them as offices that enable a democratically elected leader to serve his or her country within a constitutionally specified timeframe. In the process, the electorate is caught in the middle of political theatrics. There is also the leadership that appears shrouded with a mindset of entitlement. When faced with an unfavourable poll outcome, it is all too ready to


negotiate for appeasement packages like a power-sharing government – wanting a piece of the cake. Lastly, there is the leadership which is still milking the gains of liberation struggles by refusing to hold free and fair presidential elections. It is a sad reality when the leading custodians of states undermine processes meant to cultivate democratic practices and good governance.29

Against this backdrop of post-colonial violence, various peacemaking interventions by Sub-Saharan African countries emerging from violence were adopted to respond to violent legacies. These interventions include truth commissions, which continue to be used as a remedy for advancing conflict transformation, peacebuilding and reconciliation.

**Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commissions**

**Transitioning towards Peace and Justice**

At the “wake of the third-wave democratisation in the 1990s” countries emerging from a volatile post-independence period of the late 1950s and early 1960s30 transitioned to “reckon with the past and move from violent conflict and repressive regimes towards the establishment of democratic governance.”31 Globally, a wide range of conflict prevention and management approaches were adopted in transitional states like Chile, El Salvador, Haiti and South Africa.32 These largely involved the implementation of transitional justice processes aimed at rebuilding democracy and the rule of law, promoting peacebuilding, and national reconciliation.

According to Freeman, transitional justice is a process that guides countries transitioning from armed conflict or authoritarian rule to peace and democracy.\textsuperscript{33} Roht-Arriaza also shares a similar definition describing transitional justice as an intervention that in its practice addresses the legacies of past violations of human rights and humanitarian law.\textsuperscript{34} She asserts that “transitional justice can be defined as the conception of justice associated with periods of political change, characterised by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes.”\textsuperscript{35} The United Nations definition underscores this understanding of transitional justice, observing that it is an approach that incorporates various mechanisms to reckon with the past abuses and pursue accountability, “serve justice and achieve reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{36}

Today these transitional systems appear to serve as prerequisites for post-violence democratisation, reconciliation and sustainable peace processes. They are comprised of both judicial and non-judicial measures, which include international tribunals, special hybrid courts, truth commissions and indigenous approaches to justice. For example, Roger Mac Ginty writes about “hybrid peace” which he describes as the “fusion of peace” where the local and international mores blend in building peace and promoting post-violence reconciliation.\textsuperscript{37} In all these processes there was a proliferation in the use of national truth and reconciliation

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Mark Freeman, \textit{Truth Commissions and Procedural Fairness}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Roger Mac Ginty, \textit{International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance – Hybrid Forms of Peace}, (Hampshire: Palgrave McMillian, 2011).
\end{itemize}
commissions to respond to repression and human rights violations. “In the last two decades there have been over 25 truth commissions globally, with at least 7 of these based in Africa.” In the African context, the popularity of truth commissions in sub-Saharan Africa is attributed to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC, 1995) which was viewed as an effective contributor to the country’s nation building and reconciliation initiatives and a model for other commissions. 

The popularity of truth commissions in Africa is one of the reasons why this study focussed on them as opposed to other transitional justice mechanisms. It seemed appropriate to focus on a mechanism which although not exclusively used, has been and continues to feature quite prominently in the African region. In addition, the study gave special attention to truth commissions because they provide a model that acutely responds to the human rights concerns of survivors of rights violations. They also provide a vital platform for survivors to give voice to their human rights experiences and engage in restorative processes that truth commissions often set out to promote such as social repair, healing and reconciliation. This centrality of survivors’ human rights testimonies and their healing from past abuses was important to this study which fixated on refugees lived human rights experiences. In addition, the notion of truth commissions as a conflict transformation tool provided an ideal context for exploring the linkages between post-violence peacebuilding efforts and refugees communities.

---

Although this study singles out truth commissions it does not romanticise or glorify them as the sole exemplar for redressing past human rights violations. The study recognises that truth commissions are not “some kind of panacea for righting wrongs or … a magic bullet for healing victims of [human rights violations].”\textsuperscript{41} It also recognises the limitations of truth commissions as captured for example in the narratives of some of this study’s participants who questioned the ability of truth commissions to promote national reconciliation in post-ethnic violence contexts in the African region. Furthermore, the study also acknowledges the debates that exist on whether truth commissions can contribute towards durable peace and restorative justice in Africa’s transitional societies.

**Defining Truth and Reconciliation Commissions**

The widely used definition of truth commissions is offered by Priscilla Hayner who is considered a leading scholar on the subject. Hayner defines truth commissions as bodies that share the following characteristics: (1) they examine past abuses; (2) they investigate abuses over a specified timeframe; (3) they are temporary bodies that operate anywhere from six months to two years and submit a report upon completion of their work; and (4) they are official bodies “sanctioned, authorised, or empowered by the state and sometimes also by the armed opposition, as in a peace accord.”\textsuperscript{42} Further, they are usually set up as a key element of a post-conflict or


political transition stage. Building on Hayner’s definition, Freeman suggests that a truth commission addresses past injustices. As Freeman observes:

[A commission] is an ad hoc, autonomous, and victim-centered commission of inquiry set up and authorised by a state for the primary purposes of (1) investigating and reporting on the principal causes and consequences of broad and relatively recent patterns of severe violence or repression that occurred in the state during determinate periods of abusive rule or conflict, and (2) making recommendations for their redress and future prevention.

**Operationalizing Africa’s Truth Commissions**

An analysis of African truth commissions illustrates that to date over 5 Commissions of Inquiries and 10 truth commissions were established. Table 1 below provides a list of national truth commissions and Table 2 provides a list of truth inquiries.

**Table 1: List of Truth Commissions in Africa: 1986 to Present**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>NAME OF COMMISSION</th>
<th>PERIOD OF OPERATION</th>
<th>MANDATED PERIOD OF INVESTIGATION OF ACTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES OF VIOLATIONS INVESTIGATED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>The Commission of Inquiry into the Crimes and Misappropriations Committed by ex-President Habre and his accomplices and / or accessories</td>
<td>1990-1992</td>
<td>1981-1989</td>
<td>Assassinations, disappearances, torture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>National Reconciliation Commission</td>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>1957-1993</td>
<td>Abuses that occurred under a repressive regime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>Commission on Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation</td>
<td>2011-2013</td>
<td>2010-2011/and civil war</td>
<td>Abuses that occurred during the post-electoral violence / civil war</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43 Ibid, 127.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>NAME OF INQUIRY</th>
<th>PERIOD OF OPERATION</th>
<th>MANDATED PERIOD OF INVESTIGATION OF ACTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS</th>
<th>EXAMPLES OF VIOLATIONS INVESTIGATED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>The Special Prosecution in Ethiopia by the Special Prosecution</td>
<td>1993-2007</td>
<td>1974-1980</td>
<td>Abuses that took place under the military junta rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>Mediation Committee for National Reconciliation</td>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Post-electoral violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Commission of Inquiry into the Matabeleland Disturbances (Chihambakwe Commission of Inquiry)</td>
<td>1983-1984</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Killings of political dissidents, abuse during the ethnopolitical violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both tables and in particular Table 1 represent one third of all truth commissions established globally. These bodies were established to investigate past abuses and provide accurate records of the violence that occurred. Both Tables 1 and 2 indicate the periods of investigation as sanctioned by the concerned States. The types of abuses redressed ranged from forced disappearances, torture, and abuses carried out during post-electoral violence or ethnopolitical conflicts. For example, South Africa’s commission was mandated to investigate gross human rights violations orchestrated by the apartheid regime from 1960-1994. It was tasked to:

Develop a complete picture of the gross violations of human rights that took place in and came through the conflicts of the past; to restore to victims their human and civil dignity by letting them tell their stories and recommend how they could be assisted; to consider granting amnesty to those perpetrators who carried out their abuses for political reasons and who gave full accountings of their actions to the Commission.46

Echoing the goals of this mandate, at the time that he was appointed as the Chairperson for the South African commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu remarked:

I hope that the work of the Commission, by opening wounds to cleanse them, will thereby stop them from festering. We cannot be facile and say bygones will be bygones, because they will not be bygones and will return to haunt us. True reconciliation is never cheap, for it is based on forgiveness which is costly. Forgiveness in turn depends on repentance, which is based on an acknowledgement of what was done wrong and therefore on disclosure of truth. You cannot forgive what you do not know.47

With the growing list of truth commissions in Africa, it is apparent that these bodies will continue to have a critical role to play as transitions are made from violence towards peace and

---

justice. As Freeman observes, “the story of truth commissions in Africa will continue to be written for many years to come.”

For survivors of human rights violations, the commissions present a vital platform for redress and a space that enables them to give voice to the injustices they’ve faced by allowing them to participate in the storytelling processes. For example this was the case with the South African Commission’s (SATRC) truth-telling initiative. The SATRC Committee on Human Rights Violations (HRV) had public hearings which allowed survivors to narrate their stories of persecution faced during apartheid. Different transitional justice scholars like Brandon Hamber suggest that this avenue of storytelling presented an opportunity for the “[restoration of] the human and civil dignity of victims.” It set the tone for the personal journey towards healing. As Hamber asserts, the public hearings provide space for “victims to tell their human rights stories, particularly in public forums … [and this is] psychologically beneficial.” These spaces are essential for post-violence societies in their efforts to overcome violent pasts through truth-telling, acknowledgement, and public understanding of the human rights wrongs of the past. They are equally essential to refugees whose human rights stories cannot be ignored in the broader fields of transitional justice and post-violence peacebuilding. Presented below is an overview of truth commissions that have included refugee communities in their proceedings.

Participation of Refugee Communities in Truth Commissions

Globally there are a handful of post-violence countries whose truth commissions have engaged refugee communities in their processes. These include the commissions of East Timor, Guatemala, and Peru. In sub-Saharan Africa, outreach to refugee settlements was made by the Liberian, Sierra Leonean and Kenyan truth commissions. The commissions in Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Peru and East Timor investigated displacement in an ad hoc manner.\textsuperscript{51} The Liberian commission took a more integrative approach by involving its diaspora community which included refugees residing in West Africa, the United Kingdom and United States.\textsuperscript{52} Similarly the Kenyan commission included in its report the human rights stories of Kenyan refugees who fled to Uganda following the 2007 post-electoral violence. Bernadette Iyodu notes that a majority of interviewed Kenyan refugees were happy to be part of the process and felt that they had not been “forgotten” in the post-violence reconciliation efforts.\textsuperscript{53} In this regard, presented below is an overview of the steps taken by the Kenyan and Liberian commissions to include their refugee communities in their proceedings.

Steps Taken by the Liberian and Kenyan Commissions to Document Refugees’ Human Rights Stories

I chose these cases because out of the three sub-Saharan African TRCs that included refugees, the third being Sierra Leone, the Kenyan and Liberian commissions seem to have gone beyond an ad-hoc approach in their inclusion of refugee participants. In this regard, in my

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
overview of these commissions, I provide a brief outline of the circumstances that led to the establishment of these bodies, an overview of the commissions’ mandates, the steps that they took to document the personal narratives of refugee participants, and what this participation meant to the refugee participants. Finally, I explore the implications of this inclusive intervention on the commissions themselves.

**The case of Liberia.**

From 1979 to 2003 the Liberian people survived a bloody *coup d'état*, years of military rule, and two violent civil wars.”⁵⁴ The country was established following the resettlement of the first free-born black American, freed slaves of African descent. Tensions between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous populations ensued in the late 1970s with riots breaking out in 1979 in Liberia’s capital city of Monrovia. Amidst these tensions, the sitting President was murdered and Samuel Doe emerged as the new President. He ruled Liberia for about a decade and during this period there was a failed attempted coup. In 1989, the infamous Charles Taylor who has since been indicted for international crimes (26 April 2012) by the International Criminal Court (ICC), invaded Liberia and set off two civil wars. During this period Doe was captured and killed and Taylor eventually gained power following the country’s general elections in 1997. His presidency lasted until 2003. The latter part of his rule was characterised by violence as Liberia became engulfed by another civil conflict.⁵⁵

Liberia’s conflicts claimed over 250,000 lives and as many as 1.5 million people were displaced. By 1990 it was reported that half of Liberia’s population was displaced internally and

---

<br>⁵⁵ Ibid, 5.
externally by the protracted violence.\textsuperscript{56} A mass exodus of Liberians sought refuge in refugee settlements in neighboring West African countries as well as around the world with tens of thousands seeking refuge in the United States. “Human rights violations mapped out in the conflict included forced abductions, the use of women and female children as sexual slaves, and massacres.\textsuperscript{57} In 2003, fragile peace was finally restored to Liberia following the signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra, Ghana between the Liberian government and key militia groups.\textsuperscript{58} The agreement made a provision for the establishment of the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was enacted on May 12, 2005 by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly. The peace agreement stated that:

Truth Commission shall be established to provide a forum that will address issues of impunity, as well as an opportunity for both victims and perpetrators of human rights violations to share their experiences, in order to get a clear picture of the past to facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation. In the spirit of national reconciliation, the commission shall deal with the root causes of the crises in Liberia including human rights violations. This commission shall, among other things, recommend measures to be taken for the rehabilitation of victims of human rights violations.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties, Accra, Ghana, August 18, 2003.
The TRC was mandated to “promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{60} To realise this objective the commission set out to investigate gross human rights violations including violations of international humanitarian law that included sexual violations and massacres carried out from January 1979 to October 14, 2003. In its investigations the commission determined whether the violations were isolated incidents or systematic patterns, and investigated the context of abuses and determined those who were responsible for rights violations.\textsuperscript{61} In its proceeding the commission provided a vital public platform for both victims and perpetrators to share their human rights experiences to present a holistic picture of Liberia’s violent past. This public forum was seen as a way of helping to facilitate the country’s transitional journey towards “genuine healing and reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{62} An estimated 20,000 testimonies were documented.

This commission was unique because it was “the first … to arrange a formal partnership with an organisation overseas to receive statements from the [Liberian] diaspora.”\textsuperscript{63} The commission partnered with the Advocates for Human Rights, a non-profit organisation based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where an estimated 30,000 Liberians were said to have fled and sought refuge during Liberia’s turbulent times.\textsuperscript{64} The Advocates did not receive any funding from the Liberian government and they depended on cash and in-kind donations. More than 3.4 million

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
US dollars was raised in support of the project.\textsuperscript{65} The Advocates served as the implementing partner of the diaspora project and worked closely with the TRC commissioners and secretariat, a pro-bono team as well as an advisory team. Over 400 volunteers were trained to assist with this initiative. Volunteers included statement takers, mental health professionals, immigration lawyers and outreach workers. The diaspora project of the Liberian TRC afforded more than 1,500 Liberians living in the US, United Kingdom (UK) and in a refugee settlement in Ghana, Buduburam Refugee Camp to share their human rights stories.\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{Benefits of participation – Liberian refugees in Ghana.}

The majority of the statements taken from the diaspora were from Buduburam. In 2007 at the time of the Advocates conducted interviews with Liberians in Buduburam, there were an estimated 35,000-40,000 Liberians living in this refugee camp. Participants shared with the Advocates statement takers about “human rights abuses in Liberia that forced them to flee, their experiences in flight and in refugee camps.”\textsuperscript{67} The human rights stories recounted by Liberians in the Buduburam refugee camp described how armed conflict caused them to flee their country. “The trigger very often was the violent murder, torture or abduction of family members … others described being threatened or coming home … to find everyone gone or their houses destroyed.”\textsuperscript{68} Additionally systematic attacks targeting specific ethnic groups were also a

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
common feature of the Liberian conflicts. The community in Buduburam further narrated how it had lost years living in the camp and discussed the struggles they encountered in the camp.\footnote{The Advocates for Human Rights, \textit{A House with Two Rooms – Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberian Diaspora Project}, (Saint Paul, Minnesota: DRI Press, 2009).}

The inclusion of the refugee community provided a role for it to play in the work the Liberian TRC was undertaking to facilitate “peace, security, unity and reconciliation.”\footnote{Truth and Reconciliation Commission Mandate, Act that Established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, Enacted on May 12, 2005 by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly, \url{http://trcofliberia.org/about/trc-mandate}, (Accessed August 30, 2013).} However, the Advocates for Human Rights (AHR) also noted that the statement givers suffered from the trauma of the memories of war. For example, AHR presented this statement made by a man living in the camp who had psychological issues derived from past memories:

> I am nervous whenever I see people with [fire] arms, police on camp for example. I start to have flashbacks when I see them. I have nightmares over and over …. I get splitting headaches with the flashbacks that take days to go away.\footnote{The Advocates for Human Rights, \textit{A House with Two Rooms – Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberian Diaspora Project}, (Saint Paul, Minnesota: DRI Press, 2009), 328.}

Additionally, the TRC empowered the refugee participants to present recommendations directly to the TRC that addressed the rebuilding of a peaceful and reconciled Liberia. For example, they stressed the need to rebuild a unified Liberia, to reunify families separated by the conflict, to educate and train orphans. They also stressed the need to hold perpetrators of sexual crimes accountable, to rehabilitate former combatants, to facilitate governmental reforms and re-establish the rule of law.\footnote{Ibid, 16-18.} Moreover, by availing this public forum to the community in Buduburam, the TRC was able to highlight the vulnerability of the displaced such as the lived experiences of women living in a camp setting with some as survivors of sexual violence.
Inclusion of refugees - implications for the Liberian commission.

This unique involvement of the experiences of Liberian refugees in Ghana allowed them to be part of a historic moment “uncovering difficult truths about Liberia’s autocratic governments and sprawling civil wars.”\(^{73}\) One statement taker reflected that, this inclusive process empowered her to learn from the stories shared because, “there is a value on simply listening, and confirming for someone who suffered injustice that, ‘it is not right and I’m sorry that this happened to you.’ It may seem insignificant, but it is not. And it is a reminder that when you come in contact with someone who is suffering, in either a big or small way, there is always something … you can do. You can listen.”\(^{74}\) The inclusion of Liberia’s refugees in the TRC proceedings allowed them to give voice to their lived human rights experiences. Moreover, this inclusion also enabled them to propose recommendations that address their plight as camp refugees. For example, some of the recommendations made to the Liberian government, advocated for education and employment opportunities for displaced persons.\(^{75}\)

The case of Kenya.

In the case of Kenya, the idea of a truth commission in Kenya was not new. According to Priscilla Hayner, the idea of creating a truth commission had been debated for a number of years following decades of repressive rule under former President Daniel Arap Moi.\(^{76}\) Under former President Mwai Kibaki, Moi’s successor, a task force was appointed to investigate the idea of

---


establishing a truth commission that would redress injustices that were a critical part of Kenya’s past, particularly around issues of state repression and land ownership and distribution. The task force recommended that a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) be established to redress the legacy of wrongs dating as far back as 1963, the year that Kenya gained independence from Britain.\(^77\)

Ultimately the TJRC was established as a response to the wave of violence that ensued in the country following the disputed December 2007 presidential elections. The violent clashes occurred along ethnic lines further contributing to the ethnic divisions that were characteristic of Kenya’s society. According to the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, since Kenya’s independence, elections in the country have been “dominated by ethnic affiliation, resulting in exclusion and discrimination of those affiliated with the opposition. In the lead up to the 2007 elections, the two coalitions vying for government – the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) [led by Raila Odinga] and the Party of National Unity (PNU) [led by Mwai Kibaki] – were strongly supported by ethnically-rooted constituencies.”\(^78\) The post-polling period saw the incumbent, Kibaki declared the winner by Kenya’s Electoral Commission. The electoral crisis emerged soon after this declaration as supporters of Odinga rose up in opposition stating that the elections were rigged. “The violence that followed the disputed … results deeply shocked Kenyans. It forced the tragic realisation that long-standing resentments and historical grievances had left communities so deeply divided that it threatened the stability of the nation and the ability

\(^{77}\) Ibid.  
to move forward together.”

It is reported that the violence claimed over 1,300 lives, and an estimated 350,000 Kenyans were displaced internally and externally. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, at the height of the violent clashes, an estimated 12,000 Kenyans fled to neighbouring Uganda. Early in 2008, peace was brokered between the two political parties by the former UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan and a panel of eminent African personalities. The parties agreed to a power sharing government and the establishment of the TJRC marking the beginning of the country’s efforts to redress its historical injustices.

The TJRC was established by an Act of Parliament – the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission Act, 2008. The Act outlined the objectives of the TJRC as follows:

To promote peace, justice, national unity, healing, and reconciliation among the people of Kenya by (a) establishing an accurate, complete and historical record of violations and abuses of human rights and economic rights inflicted on persons by the State, public institutions and holders of public office both serving and retired between 12th December, 1963 and 28th February 2008, … (b) establishing as complete a picture as soon as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights and economic rights which were committed during the period between the 12th December, 1963 and the 18th February 2008, … (c) investigating gross human rights violations and violations of international human rights law and abuses.

---


The TJRC was also mandated to make recommendations on the prosecution of those who perpetrated gross human rights violations and to determine a process of redress for victims of rights abuse as well as facilitating the granting of conditional amnesty to persons who fully disclose facts concerning the violations they orchestrated, and by providing a public space for victims and perpetrators to engage in truth-telling.

**Benefits of participation – Kenyan refugees in Uganda.**

Against this backdrop, the TJRC “collected statements from Kenyans from all walks of life and every region of the country – the largest collection undertaken by any truth commission to date.”84 Those interviewed included Kenyans who fled to Uganda and were living in the refugee camps. They were interviewed to ascertain how they were affected by the 2007 post-election violence. Members of the TJRC travelled to Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement in Uganda where over 1300 Kenyan refugees were seeking refuge. The TJRC Vice-Chairperson, Tecla Namachanga Wanjala, who was present during the statement taking noted that the “TJRC was [there] to ensure the creation of a complete record of the post 2007 election violence.”85 The testimonies shared by the refugees revealed that some of them were displaced “by repeated cycles of violence in 1992, 1997, 2002” and again in 2007. They narrated how they had lost

---


their land, had their property looted, and how they had lost everything as they escaped the violence to save their lives. They complained about the legacy of colonialism, corrupt politicians and tribalism, which they stated constituted some of the seeds that sparked the violence.  

The visit by the TJRC officials allowed the refugee community to discuss ways in which they could be involved in the transitional justice processes aimed at helping Kenyans to reconcile and heal from the country’s violent past. They had the opportunity to not only share their stories but to also offer suggestions. The stories of refugees were recorded to be shared nationally in Kenya. According to Bernadette Iyodu, “the Kenyan TJRC’s [efforts] to reflect the voices of those living in exile in the transitional process [demonstrated] a respect for the refugees’ rights as Kenyan citizens, and also [made] it easier for individuals to make informed decisions on whether to continue living in exile or return home in the near future.”

**Inclusion of refugees - implications for the Kenyan commission.**

By consulting with the refugee community, the TJRC demonstrated its readiness to have an inclusive process when responding to its mandate to promote “peace, justice, national unity, healing, and reconciliation among the people of Kenya.” It also demonstrated that the inclusion of refugees in transitional justice processes is feasible. Moreover, this inclusion presented those in exile with the hope that they could return to Kenya. A recent report issued by an independent

---

86 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
Ugandan news agency indicated that at least 278 households that fled to Uganda in 2007 had since returned to Kenya.\(^{90}\)

In May 2013, the TJRC released its final report which outlined its findings and recommendations. Captured in the report are the experiences of Kenyan refugees interviewed in Kenya in 2011. For example, the report acknowledges the harrowing experiences that some of the refugee women and children went through while fleeing for their lives – including the story of a mother who gave birth during her flight and helplessly watched her newborn fall into a river right after her delivery. Fortunately the child was rescued and survived the fall.\(^{91}\) These documented experiences reiterated the importance of including the voices of survivors so that their post-violence needs could also be addressed as steps are taken to secure sustainable peace and justice.

**Lessons from the Liberian and Kenyan experiences.**

An analysis of these truth commissions reveals both successes and setbacks of integrating refugee populations in transitional justice processes. The successes demonstrate that truth commissions can afford refugee participants the opportunity to share their human rights stories and views on their countries’ transitional processes. The steps that the Liberian and Kenyan commissions took allowed for a more inclusive civic engagement process in the redress of past human rights wrongs. Furthermore, both of these commissions underscore how the role of camp refugee communities in the work of truth commissions provide the opportunity to document,

---


acknowledge and understand their lived human rights experiences. They illustrate different ways in which the communities can be interviewed whether it is by commission staff or volunteers. The broad consultation with survivor groups further enhances the legitimacy of the work of the truth commissions empowering them to provide a more comprehensive picture of their countries human rights past. As Huma Haider stresses, this inclusion allows for “diversity of perspectives; more comprehensive truth gathering; greater international awareness.”

Further, the documentation of refugee lived experiences creates opportunities for understanding their basic human needs such as, their need for psychological healing and the types of mental health programs that would need to be developed to respond to their health concerns.

Given that each post-peace accord situation is unique, future truth commissions in the sub-Saharan African region will need to assess and determine an ideal approach for including their refugee communities in the TRC process.

The setbacks reveal logistical and financial challenges of including refugee populations in activities of truth commissions. However despite the challenges, the incorporation of refugee communities appears to help raise awareness about the human rights experiences of refugees and the value of refugee engagement in transitional processes. This overview of Africa’s truth commissions and their responses to past human rights atrocities, sets the stage for the subsequent section which outlines the human rights reality of refugees globally and more specifically within the African context.

---

93 Ibid.
The Human Rights Reality of Refugees

Violence and the Human Rights Reality of Refugees

*Human rights are ... linked to all parts of the refugee experience.*

Globally, there are currently over 20 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) with a large number situated in the African region. Although natural disasters also play a role in some of the displacements, in most cases refugees were forced from their homes by armed conflict and other forms of persecution. This type of forceful displacement highlights human rights violations as a major cause for refugee movements and attests to the fact that the root causes of refugee displacement are inextricably linked to conflict, persecution and the denial of human rights.

The very existence of refugees and other forcibly displaced people is therefore a “barometer of a society’s incapacity to resolve its differences by peaceful, rather than violent means.” This is clearly evidenced in Africa’s refugee flows. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2012 Regional Operations Profile, armed conflict

---

99 “The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency is mandated to lead
and persecution in 2011 forced large numbers of people to flee their homes in sub-Saharan Africa with conflicts persisting in Somalia, some parts of DR Congo, inter-tribal fighting in Darfur, and tensions along the border of Sudan and South Sudan. This human rights reality of refugees is concerning. As Vamik Volkan observes, “anyone who visits one of the many refugee camps in the world today and truly listens to the stories of refugees and asylum seekers cannot deny the existence of aggression within human nature.” Human rights violations lie at the root of forced displacement.

Global Refugee Framework

The international community adopted the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Convention) to respond to the plight of millions of refugees displaced during World War II. This Convention serves as the principal legal document guiding the treatment and protection of refugees and their human rights. Together with the 1967 Protocol, which amended the 1951 Convention, these legal instruments document the rights of refugees and the obligations and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country.”


of signatory States. Among other aspects, the Convention outlines standards for the treatment of refugees and their rights entitlement.¹⁰³

As a cornerstone of refugee rights, the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as:

A person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership or particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.¹⁰⁴

Both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol provided a foundation upon which regional legal instruments were developed. These include Africa’s 1969 OAU Refugee Convention.

**African Refugee Framework**

While embracing the 1951 Convention in its response to refugees experiences in Africa, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now replaced by the African Union (AU), adopted the *1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* (1969 OAU Convention), which specifically addresses refugee matters. Complementing the 1951 Convention, the 1969 Convention expanded the 1951 refugee definition. It states that a refugee also includes anyone who:

owing to external aggression occupation, foreign domination, or events seriously disturbing public order in either part of the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his (or her) place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality.¹⁰⁵

---


Despite these existing legal frameworks at both the global and regional levels, the human rights stories of refugees attest to their violent experiences of torture, ethnic cleansing, political oppression, gender violence, and religious persecution. As Gil Loescher observes, the “global refugee problem is not a humanitarian problem requiring charity, but a political problem requiring political solutions.”

**Southern African Refugee Movements, Botswana and Dukwi Refugee Camp**

Map 2: Map of Southern Africa

---


Evolution of Refugee Movements in Southern Africa and Botswana

According to Bonaventure Rutinwa, forced migration in the Southern Africa sub-region can be traced throughout the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. During the colonial stage, displacement was triggered by “colonial conquest wars, and in some cases, extreme exploitation.” In the 1960s, wars of liberation contributed to further displacements in countries like DR Congo (formerly Zaire), Mozambique, South Africa, Angola and Zimbabwe.

Post-independence civil wars in countries like Mozambique and Angola caused further displacement. More recent refugee flows have resulted subsequent to the political instability in Zimbabwe and violent conflict in parts of DR Congo. According to recent United Nations data for 2012, by the end of 2010 there were an estimated 340,000 displaced persons in the Southern African region, which included 146,000 refugees and 193,000 asylum seekers. The ongoing conflict-induced population movements from the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa continue to add to the refugee composition in Southern Africa.

111 Ibid.
A Country of Refuge - Botswana and Dukwi Refugee Camp

The notion of Botswana as a place of refuge is central to its identity

Map 3: Map of the Republic of Botswana

Neil Parsons suggests that in the Southern African region, Botswana has provided refuge to refugees from as far back as the “Southern African wars of the 1820-50s.” This role has continued to date. As Parsons observes, Botswana’s refugee haven status was recognised by Pope John Paul II who while visiting the country in 1988 described it “as a distinctive island of peace in a regional sea of turmoil.” The country’s only refugee camp, the Dukwi Refugee

---

114 Ibid, 29.
Camp, was once described as “capturing the history of Southern Africa in a nutshell.” Situated in the eastern part of the country, since its establishment in 1978, Dukwi Refugee Camp has provided refuge to refugees from the Southern African region and other parts of continent. “At its peak, the camp hosted more than 45,000 people, mostly fleeing oppression and racism in Zimbabwe [former Rhodesia] and apartheid in South Africa.” During this period it also provided refuge to refugees from Angola, and Namibia.

Today the camp is home to over 3,000 refugees from 13 nationalities, comprised of persons from Algeria, Angola, Burundi, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Their human rights stories underscore various forms of abuses faced in their countries of origin.

**Demographic Profile of the Refugee Camp Population in Botswana**

Tables 3 and 4 below provide a general overview of the demographic composition of the current refugee and asylum seekers population in the Dukwi Refugee Camp. The content in both tables was obtained in-person from the UNHCR Duwki field office. It is based on a report prepared by UNHCR officers, Onkemtse Leburu and Tadesse Habte. Tables 3 summarises the nationalities represented in the camp and the gender composition of the refugees. Table 4 provides profiles for the dominant national groups in the camp indicating places of origin, ethnicity, and their reasons for displacement, as well as socio-economic characteristics that

---


117 Ibid.

provide a background to their socio-economic status prior to their flight. As noted in these latter tables, human rights violations vary from the context of civil war, to political persecution and ethnic persecution prompting forced displacement. These violations clearly indicate that “refugees are human rights violations made visible.”

Table 3: Dukwi Refugee Camp Population of Concern by Nationality and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algerian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angolan</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundian</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congolese</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrean</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenyan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibian</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwandese</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudanese</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugandan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwean</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>1192</td>
<td>3105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Dukwi Refugee Camp Summary of Demographic Profile by Nationality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATIONALITY</th>
<th>DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND REASONS FOR DISPLACEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANGOLAN</td>
<td>Main areas of origin: Vast majority from Cubango, some from Huambo and Benguela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnic groups: Mbukushu and Mbunda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for displacement: Civil war, foreign occupation and persecution for political opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BURUNDIAN</td>
<td>Main areas of origin: Bujumbura, Buri, Gitega and Makamba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethnic groups: Hutu and Tutsi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reasons for displacement: Persecution based on political opinion and ethnicity. Many Burundians fled to Tanzania and DRC in 1993, they later repatriated (voluntary or coerced) to Burundi where they found political instability / ethnic clashes which resulted in their second flight. Some were recognised as refugees in South Africa and had a second flight due to xenophobic incidents in 2008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONGOLESE</th>
<th>Main areas of origin</th>
<th>South Kivu, North Kivu, Kinshasa, and Katanga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups</td>
<td>Bembe, Kasai, Bafulero and Banyamulenge, Banyarwanda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for displacement</td>
<td>Civil war, political unrest in country of origin, persecution based on ethnic background. Some families were recognised as refugees in South Africa and had a second flight as a result of xenophobic incidents in 2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAMIBIAN</th>
<th>Main areas of origin</th>
<th>Caprivi region (Katima Mulilo, Linyati)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups</td>
<td>Mufwe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for displacement</td>
<td>Persecution based on political affiliation and opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RWANDESE</th>
<th>Main areas of origin</th>
<th>Kigali, Butuare, Byuma and Cyangugu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups</td>
<td>Hutu and Tutsi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for displacement</td>
<td>Persecution based on ethnicity. During the genocide many individuals fled the country to neighbouring countries (Burundi, DR Congo, Tanzania) and sought refuge there – they later repatriated to Rwanda (voluntary or coerced) only to find an intolerable environment due to ethnic violence, abuse from government military forces, loss of property without legal redress, resulting in a second flight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOMALI</th>
<th>Main areas of origin</th>
<th>Mogadishu and Kismayo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups</td>
<td>Madiban, Darod, Ashraf, Ogaden, Rahan-weyn, Abgal, and Bantu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for displacement</td>
<td>Civil war, political unrest, persecution based on ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZIMBABWEAN</th>
<th>Main areas of origin</th>
<th>Plumtree, Bulawayo, Gwanda, Matopo, Kezi, Lupani, and Harare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic groups</td>
<td>Ndebele, Shona and Kalanga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Displacement</td>
<td>Persecution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As both tables demonstrate Botswana is host to refugees from different sub-Saharan African countries. Currently the dominant populations are from Zimbabwe, Namibia (Caprivi region) and Somalia. In the face of persecution, these individuals travelled from as far away as Somalia in search of refuge and protection. As illustrated by both tables, the women, men and children in the camp fled persecution varying from internal civil war, political unrest to ethnic violence.

Chapters 5 and 6 will delve more into the stories of persecution and illustrate how normal lives were abruptly disrupted by human rights violations. Their testimonies reveal that prior to their flight, camp members were students, farmers, dressmakers, or professionals in others fields. Today as a result of persecution, their lives are different. As Amahoro from DR Congo remarked during the face-to-face interviews, “I live like a beggar and I have hands, I want to be working
for myself, I have qualifications … why am I not working.”\textsuperscript{120} The story of the Dukwi community is one of the realities of struggle and survival, and the rebuilding of lives through resiliency and courage.

\textbf{Conclusion}

\textit{Human rights has become the dominant moral vocabulary in foreign affairs}\textsuperscript{121}

A close look at the prevailing foci of violations addressed by truth commissions overviewed by this chapter mirrors the above assertion made by Michael Ignatieff. Human rights are a dominant theme in the work of these truth-seeking bodies. The commissions provide platforms for human rights discourse as they allow survivors to testify about their experiences. They show that human rights stories “provide [the] necessary evidence and information about violations [and] they put a human face to suffering.”\textsuperscript{122} As Jessica Senehi also states, stories are part of how communities pass on knowledge.\textsuperscript{123}

The human rights lens and storytelling approach used by the commissions to redress past injustices, illustrates that a connection is evident between the human rights narratives of refugees and truth commissions. The threads of this connection are woven into the human rights stories and the rights claims of refugees to human dignity, peace “life, liberty and security of person.”\textsuperscript{124} The narratives therefore raise the important point that refugees’ stories warrant a closer

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{120} Amahoro, research participant from DR Congo.  
\end{flushright}
examination that explores ways in which they can have a place in truth-seeking and peacebuilding initiatives of post-violence societies. Refugees represent human faces and voices of survivors who have the “right to know about the circumstances of serious violations of their human rights and about who was responsible.” The subsequent literature review chapter sets the stage for this exploration.

---

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Introduction

For decades the landscape of a number of post-independent sub-Saharan African countries were characterised by armed conflict, forced displacement and other human rights atrocities. For example Nandini Patel observes;

Conflict and Africa have for a time been regarded as practically synonymous. Ever since the emergence of independent African states, civil and factional wars have rocked the continent … The causes for these conflicts are related to regime formations, economic crises and tribal or ethnic factors. Most also have their roots in the colonial past.\(^\text{126}\)

In response to these violent challenges post-violence sub-Saharan countries have adopted transitional justice and peacebuilding processes to guide their roadmap to peace. To name a few, examples of countries that have embraced these approaches include Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda. Today, these processes are key features in the sub-Saharan African landscape. Given their central relevance to this study, these processes feature prominently in this literature review chapter. They are also woven throughout subsequent chapters.

In this regard, this study is informed by four theoretical considerations, namely, transitional justice, truth commissions, storytelling, and post-violence peacebuilding. These bodies of theory provide a solid platform for an in-depth inquiry of the main goal that preoccupies this study. This goal concerns the link between refugees’ human rights stories about the persecutions they faced in their home countries and their lived experiences in a refugee camp to truth commissions and peacebuilding activities. Therefore, this literature review explores the concept, purpose and approaches of transitional justice. Next, it examines the theory of truth commissions. In particular it looks at how truth commissions aim to promote reconciliation and

---

facilitate forgiveness and healing. This examination helps to shed light on the role that truth commissions play in redressing human rights violations and accommodating survivors’ voices. Next constructive storytelling is discussed in the broader framework of human rights stories and how it connects to peacebuilding and truth commissions. Finally, the concept of peacebuilding is addressed as the chapter outlines the origins of peacebuilding and its objectives.

**Transitional Justice**

The following section defines transitional justice and its assortment of non-judicial and judicial approaches, provides an overview of the origin of the transitional justice practice and examples of where it has been applied. It also outlines the debates surrounding the field as well as the arguments made in favour of transitional justice.

**Defining Transitional Justice**

According to Freeman, the term transitional justice has only recently been coined. It is a process that comprises of judicial (e.g. tribunals) and non-judicial (e.g. truth commissions) measures that address past human rights violations. Among others, the violations include disappearances, war crimes, torture, extrajudicial executions, crimes against humanity, and the enslavement of forced labour.\(^\text{127}\) These violations may have been carried out by entities such as rebel groups, state military, corporations, and private persons.\(^\text{128}\) Additionally, Roht-Arriaza


describes transitional justice as an approach that addresses legacies of past human rights wrongs.\textsuperscript{129}

Ismael Muvingi offers a broader definition that embraces institutional reform, reparations and truth seeking.\textsuperscript{130} Looking at the social dimension of transitional justice, Hugo Van Der Merwe suggests that many analysts and advocates see transitional justice as social responses to severe repression, violence, and systematic abuses.\textsuperscript{131} He notes that ultimately transitional societies aim to establish democratic forms of governance as steps are taken towards post-violence reconstruction and new political systems that reflect a shared commitment.\textsuperscript{132}

\textbf{Relationship between Transitional Justice and Human Rights}

The roots of transitional justice are underpinned in the contemporary idea of human rights. Formulated and given content during World War II and its aftermath, this idea of human rights is governed by international instruments such as the United Nations Charter (1945), the International Bill of Human Rights and other Human Rights Treaties that call for universal dignity and justice for all peoples. The Bill of Rights consists of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976). These instruments richly outline the shared freedoms declared for humanity such as freedom from fear and want where all peoples can freely enjoy their inalienable rights. In particular, the UDHR

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
spells out individual rights, which should be observed, respected and promoted. The said legally binding Covenants contain specific human rights that deal with political, civil, socio-economic and cultural rights.

For example, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protects rights that include among others the inherent right to life, and the right to protection from inhumane treatment. The Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights protects rights that pertain to the overall welfare of persons. They address, among other rights, the right to an adequate standard of living, education, equal pay without discrimination, and the right to social security. These international instruments are complimentary and constitute the foundation and pillars of the international human rights system. In relation to transitional justice, these instruments are particularly important in the work of truth commissions, which are set up to investigate and redress human rights abuses orchestrated during a specific period of a violent conflict or oppressive regime.

Against this backdrop that traces the trajectory of the human rights roots of transitional justice, it is important to note that although the “concept of human rights has become one of the most potent in contemporary politics,” this was not always the case. For example, at the time the UDHR was adopted some of the countries that drafted and facilitated its approval were still colonial authorities. Their colonies did not have the liberty to enjoy the universal freedoms and rights stipulated in UDHR. During this period a majority of African countries were still under

---

colonial rule and it was only in 1957 that Ghana became the first black African country to gain its independence from British colonial rule. According to Peter Kulchyski, “although … rights emerged from intense, popular struggles, in various places and phases of history they also offered moral justification for elite-inspired colonial [political agendas].”  

The universality of human rights continued to evade non-western countries as their struggle for decolonisation and the right to self-determination was hijacked by geopolitical issues such as the Cold War which was fought between the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Cold War dynamics made human rights and liberation movements in sub-Saharan African countries like Angola and Mozambique the pawns of political and ideological struggles. In this regard, Jack Donnelly asserts that, “the foreign policies of both superpowers regularly and flagrantly disregarded human rights. The United States was willing to accept the most vicious human rights practices in ‘friendly’ anti-communist regimes … The Soviet Union likewise was ready to use force when necessary to sustain ‘friendly’ totalitarian regimes in its sphere of influence.”

There were newer developments in the post-colonial and post-Cold war eras. These eras ushered in many global human rights improvements as newly independent countries became members of the United Nations, established civil and political rights, and embraced the concept of human rights as part of their governance and legal frameworks. For example, the African region guided by the Organisation of African Unity, drafted and adopted regional human rights frameworks that affirmed the UDHR. Today as the trajectory of human rights advances through

---

139 Ibid.  
processes such as transitional justice, the undertones of the history of human rights politics are still apparent as evidenced by global concerns such as the role of multi-national corporations in the human rights field, the proliferation of small arms and protracted armed conflicts in the mineral-rich Eastern DR Congo and Somalia. The human rights challenges are also evident in situations whereby the international community has failed or is failing to prevent human rights catastrophes like the Rwandan genocide and Syria’s ongoing armed conflict that emerged in 2011. However, despite these complexities and challenges fuelled by geopolitics and economic influences; rights-focussed mechanisms like transitional justice present opportunities for strengthening the global human rights system to ensure that human rights are truly universally enjoyed. In post-violence situations, transitional justice processes are equipping post-peace accord societies with mechanisms to promote human rights domestically throughout these societies’ social strata.

The Origin, Evolution and Application of Transitional Justice

Although the coining of transitional justice is relatively new, its practise is not. It dates back to the 411 and 404-403 BC democracy restoration processes in Athens. For example, according to Jon Elster, in 411 and 404-403 BC the defeat of the oligarchs in Athens resulted in the restoration of democracy and “retributive measures against the oligarchs.”\textsuperscript{141} In modern times the development of the field has been influenced by global events which include the Second World War, and other transitions from war to democracy experienced in Southern Europe in the 1970s, in Latin America in the 1990s, and in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe in the

1990s and beyond.\textsuperscript{142} Prior to the 1990s, examples of transitional justice methods included the post-Second World War Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals that prosecuted individuals responsible for war crimes, crimes against peace and crimes against humanity. The methods also included reparations made by Germany to victims of the Holocaust.

From the 1990s onwards, transitional societies started using truth commissions widely as they were seen as a forum that allowed human rights stories of survivors to be relayed and for crimes to be officially documented. For example, commissions such as those of South Africa and Peru were set up to allow for public hearings, enabling survivors to tell their own stories and “to speak to human agency and possibility”\textsuperscript{143} in the aftermath of human horror. As Mark Libin observes, in South Africa the witnessing of the past provided the “narrative impetus required to inaugurate the ‘new’ South Africa” that was “ready to transcend a violent and divisive past.”\textsuperscript{144}

On a different front, the approach taken at the Nuremberg trials (1945-1949) known as the first wave of modern-day transitional justice, evolved in the 1990s into the second wave known as international criminal tribunals. In 1993, in response to widespread human rights violations in the Balkan wars, the first criminal tribunal was established by the United Nations Security Council. It was known as the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

\textsuperscript{142} Mark Freeman, \textit{Truth Commissions and Procedural Fairness} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4-5.


\textsuperscript{144} Mark Libin, “Can the Subaltern be Heard? Response and Responsibility in South Africa’s Human Spirit,” \textit{Textual Practice} 17 (1), 2003, 119-140.
(ICTY). Its mission was to prosecute and bring to justice those responsible for mass killings, ethnic cleansing, rape of women and systematic detentions.\textsuperscript{145}

A year later, the \textit{International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda} (ICTR) was established to prosecute persons responsible for genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.\textsuperscript{146} Four years later, in 1998, the \textit{International Criminal Court} (ICC) was set up as a permanent institution with jurisdiction over the gravest crimes of international concern, which include war crimes, the crime of genocide, the crime of aggression and crimes against humanity. In its work, the ICC is complementary to national criminal jurisdictions.\textsuperscript{147} Most recently hybrid courts were established through an agreement between the United Nations and a couple of transitional national governments, mainly East Timor – \textit{Crime Panel of the District of Dili}; Sierra Leone – \textit{Court of Sierra Leone}; Kosovo – “\textit{Regulation 64}” Panels in the Courts of Kosovo and Cambodia - \textit{Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)}. These courts were tasked to prosecute those individuals who caused serious violations of international law. For example, in the current case of the ECCC, an investigation into the crimes committed


\textsuperscript{146} Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States, between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1994, \url{http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/itr.htm} (Accessed April 10, 2010).

by members of the Khmer Rouge regime is underway.\textsuperscript{148} In addition to this hybrid approach, national courts have become more active in trying their own cases and investigating crimes committed elsewhere. This has been made possible by laws that allow for universal jurisdiction over certain heinous international crimes. The most famous example of such a case involved the 1998 arrest of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in the United Kingdom. The arrest warrant was issued by the Spanish government.\textsuperscript{149} Together with leaders of his security forces of the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA), Pinochet stood trial for human rights atrocities committed during his rule.\textsuperscript{150} As Richard Wilson observes, this move demonstrated, “the increasing space for the operation of international criminal law and procedure in domestic courts in the post-Cold War era.”\textsuperscript{151}

Other national transitional initiatives include reparations through which governments provide services and financial compensation to survivors of human rights violations. Moreover, governments have also taken steps to apologise for past abuses. They have set up monuments, memorial spaces and days, and vetted security forces based on their human rights record.\textsuperscript{152}

Although there may be some similarities, each transitional operation is different from the other. Some transitions are quickly attained (e.g. Greece’s return to democratic rule in the 1970s), others are slow and constrained (e.g. Chile’s return to democratic rule in the 1990s). In


\textsuperscript{150} Richard Wilson, “Prosecuting Pinochet in Spain,” \url{http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/v6i3/pinochet.htm}, (Last accessed 18 August 2012)

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.

some cases the United Nations is engaged in the process (for e.g. it negotiated the end of Guatemala’s civil war), and in other situations there is an overwhelming foreign presence (for e.g. Afghanistan). However, in all of these cases as Freeman points out, “there is one feature that unites all (and that is) the legacy of widespread violence and repression. This is the feature that highlights the need for transitional justice mechanisms that redress gross human rights violations.”

Mechanisms of Transitional Justice

Freeman observes that in both theory and practice, transitional justice focuses on four mechanisms which include trials, fact-finding bodies, reparations, justice, and institutional reforms. The trials represent civil or criminal approaches that are either nationally or internationally established. Examples of trials include the Nuremberg Trials, the International Tribunals of Yugoslavia and Rwanda and the Special Court of Sierra Leone. The fact-finding bodies can be comprised of truth commissions or similar national or international investigative bodies that can be non-judicial or quasi-judicial in their work. These bodies investigate past abuses to determine the nature and extent of violations. Methods of inquiry include truth-telling processes. For some mandates may include the promotion of national reconciliation, and reparations initiatives, which may be compensatory, symbolic or rehabilitative. In sub-Saharan Africa, examples of truth commissions include those of South Africa (1995), DR Congo (2003) and Liberia (2006). The justice reforms look at legal and constitutional reforms, which may include reforming repressive public institutions such as the military and police, and oppressive

laws. The process of vetting include removing government officials who were responsible for abuse or corruption from office and ensuring that they are held accountable for their crimes.

Freeman also points out that in their implementation, these four mechanisms respond to international human rights law and the application of these mechanisms varies in each national situation. While truth commissions have widely been used, in each country they vary in different ways. For example, they differ in structure, mandate and composition. In some situations there are countries which have opted for a mixed composition of transitional justice methods. This was the case with the East Timorese mix of a Commission for Truth Reception and Reconciliation and, the Special Panel for Serious Crimes. In places like the Czech Republic and other parts of Eastern and Central Europe vetting or “cleansing of political leaders and security forces” was a primary element of the transitional justice processes. Overall national justice interventions are set to meet the following goals:

- Restore dignity to victims and promote psychological healing, end violence and human rights abuses and prevent them in the future;
- Create a “collective memory” or common history for a new future not determined by the past;
- Forge the basis for a democratic political order that respects and protects human rights;
- Identify architects of the past violence;
- Legitimise and promote the stability of the new regime;
- Promote reconciliation across social divisions;
- Educate the population about the past; and
- Recommend ways to deter future violations and atrocities.

---

Dilemma for Transitional Justice – The Debate between Peace and Justice

There are a series of questions that face transitional societies. Among others they include decisions about how wide to cast the net of responsibility for orchestrated abuses. Intervention also involves redressing controversial histories marred with violence and repression. In addition, questions about building public confidence in the transitional process and availing of just and fair compensation for survivors of rights abuse need to be also addressed. Transitional societies also have to ask themselves whether an examination of human rights violations will exacerbate societal divisions.156

The variety of questions highlights concerns that some scholars (e.g. Suren Pillay and Chandra Lekha Sriram)157 refer to as the dilemma between peace and justice in transitional situations. The underlying question is “whether there can be justice without criminal sanctions and accordingly peace without this form of justice?”158 My study embraces the position of scholars and practitioners who suggest that there is no conflict between peace and justice in transitional contexts. These people suggest that the pursuit of peace and justice is a mutually supportive process. For example, Rama Mani argues that the key question is to look at how peace and justice are defined in the transitional context. “If peace is taken to mean only a cessation of hostilities and if justice is taken to mean only formal measures such as prosecution of all responsible, then it is likely that the two will clash ... [However], if we are intent on

pursuing lasting peace, deeper and broader justice, it becomes clear that the two are inseparable, interdependent and cannot be addressed in isolation.”159

Mani’s view underscores that there is no dilemma between justice and peace. Similarly, the United Nations Report on the Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in conflict and Post-Conflict Societies suggests that, “justice, peace and democracy are not mutually exclusive objectives, but rather mutually reinforcing imperatives”160 for transitional settings. The report further notes that experiences on the ground illustrate that tribunals and truth commissions complement each other. To this end, the Sierra Leonean transitional justice process illustrates this complementarity as it had both a truth commission - (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and a special court – (Special Court for Sierra Leone). These two bodies functioned simultaneously. Another example is East Timor, which also had its own complementary system comprised of a Commission for Truth, Reception and Reconciliation and Special Panels for Serious Crimes.161

Biggar also reinforces the argument of the interdependent relationship between justice and peace. Using South Africa as an example he notes that both peace and justice were realised through the public hearings of the truth commission. He notes that during the human rights violations hearings, victims were able for the first time to publicly tell their stories and have them be fully acknowledged, granting them public justice by the public exposure of perpetrators’

crimes. They are both necessary processes for transitional situations and they reinforce each other. There is no single method that can help a country transition from a violent past towards a stable and peaceful present and future. It cannot just be peace nor can it just be justice at work. A combination of approaches is required and in this regard, peace and justice processes should be seen to be working hand in hand and not in conflict with each other. In the case of my study, both peace and justice are necessary ingredients for the redress of human rights wrongs that my study participants faced. Their narratives demonstrate that refugees require sustainable peace in order to repatriate to their home countries. They also require relevant state stakeholders to apply post-violence justice in order to respond, for example, to their socioeconomic and gender injustice concerns.

The Case for Transitional Justice

In sum, as Richard Goldstone argues, there is no region in the world that is immune to widespread violence and human rights violations. In this regard, the universality of atrocious crimes against humanity warrants the need for transitional justice mechanisms. Goldstone believes that these systems can deal with perpetrators’ excuses and victims’ calls for justice.162 Nelson Mandela reiterates Goldstone’s observation because he also asserts that transitional justice as an approach can help guide the processes of legitimate governance as concerns of political repression, and issues of policy and law are dealt with in post-violence societies.163 Transitional justice processes can help advance the rule of law and respect for human rights, dignity and life. They are also resourceful in aiding peace and stability to prevail in post-conflict

situations as concerns of inequalities and abuse of power are readdressed. This is evident, for example, in the work of truth and reconciliation commissions, which are discussed in the subsequent section.

**Truth and Reconciliation Commissions**

The third wave of transitional justice known as the democratisation phase ushered in truth commissions that set out to redress human rights wrongs. This next segment of the study explores the concept and role of truth commissions, and it uses the terms truth commissions, TRCs, commissions interchangeably.

**Defining Truth Commissions**

From the mid-1970s a number of countries from Africa (for e.g. Uganda, Zimbabwe), Asia (for e.g. Sri Lanka, Nepal), Latin America (for e.g. Argentina, Chile) to Europe (for e.g. Kosovo, Yugoslavia) embarked on transitions from post-conflict situations or post-authoritarian rule towards democratic existence. According to Brahm, one of the greatest challenges that these states had to face was promoting peaceful coexistence after a time of inter-group conflict. In this regard, truth commissions have played a vital role in helping post-violence countries transition from a violent period towards a state of peace and democracy. Since the advent of South Africa’s national commission, scholars and practitioners are advocating for their use in addressing past human rights wrongs. As Freeman observes, it is now quite common for

---

countries emerging from conflict or repressive rule to consider establishing a truth commission.\textsuperscript{165}

Truth commissions are bodies that are “typically tasked to … discover, clarity … formally acknowledge past abuses … address the needs of victims … and counter impunity.”\textsuperscript{166} In essence they are bodies that focus on the past, investigate events that occurred over a certain timeframe, they are victim / survivor centered, they document and gather information on human rights experiences, they are temporary bodies which at the end of their mandate are required to produce a final report of their proceedings.\textsuperscript{167}

**Establishing the Authorities of Commissions**

As noted commissions are normally sanctioned, authorised and sponsored by the state. Their mandate may stem from the executive branch (for e.g. Chile), the legislative branch (for e.g. South Africa) and even from a monarch (for e.g. Morocco).\textsuperscript{168} In some instances the United Nations has also played a key role in the establishment of some Commissions namely, in El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, East Timor, and Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{169} For the most part, the selection of commissioners who execute the mandate of truth commissions is undertaken by these said bodies and in some cases as with the case of East Timor, the commissioner’s appointment was

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{168} Mark Freeman, *Truth Commissions and Procedural Fairness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27.
\textsuperscript{169} Report of the United Nations Secretary-General entitled “The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies” UN doc. S/2004/616 (2004): “Truth commissions are official, temporary, non-judicial fact-finding bodies that investigate a pattern of abuses of human rights or humanitarian law committed over a number of years. These bodies take a victim-centred approach and conclude their work with a final report of findings of fact and recommendations.”
conducted through a nomination and selection process. In Ghana the selection was based on the criteria and procedures outlined on the mandate.\textsuperscript{170}

**Purpose and Objectives of Truth Commissions**

A commission’s main purpose is to provide an accurate record about those responsible for past human rights abuses in the concerned country. These abuses include assassinations and disappearances, extra-judicial killings, massacres and other grievous abuses specified in a commission’s mandate. This investigative process allows for the truth of a nation’s past to be unveiled and for a common historical truth to be established. Other commissions have also been tasked with making recommendations for reparations for victims as was the case with the South African commission. Summing up their basic work Hayner notes that commissions should have some or all of the following: “to discover, clarify, and formally acknowledge past abuses; to respond to specific needs of victims; to contribute to justice and accountability; to outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; and to promote reconciliation and reduce the conflict of the past.”\textsuperscript{171}

The objectives of truth commissions vary as per their mandates and in this regard some may focus on national reconciliation (for e.g. South Africa and Chile); promote reconciliation between victims and perpetrators (for e.g. South Africa and East Timor); consolidate peace and democracy (for e.g. the Democratic Republic of the Congo); highlight criminal justice (for e.g. Argentina)\textsuperscript{172} and also other goals such as “ending impunity to putting in place protection to

\textsuperscript{172} Mark Freeman, *Truth Commissions and Procedural Fairness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33.
prevent repetition of abuses in the future.”¹⁷³ And in the context of protracted ethnic conflicts they’ve also aimed at conflict prevention in order to “prevent a repetition of the abuses by seeking a broad analysis of the social, historical and psychological causes of the conflict (Sierra Leone, Liberia).”¹⁷⁴

**Places Where Truth Commissions Have Been Used**

There are at least twenty-one official truth commissions established globally. One of the most recent commissions established globally was the Brazilian truth commission in 2011. It has been mandated to unearth facts about violence orchestrated by the military regime between 1964 and 1995. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the most recent commission is Ivory Coast’s commission, which was also established in 2011 to help the country heal from the post-electoral violence of 2010 that resulted in the deaths of an estimated 3000 people. A quick scan of commissions around the world illustrates that most of the commissions were established in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. According to Freeman, since 2000, on average three commissions are being established each year.¹⁷⁵ The names of truth commissions vary and are often guided by their mandates. For example in sub-Saharan Africa, the Ghanaian commission was known as the National Reconciliation Commission, the Ugandan was called the Commission of Inquiry into Violations of Human Rights, and Kenya’s is labelled the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission.

Truth Commissions as Instruments that Promote Reconciliation, Forgiveness and Healing

This next segment highlights prominent features associated with the work of truth commissions. The study is specifically concerned with the role that commissions do to promote national reconciliation, forgiveness and healing. Although some mention of other commissions is considered, for the most part the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) serves as the primary reference point in the discussions below. This is because, to date, in Sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world, the SATRC is used as a model to guide post-violence societies to redress past human rights wrongs, promote national unity and reconciliation, and facilitate dialogue on forgiveness and healing. It is also one of the truth and reconciliation commissions that has been widely researched and documented.

Truth commissions and reconciliation. William Long and Peter Brecke suggest that reconciliation refers to “mutually conciliatory accommodation between former antagonists.”176 As a tool of truth commissions, the reconciliatory approach provides post-violence societies with the opportunity to break the cycle of revenge and hatred between former enemies.177 Reconciliatory efforts played a fundamental role in the SATRC. The 1995 Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, which established the commission and, tasked it to promote national unity and reconciliation. The commission was seen as a reconciliatory bridge that would enable South Africans to take the “long road towards making individual, communal

---

and national reconciliation a living reality in (the country).”\textsuperscript{178} It was a bridge that sought to leave behind the injustice of the past and present a path towards a future of democracy, peace and coexistence for all South Africans. As stated in the commission’s report, reconciliation was both a goal and a process.

The steps towards reconciliation included coming to terms with the past by learning the painful truth of what happened to loved ones, promoting forgiveness and healing between victims and perpetrators, and laying the foundation of national reconciliation. This reconciliatory approach allowed a divided South African society to nurture a public forum for accepting moral and political responsibility for its violent past. It allowed the nation to promote a culture of human rights, democracy and awareness for respect for a common humanity, and a commitment to transform the causes of conflict such as unjust inequalities.\textsuperscript{179} It created a new space for “a new national narrative of acknowledgement, accountability and civic values.”\textsuperscript{180}

The South African situation demonstrated that commissions can aid the lengthy process of reconciling deeply divided societies and transforming relationships among former antagonists.\textsuperscript{181} The benefits of reconciling a nation are outlined by Jeong who asserts that reconciliation and social rehabilitation are necessary components for lasting peace for societies emerging out of violence. Jeong also suggests that reconciliation based on compassion, forgiveness and restitution is a critical step for all sides of the conflict to humanise each other, to

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid, 435.
\textsuperscript{180} Martha Minow, Between Vengeance and Forgiveness – Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).
allow for improved relations and mutual accommodation. John Paul Lederach also presents a similar message, seeing reconciliation as a journey that allows for social interaction that can bring about a change in relationships. He views it as a journey that can transform violent social environments.

According to Chapman, reconciliation is regarded as a process that reunites societies or brings together a divided people. As a concept its origins are traced to Christian theology. It is only with the recent development of transitional justice, particularly with truth commissions, that reconciliation has also gained growing attention in political discourse. Reconciliation is inclusive and allows for peace making and the re-establishment of relationships after estrangement. Desmond Tutu views reconciliation as a process that cannot be imposed but rather it must be an owned solution that involves coming to terms with a painful past, understanding motivations of perpetrators of injustice, and bringing the estranged together to journey jointly in search of a shared vision for justice, truth and peace. It is as he puts it, a “long-term process” that has at its centre the quest for truth about past horrors, the understanding and commitment to ensure that the past is not repeated. The Handbook of the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), entitled Reconciliation after Violent Conflict, suggests that as a process, reconciliation involves healing, justice, forgiveness, and truth. In this process former enemies learn to coexist, cooperate and redesign their relationship for a better future. This

---

185 Ibid.
coming together of truth and justice is supported by John Paul Lederach (2005, 2006), who also
adds that love and peace are part of the reconciliatory machinery.

Lederach asserts that in the journey toward reconciliation the concepts of love, peace,
justice and truth come together to shape reconciliation. In the journey these four concepts are
thrashed out to bring about an intrinsic understanding of reconciliation and its realisation.186
and Peace [kiss].”187 In this regard he believes that the Psalm reinforces the notion that
reconciliation is a journey to be taken in order to reach the “locus or meeting place.”188 In
addition, Louis Kriesberg invokes similar reflections on the shaping of reconciliation, suggesting
that the dimensions of reconciliation should include the truth of shared understanding; justice
that is either focused on punishing wrongdoers or on establishing equitable social systems;
remorse and forgiveness; and lastly, individual and collective safety and security.189
Furthermore, in her observations of reconciliation processes, Wendy Lambourne notes that
reconciliation between individuals or groups is shaped by “an interaction of apology and
forgiveness and the willingness to embark on a new relationship based on acceptance and
trust.”190 In sum as the IDEA Handbook reveals, “in its forward-looking dimension,

187 Psalm 85:10 Quoted in The Journey Toward Reconciliation, 53, John Paul Lederach,
(Scottdale PA: Herald Press, 1999).
188 John Paul Lederach, The Journey Toward Reconciliation, (Scottdale PA: Herald Press, 1999)
189 Louis Kriesberg, quoted by Audrey Chapman, “Approaches to Studying Reconciliation,” in
Assessing the Impact of Transitional Justice – Challenges for Empirical Research, Hugo Van Der
Merwe, Victoria Baxter, Audrey Chapman, eds. 143-172 (Washington: United States Institute of
190 Wendy Lambourne, “Justice and Reconciliation – Post Conflict Peacebuilding in Cambodia
and Rwanda,” in Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence – Theory and Practice, ed. Mohammed
reconciliation means enabling victims and perpetrators to get on with life and, at the level of society, the establishment of a civilised political dialogue and an adequate sharing of power.”\(^\text{191}\)

For the purposes of this study, reconciliation is broadly used in line with the IDEA Handbook’s definition, which emphasises that “reconciliation needs to be a broad, inclusive process.”\(^\text{192}\) Accordingly, chapter 5 of this study fleshes out the notion and practice of reconciliation further as it explores its link to survivors of human rights violations. The IDEA Handbook offers the following illustration on the reconciliation process:

**The process of reconciliation is:**
- Finding a way to live that permits a vision of the future
- The (re)building of relationships
- Coming to terms with past acts and enemies
- A society-wide, long term process of deep change
- A process of acknowledging, remembering, and learning from the past
- Voluntary and cannot be imposed

**The process of reconciliation is not:**
- An excuse for impunity
- Only an individual process
- In opposition to an alternative to truth or justice
- A quick answer
- A religious concept
- Perfect peace
- An excuse to forget
- A matter of merely forgetting

**Truth commissions and national reconciliation.** Truth commissions are playing a pivotal role in contributing national reconciliation in countries emerging from a volatile and divisive past. For example Mani asserts, “the most concrete and vaunted asset of truth commissions is their purported contributions to national reconciliation.”\(^\text{193}\) Audrey Chapman also suggests that national reconciliation has two dimensions and the first dimension focuses on the transformation of relationships among divided societies. This dimension aims to build trust

---


between former antagonists to enable them to coexist and collaborate. The goal of the second dimension is to establish a new relationship between a government and its citizens by facilitating for the reform of political institutions that are based on the rule of law and respect for human rights.\textsuperscript{194} National reconciliation is a “process and goal.” Although there is no one-size-fits all promoting national reconciliation, as a process it should respond to post-violence challenges by engaging in the process of truth, justice, apologies and reparations, and the rebuilding of relationships. In the context of truth commissions, by raising questions and exploring forgiveness and restoration, the process of national reconciliation facilitates the transformation of once hostile relationships. As Chapman notes “several theorists and analysts link national reconciliation primarily to the elimination or management of destructive and protracted conflicts among groups.”\textsuperscript{195}

Asmal, Asmal and Roberts, further point out that the truth-telling component of reconciliation allows communities to face the difficult truths of the past “in order to harmonise incommensurable world views.”\textsuperscript{196} Through a commission’s reconciliatory work, a national platform is provided for a common understanding of the legacy of the past. It is upon this platform that the wrongs of the past must be acknowledged to empower the transition towards national peace and reconciliation. For example, for South Africans, the road towards national reconciliation included reconciling with the truth of apartheid; the “truth that human dignity was entirely absent from the [politics of apartheid]” combined with the truth that there was need for a

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid, 152. \\
\end{flushleft}
new social and political order. It was also through this truth-telling arm of transitional justice that restorative justice was employed to help repair harm and restore relationships.

Speaking of the institutional dimensions of national reconciliation, Ryan (2004) argues that if there is no sustained national commitment at both government and institutional levels durable national reconciliation will be elusive. There should also be a transparent equality of treatment to ensure that there is equality before the law and equal protection of rights. Ryan further mentions the need for social and economic integration to promote sustainable peace and the reform of the constitution and institutions.

A similar position is held by Chapman, who states that successful national reconciliation also depends on the establishment of effective national political institutions. Chapman further contends that weak or corrupt institutions cannot facilitate a legitimate reconciliatory process. She also suggests that sound national reconciliation requires effective and inclusive political institutions that promote the respect for human rights and create public policies that aim at reducing social tensions, inequalities and that generate shared national identities and goals.

In many ways reconciliation is a challenging process. It is as Biggar puts it “hard work.” But the future of post-violent societies and creating a vision of nation building rest on

197 Ibid, 50.
Truth commissions as a transitional justice arm make it possible for the hard work to begin. They create that pragmatic shift from human rights abuses and antagonistic relationships to a process of peacemaking that focusses on the rebuilding of relationships.  

Fostering national reconciliation is key to effective transitional processes that can usher in peace and justice and the upholding of human rights in transitional societies. It is key to resolving past human rights crimes and preventing future crimes or violent conflict. In its recognition of transitional justice’s relevance in national reconciliation, the United Nations declared 2009 as the *International Year of Reconciliation* recognising that reconciliation is a fundamental ingredient for nations that have been or are still terrorised by armed conflicts. It further recognised that the development of reconciliation processes would create conditions for durable and lasting peace.

**Truth commissions and forgiveness.** Like reconciliation, forgiveness can also be placed in the context of transitional justice. This is evident in the themes outlined in the definitions made by scholars and practitioners such as Andrew Rigby (2000), Mark Amstutz (2006), Desmond Tutu (1999), and Russell Daye (2004), who argue that forgiveness is a transitional and transformative process. Although previously dismissed as a religious concept, today in the political field the idea of forgiveness as a process of post-violence healing has gained momentum. Moreover, Andrew Rigby states that forgiveness is a creative act that leaves people

---

201 Ibid, 248.
in a position to move forward into the future together.\textsuperscript{204} Such a definition resonates with the national goals of transitional societies, which set to move from violent conflict or repressive regimes towards stable peace, democracy, the respect for human rights and the dignity of all citizens. Truth commissions play an active role in encouraging former antagonists and divided societies to come to terms with the legacy of abuse by letting go of the past, foregoing revenge, and embracing forgiveness.\textsuperscript{205}

Describing forgiveness as a “deep form of reconciliation” Russell Daye suggests that like reconciliation, forgiveness is also a process that may take a long time.\textsuperscript{206} In his reflections on forgiveness Archbishop Desmond Tutu notes that forgiveness is not about forgetting, or being sentimental, nor does it mean condoning atrocities. He suggests that forgiveness:

> Involves trying to understand the perpetrators and so have empathy, to try to stand in their shoes ... forgiving means abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his [or her] coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim ... [and] in the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on the course that will be different from the [past].\textsuperscript{207}

Thus for transitional societies, forgiveness as promoted through a culture of transitional justice presents the possibility for new beginnings for the rebuilding of a nation and its socio-economic and political structures.

**The act of forgiveness.** Addressing the process of forgiveness, Daye notes that in order to forgive one should understand why and who one is forgiving. In this case truth is central to the

\textsuperscript{204} Andrew Rigby, “Forgiving the Past: Paths Towards a Culture of Reconciliation, Centre for the Study of Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” (paper presented at the International Peace Research Association (IPRA) Conference, Tampere, Finland, August 5-9, 2000).

\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.


process of forgiveness. Daye uses an analogy of a drama to describe a process of forgiveness suggesting as follows:

The first act in a drama of forgiveness is the naming and articulation of the harm done. Somebody must point out that one’s unjust action or inaction has damaged another party or caused that second party to suffer. Usually it is the victimised party that makes this statement and begins the narrative of wrongs done ... The second essential act is an apology or confession in which the guilty party admits to the wrong done and acknowledges its moral indebtedness to the party it has harmed ... The third act is the offering of forgiveness by the victimised party.  

Amstutz concurs with Daye’s portrayal of the process of forgiveness. He suggests that forgiveness brings together victims and perpetrators to seek healing, restoration and reconciliation. In forgiveness perpetrators repent of the wrong caused and suffering inflicted in word or at times in deeds such as reparations. In this regard, apologies constitute a fundamental part of confession. For example, this process was played out in some of the SATRC amnesty hearings. It is through the apology that perpetrators claim responsibility for their actions. In turn, victims are provided with the opportunity to let go of resentment and embrace forgiveness and choose to see the perpetrators as human beings as opposed to monsters. As cited earlier, in forgiving you are “abandoning your right to pay back the perpetrator in his or her own coin, but it is a loss that liberates the victim.” For example, Lederach suggests that the liberation found in forgiveness is attained as issues of security and fear of abuse are addressed

and perpetrators are transformed by acknowledging their wrongful past.\textsuperscript{213} In essence, forgiveness is a complex and evolutionary process that presents opportunities for healing and reconciliation.

Moreover, forgiveness can help people to deal with deep emotions generated by violence such as pain, anger, fear and hatred. It enables a divided society to come to terms with suffering that transpired from human rights abuse. Without forgiveness people “remain locked in the value systems that produced the violence. Little transformative progress can be made.”\textsuperscript{214} Truth commissions’ procedures create opportunities for the constructive process of forgiveness to take place in a society emerging from conflict. This was the case for post-apartheid South Africa. The procedural conduct of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission created a climate for those victims who were willing to begin the process of forgiving their oppressors. Tutu offers this remark about some of the proceedings:

Gloriously there was another side that by rights should have been filled with bitterness because of the untold and unnecessary suffering they [survivors] had endured. Instead, they were able to demonstrate a remarkable generosity of spirit, and almost unprecedented magnanimity in their willingness to forgive those who had tormented them.\textsuperscript{215}

Tutu also shares stories of some of the victims that included Ms. Beth Savage, a victim of a grenade attack carried out by the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA). In her comments when asked how she felt about amnesty for the perpetrators she commented:

\textsuperscript{213} John Paul Lederach, \textit{The Journey Toward Reconciliation}, (Scottdale PA: Herald Press1999), 39.
\textsuperscript{215} Desmond Tutu, \textit{No Future Without Forgiveness}, (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 144.
It’s not important to me, and I’ve said this to many people, what I would really like is, I would like to meet that man that threw that grenade in an attitude of forgiveness and hope that he could forgive me too for whatever reason.\textsuperscript{216}

Forgiveness as already stated ends the cycle of violence or the offense because it allows for the reconnection of people’s common humanity.

\textbf{Shortcomings of truth commissions.} A number of shortcomings have been identified in the work of truth commissions. These include both technical and substantive limitations. First, looking at the technical aspects; commissions face time constraints. With timeframes usually lasting for six months to a year or two, commissions face the pressure of fulfilling demanding mandates within a short period of time. In the context of survivors’ human rights stories, limited attention and response are given to the number of stories documented as well as the time taken to understand and address the root causes of abuse. For example, due to time constraints, the El Salvadoran commission (July 1992-March 1993)\textsuperscript{217} was unable to complete its work in six months and had to be given a two-month extension. Questions remained about how exhaustive this commission was in addressing the country’s volatile past. Second, commissions have faced the challenge of working with limited financial resources and in some cases some have run out of funds before completing their mandates. This limitation emanates from the fact that most commissions are sponsored by individual national governments with little or no international support. Given this limitation, there are some reports of corruption and nepotism interfering with the work of some commissions. For example, this allegation was made against Sierra Leone’s commission as commissioners and staff were accused of petty corruption and mismanagement of

\textsuperscript{216}Ibid, 147.
funds. Other technical shortcomings include those made by scholars like Minow who point out that time and financial constraints may also result in commissions’ final reports not being as comprehensive as they could have been.

With respect to substantive matters, one of the challenges commissions may face is in promoting inter-personal reconciliation. Hayner points out for example that reconciliation is a complex process. This would also apply to the journey of forgiveness. In South Africa there were a number of victims that were not in favour of the amnesty call for survivors to forgive perpetrators who showed remorse and confessed their crime. For example Minow writes about the Mxenge and Biko families who challenged the existence of the TRC on the premise that the amnesty provisions were a violation of their individual rights to seek retributive justice for the deaths of their loved ones. Minow quotes one Mxenge family member who remarked that “Unless justice is done, it’s difficult for any person to think of forgiving.” She mentions that there were survivors who struggled with the ‘truth’ that some of the perpetrators told and as a result some victims did not want to forgive. She relates this story about one police officer who sought forgiveness at one of the public hearings: “A police captain admitted his role in the shooting of thirteen people, and asked the victims’ families for forgiveness. Instead he was met by ... clear resistance to the notion that amnesty and truth could heal wounds.” In essence as much as commissions may push for national healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, these bodies

222 Ibid.
will likely face some resistance from survivors of violence as all these processes are in many ways personal journeys.

Last, another challenge that commissions may face is lack of or limited implementation of their recommendations that are documented in the final reports. In places like Haiti, recommendations are yet to be fully implemented by the state. In addition, members of post-violent societies also have their own expectations for commissions. For example, Hauss notes that members of a transitional society may have expectations that through the work of commissions they will have noticeable improvements in their living conditions.²²³ For the most part these rising expectations may not be met.

**Benefits of truth and reconciliation commissions.** Despite the challenges outlined above, truth commissions contribute to reconciliation, healing and forgiveness processes. As illustrated by the South African example, SATRC pushed for transformational changes, which in turn encouraged the country to peacefully deal with the legacy of human rights abuse and address forgiveness. Desmond Tutu sums it up best when he shares that through SATRC’s initiative, South Africans started their “journey from a past marked by conflict, injustice, oppression, and exploitation to a new and democratic dispensation characterised by a culture of respect for human rights.”²²⁴

Moreover, through their processes of truth-seeking, the redress of gross human rights violations, and provision of reparations, commissions present the possibilities of breaking the cycles of violence, retaliation and hatred. As Tutu comments, for South Africans the TRC process meant that some of the unanswered questions were answered – ranging from “who

---

ordered the killings, why did this conflict take place, to what happened to Steve Biko or the Cradock Four” all these were for the first time publically addressed in South Africa.  

Therefore, commissions allow for this type of exposure to the ills of violence, the deceptions, myths, and causes of human rights atrocities. Commissions are therefore a necessary ingredient for peace and justice processes because they present necessary steps to help divided societies transition from a volatile past into a state of transitional peace. This transitional peace as Tutu suggests, allows “a society to [become] a new society ... more compassionate, more caring, more gentle, more given to sharing – because [it] has left the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice.”

Undoubtedly truth commissions have an instrumental role to play in redressing human rights violations. In light of the millions of human lives claimed, or affected by persecution, it is evident that robust systems are needed to protect innocent lives. Effective measures are needed to end hostilities, create safer communities that allow for healing from atrocities, and in restoring people’s human dignity. These commissions appear to be a vital bridge from the past to the present and future but they also face critical challenges in their work.

**Storytelling**

This next section of this chapter provides an overview of storytelling. In this regard, storytelling is defined and its relevance to the work of truth and reconciliation commissions and post-violence peacebuilding is explored.

---

226 Ibid, 22.
Defining Storytelling

Storytelling is a narrative process that involves the narration of experiences and meanings. Narratives can be told by anyone - young or old - and narratives are also found in mediums such as films and books. Chaitin notes that “taken together, a story or narrative combines either real or imagined events that connect in such a way to provide a chain of events that are recounted to others.” Senehi also suggests that “storytelling is language” that comprises of elements such as “norms of communicative behaviour,” vocabulary and narrative forms. In fact as she notes storytelling can be viewed as a “sub-type of narration.” In the telling of a story there is usually one teller and one or more listeners making the process interactive. At its core storytelling is basically having someone tell another about an event or experience that took place in the past. The oral method is a universal process by which people across cultures deal with knowledge, identity, socialisation, emotions, morality, memory and geography and is part of the “social construction of meaning.”

Humanity is rife with stories as our lives are all about story as our daily social realities are presented in the form of stories. Stories are the medium for interaction in private and public

---

spaces, and as Senehi says, “stories and social structure are interrelated.” Stories can be used to address various issues as influenced by social needs or the aims of the storyteller. In this case they can also serve as a place “where the structure and agency can be examined.” In this regard, the marginalised, oppressed and vulnerable communities can use stories as a mode of agency to reclaim their basic human rights and basic needs. This is one of the empowering factors of storytelling because it empowers an individual’s agency of story to redress limiting and repressive structures. Additionally, states and other groups such as multi-national corporations also act as storytellers by using stories to communicate political ideologies, to rally support, to inspire and mobilise trust in political leadership. As Stephen Denning shares, “if used skillfully, [storytelling] can be the engine for powerful leadership communications.”

Reflecting further on the definition of storytelling, Senehi discusses constructive storytelling which she states focuses on positive peace (social justice).

For the purposes of this study storytelling will be used to refer to the “constructive telling” of story offered by as Senehi. She states that this process is “inclusive, [that] it fosters collaborative power and mutual recognition, creates opportunities for openness … and means to bring issues to consciousness and a means of resistance. [This type of] storytelling builds understanding and awareness, and fosters voice.” Also in this study the term storytelling is

---

232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.
235 Ibid, 14.
237 Ibid.
used interchangeably with truth-telling. In this respect storytelling is seen as a means of truth-telling as it is the case in the context of truth commissions and peacebuilding, where truth-telling is seen as a process that uncovers and tells the truth about the past.\textsuperscript{238} For example, as survivors of past human rights abuses tell their stories, they reveal the truth about the atrocities they faced.

Senehi (2002, 2009) demonstrates that the benefits of storytelling or truth-telling are many. For example, she underscores that storytelling is a method that is accessible given that anybody can tell a story. Senehi further notes that as an inclusive process, storytelling allows for a diversity of stories to be told from around the world. It advances mutual recognition, empowers people through the gift of voice and by de-silencing the silenced, it gives all the opportunity to share their experiences. Moreover, Senehi states that storytelling can also act as a tool for creating safe communal spaces for social engagement and community building as a community engages in the sharing of personal or communal stories. It is an inexpensive process as its focus is on human lives and lived experiences.\textsuperscript{239} The narrated stories ensure that knowledge is spread and they also serve as interconnectors that empower communication, and inform our cultural and group identities. They socialise people on “norms and worldviews” and provide teachings in a variety of areas through meanings woven in what is related.\textsuperscript{240}

Although this study focuses on the constructive nature of storytelling it is necessary to mention that storytelling can and has also been used destructively and resulting in conflicting relationships. For example, as Senehi has explained that while constructive storytelling focuses


\textsuperscript{240} Ibid.
on conflict transformation, community building and empowerment, destructive storytelling associates with “coercive power” and “exclusionary practices.” As a process, destructive storytelling fails to create post-violence environments of mutual recognition and tolerance.

Rather, destructive storytelling reinforces stereotypical narratives that dehumanise the other and deepen social cleavages. For example reflecting on stories he heard while growing up in South Africa, Wilhelm Verwoerd writes:

> Whenever we talk about storytelling what I remember personally is the way I grew up with stories about the Anglo Boer war in South Africa – when we only heard the stories about the women and the children in my community who died in the concentration camps. It was only much later that I heard the stories about black South Africans who also died in those concentration camps. That always stays with me. It stays with me as a real caution and almost – I don’t know if “fear” is the right word. It reminds me to remember the destructive power of stories, and their ability to blind and divide and traumatised people. We became blind – my community, my family – to what we were doing to black South Africans, because we were so focussed on the stories about the suffering with my own family and community. We haven’t spoken a lot about that, but I think there’s a real dark side to stories and the power of storytelling.241

Thus, as Verwoerd’s reflections demonstrate, storytelling can be used destructively. However as noted, this study focusses on its constructive use as a tool for giving voice to human rights lived experiences, peacebuilding tool in the work of truth commissions, and a mechanisms for facilitating community building and acts as a tool for social change.

Against this backdrop of the strengths of storytelling, the following sections explore the relationship between storytelling and truth commissions and peacebuilding. The section below looks at the relationship of storytelling and truth commissions primarily through the lens of the SATRC where storytelling played an instrumental role in the work of this truth body.

Storytelling and Truth Commissions

[South Africa’s] TRC was the ... longest running story of the decade. It produced some of the most dramatic human-interest stories imaginable ... The TRC process changed the whole nature of storytelling. By giving this open, front-of-the-lights platform to the people [not the leaders, not the preachers, not the politicians], the real people with their own stories, in their time, place and language – by giving them that opportunity ... changed the nature of storytelling and how it is reported.242

The [South African] commission has brought back the art of storytelling243

During the South African Reconciliation Commission, the coming together of storytelling and truth commissions was realised during the public hearings of the HRV Committee that was tasked to hear the stories of victims to establish whether gross human rights abuses had occurred. An approximated 22,000 stories from victims and witnesses were processed, of which 2,000 people appeared to give their testimony in various public spaces throughout the country.244 The significance of this process was evident in its outcomes of constructing a common memory of the past. It gave voice to those that had been marginalised by the majority, giving them the opportunity to restore their once denied civil and human dignity. In his reflections of this process, Alex Boraine, the former co-chair of the TRC, insists that the storytelling process was desperately needed. It came to serve as a ritual for cleansing the nation and stirring healing for those traumatised by a past of human rights atrocities.245

---

244 Priscilla Hayner, Unspakeable Truths – Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions (New York: Routledge, 2001),43.
As Boraine’s comments denote, storytelling allowed TRC participants to tell their stories and uncover the truth about human rights violations committed under the apartheid regime. The human rights stories narrated were of “ordinary life under apartheid that would ultimately redefine the nation’s past (and) its future.”246 This truth-telling process also provided a platform for resiliency stories that captured ways in which survivors demonstrated how they overcame past atrocities. Additionally, the South African stories highlighted the link that has often been associated with storytelling and reconciliation. This link was communicated by the commission’s slogan “Truth – The Road to Reconciliation,” which was used to connect truth-telling and the nation’s journey towards reconciliation.

In this situation, it was hoped that through truth-telling the South African nation would reconcile with its past and pave the way for peace and national unity. Truth-telling through storytelling was viewed by the framers of the SATRC as a path that would help repair antagonistic relationships, bring about healing, and transform a conflict-torn environment into one of peacebuilding. Today with the growing recognition of the role of truth-telling as a peacebuilding and reconciliatory tool, the concepts of ‘truth and reconciliation’ have increasingly become a norm in the titles of truth commissions in sub-Saharan Africa.247

**Storytelling and Peacebuilding**

Storytelling can also provide a vital space to engage a divided society to meet and share its stories, allowing for its narratives to act as bridge builders towards sustainable peace and to heal from a violent past. In complex social environments, constructive storytelling provides

---


opportunities for promoting conducive environments for peacebuilding activities that assist with national reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation.\textsuperscript{248} These spaces for recounting of personal stories about shared violence and social tensions can ensure that barriers can begin to be broken down. They can help to contribute towards the gradual transformation of adversarial relationships. Reiterating this viewpoint, Earl comments that “storytelling gives us the option of retelling [violent episodes] and giving [them] a positive ending [by] opening people’s minds to the possibility of resolution.”\textsuperscript{249} Storytelling provides that critical avenue of “constructive social change” that can facilitate the challenging task of “moving relationships from those defined by fear, mutual recrimination, and violence toward those characterised by love, mutual respect and proactive engagement.”\textsuperscript{250}

Storytelling provides that relational link for the recognition of common humanity through the engagement of meaningful interpersonal communication that fosters “mutuality, understanding, and accessibility.”\textsuperscript{251} As human beings we are sustained in both the public and private sphere by relationships – “we are born into relationships – parent, sibling, friend, partner, colleague, spiritual beings, for our survival, our physical and emotional nourishment, our intellectual and spiritual growth, our material achievements, our pleasure, relief of pain and our growing old.”\textsuperscript{252} Through storytelling the narrative cycles of violence, which inhibit healthy communal relationships for nation building, can be broken through an inclusive re-storying

\textsuperscript{248} Ho-Won Jeong, \textit{Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Societies – Strategy and Process} (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 1-2.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid), 56.
process for peacebuilding.\textsuperscript{253} Reflecting on the power of storytelling in post-violence societies Scheub observes that:

\begin{quote}
Story is the way we remember, the way we make judgements – and perhaps, because they are tough on the heart – the stories point the way to forgiveness and understanding. By means of story, we can experience the terrible and noble of what happened, we can put names to faces, meaning to places and events, gain a sense of the humanity of victims and the victimisers, and re-live the events of history in their fearsome detail.\textsuperscript{254}
\end{quote}

A literature review on peacebuilding follows suit. As this study demonstrates, this method of making peace is also vital to transitional societies and vulnerable groups such as refugee communities in their journeys towards recovery, rehabilitation, and development.

\textbf{Peacebuilding and Post-violence Societies}

\textit{Peacebuilding involves a full range of approaches, processes and stages needed for transformation toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships and governance modes and structures. Peacebuilding includes building legal and human rights institutions as well as fair and effective governance and dispute resolution processes and systems. To be effective, peacebuilding activities require careful and participatory planning, coordination among various efforts, and sustained commitments by both local and donor partners.}\textsuperscript{255}

The following aspects are covered in this section, a definition of peacebuilding is provided and the role of peacebuilding processes in post-violence societies is outlined.

\textbf{Defining Peacebuilding}

In 1992 in a report entitled \textit{An Agenda for Peace}, the former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the concept of peacebuilding. In this report,\textsuperscript{253,254,255}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
peacebuilding was added as part of other core UN-related peace activities, namely peacemaking, peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy. Boutros-Ghali believed that the four actions of peacemaking, peacekeeping, preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding would jointly position the international community to realise the UN Charter’s objective of “maintaining international peace and security, securing justice and human rights, promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”

His definition of peacebuilding was widely influenced by what he referred to as the “changing context” of the international landscape that was transitioning with “contradictory trends” of conflict, peace and democratisation and the emerging needs for conflict prevention and resolution. In this regard Boutros-Ghali defined peacebuilding as a process which incorporates a variety of activities that in a post-violence phase pushes for, among other things, consolidation of peace, the building of public confidence, the disarming of warring groups, repatriation of refugees, the reform of government structures and institutions, and advances in social and economic development. Boutros-Ghali noted:

Peacebuilding is an action that would support structures that would strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict … Peacebuilding is the construction of a new environment that should be viewed as the counterpart of preventive diplomacy … [to foster] sustained, cooperative work to deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems [that allows] for achieved peace to be placed on a durable foundation.

---

257 Ibid.
258 Ibid.
According to James Milner, since the UN’s definition, peacebuilding has largely played out in post-violence societies like East Timor, Cyprus, Bosnia and Northern Ireland. This was also the case in the sub-Saharan African nations of Liberia and Rwanda. In these countries peacebuilding efforts included, among other dimensions, the rebuilding of institutions. A similar observation is made by Elizabeth Cousens who notes that during the 1990s peacebuilding activities became more visible and “expansive” as a result of its adoption into the UN system and its use by other international outfits and nongovernmental groups. This observation is reiterated by Craig Zelizer and Valerie Oliphant who state that although the field of peacebuilding was once seen as distinct, today it has “began to be integrated into numerous sectors, ranging from humanitarian relief to international development.” Pursuant to Boutros-Ghalis’s definition, further steps at the UN level were taken to enhance peacebuilding activities. This expansion included the introduction of the UN Peacebuilding Commission into the UN system that was seen as paving a way for strategic coordination of UN peacebuilding work. Some of the Commission’s work has focused on democracy consolidation and justice and security reform in places like Sierra Leone.

In addition to Boutros-Ghali’s conceptualisation of peacebuilding, other definitions of peacebuilding also surfaced. These include those offered by peace scholars Ho Won Jeong,

Roger Mac Ginty, Craig Zelizer and John Paul Lederach. For example, Craig Zelizer and Valerie Oliphant discuss the notion of “integrated peacebuilding.” which they say is defined as “a set of processes and tools used by civil society and governmental actors to transform the relationships, culture, and institutions of society to prevent, end, and transform conflicts.” According to Lederach, peacebuilding goes beyond post-peace accord reconstruction because it “encompasses, generates, and sustains a full array of processes, approaches and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships.” Lederach also notes that peacebuilding should be a process that “responds to a set of needs and challenges identified in conflicts. [It should be a process that has a framework that transforms conflicts and] addresses structural issues, social dynamics of relationship building and the development of a supportive infrastructure.” Sean Byrne and Jessica Senehi reiterate this point in their studies on violence and violence intervention and prevention. They suggest that among other key aspects, community interactions and relationship building, the promotion of shared goals for peace and grassroots empowerment should characterise steps taken to build peace. Lederach’s definition guides the peacebuilding discussion of this study as it explores truth commissions and peacebuilding in transitional societies. As already illustrated in the outlined mandates of sub-Saharan African truth commissions in chapter two of this study; commissions set a tone for long-term peacebuilding by uncovering past realities of atrocities and mapping ways for democratic transitions and national reconciliation.

Lederach’s definition is echoed by Jeong who defines peacebuilding through a reconstructive, rehabilitative, and transformative lens. Assessing the complex nature of post-violence peacebuilding Jeong asserts that:

The end of violent conflict has to be accompanied by the rebuilding of physical infrastructure and the restoration of essential government functions that provide basic social services. In the long run, stability cannot be achieved without the participation of former adversaries in a democratic political process and socioeconomic reform.\textsuperscript{268}

This form of building peace as conveyed by Jeong denotes a process that is equipped with activities that “enhance public security, generate economic recovery, facilitate social healing, and promotes democratic institutions.”\textsuperscript{269} It comprises dimensions that influence social and economic rehabilitation to encourage communities emerging from violence and other human rights abuses to rebuild a “social foundation of security.”\textsuperscript{270}

**Peacebuilding in Post-violence Societies**

According to Jeroen De Zeeuw and Krishna Kumar, post-conflict societies are those recovering from protracted violent conflict.\textsuperscript{271} They are also societies that are at-risk, divided with weakened political and economic structures.\textsuperscript{272} In this study, the term post-violence societies refers to societies that have been affected by prolonged violent conflict and other forms of human atrocities. The term is used interchangeably with post-violence societies, post-peace-

\textsuperscript{269} Ibid, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid.
accord societies or transitional societies. Given their human rights experiences, refugees fall into this category of post-violence societies. For example, the types of abuses that my study participants faced mirror those that the United Nations (UN) places under the notion of gross human rights violations. The violations captured under this umbrella include, “torture and similar cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; extra-judicial summary or arbitrary executions; slavery; enforced disappearances, rape and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity.”

Edward Newman and Albrecht Schnabel note that:

Conflict-torn societies are characterised by the traumatic impoverishment of economic, political and social relations between groups and individuals. Previously existing divisions within society are exacerbated, and new divisions are created. Once violence stops, it becomes extremely difficult to re-create a sense of identity and belonging among communities that have experienced political, economic and socio-cultural breakdown. While it may be possible to impose a sense of order from outside, the sense of community has to grow from within.

Consequently Newman and Schnabel captures the realities faced by post-violence societies in taking steps towards recovery, institutional rebuilding and national reconstruction in an inclusive manner of all members of a post-accord society. This notion of inclusiveness becomes more relevant when exploring ways in which refugee communities from sub-Saharan

---

273 Roger Mac Ginty, “Post-Accord Crime,” in *Violence and Reconstruction*, ed. John Darby, 101-120, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2006), 103. When redressing past crimes Mac Ginty asserts that “post-accord peace” offers a more realistic picture of post-violence environment. He states that the concept of “post-accord” recognises that “complex ethnopolitical conflicts rarely end in a definitive manner. While violence, or a certain levels of violence may cease or become more manageable, the latent bases of conflict often persist ... (The) post–accord (phase is) “the period after the agreement and ratification of a major peace accord involving the main actors in a conflict, including the governing party.”


African post-conflict societies can be situated in peacebuilding processes. Evident from the peacebuilding literature is the fact that the participation of refugee communities and other survivors of human rights abuses is vital for realising holistic peacebuilding efforts. In their support of the need for post-violence societies to have more inclusive peacebuilding processes, Edward Newman and Albrecht Schnabel point out that “true peacebuilding cannot occur without a strong established well-functioning and broadly supported civil society.” This claim is reiterated by Roger Mac Ginty who contends:

> While institutions, large and small, do have a crucial role to play in peacebuilding, ultimately it is the people who experience peace and conflict in their homes, workplaces, schools and everyday lives. There is the danger that the professionalization of peacebuilding gives too much authority to ‘experts’ and ‘peacebuilding professionals.’ It is often individuals, families and communities who have to do the ‘heavy lifting’ of peacebuilding by learning to live with their neighbour from another religious group or learning to work alongside someone who shares very different political views.

All members of society should participate in transforming abusive episodes to allow for the transformation of the human and socio-economic, cultural and political institutional structures and realities. This transformation Lederach states can help increase justice in social structures, transform relationships rooting them in peace, and facilitate constructive dialogue.

**Conclusion**

During his inaugural address in 1994, the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela made the following remarks:

---

276 Ibid, 2.
... The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the
chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us. We have, at last,
achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people
from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other
discrimination. We succeeded to take our last steps to freedom in conditions of
relative peace. We commit ourselves to the construction of a complete, just and
lasting peace. We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of the
millions of our people. We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in
which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any
fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity--a rainbow
nation at peace with itself.279

Nelson Mandela’s remarks were targeting the South Africa nation during a key historical
moment of the post-apartheid era. However, in many ways, his statement embodies the mixed
bag of opportunities presented to post-violence societies by truth commissions and post-violence
peacebuilding processes as demonstrated by this chapter’s theoretical overview. These
opportunities vary from post-violence healing to the reclaiming of human rights that should be
available to all members of a post-violence society. Sub-Saharan Africa’s refugees’ accessibility
to these opportunities is at the core of this study as it explores how their human rights
experiences can be part of new national chapters of peace and justice in their home countries in
their search for what Nelson Mandela calls a “just and lasting peace”280 through stories and
storytelling.

279 Mandela, Nelson. Statement of the President of the ANC, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela at His
Inauguration as the President of the Republic of South Africa, Union Buildings, Pretoria, May 10,
280 Ibid.
Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

*Narratives may be a way for all people to have a voice, so that one day even our leaders will regard us as human beings*\(^{281}\)

*Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone [or oneself] about one’s life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned*\(^{282}\)

*The role of storytelling is in re-humanising*\(^{283}\)

Guided by a qualitative research design, this chapter discusses methods used to document the human rights narratives of 33 refugee community members that participated in this study. The chapter maps out the purpose of the study, illustrates why a narrative inquiry was employed and its significance to the study. It also outlines ethical considerations and procedural steps taken to carry out the research, it addresses my role as researcher and my personal reflections about the field research.

According to Schaffer and Smith, the post 1990s era has increasingly underscored interconnectedness between human rights and life narratives as the personal stories of survivors of human rights violations increasingly bear witness to human rights abuses being orchestrated in violently divided societies.\(^{284}\) Thus, victims of abuse are testifying to their experiences and these


“life narratives have become one of the most potent vehicles for advancing human rights.”

Paul Gready attests to this progression in the human rights movement and scholarship, remarking that the “proliferation of narrative sites [and practices]” such as transitional justice and truth commissions provide human rights abuse victims access to platforms for telling their stories and putting on public record an acknowledgement of what happened to them. This acknowledgement of victims’ personal stories is increasingly highlighting the relevance of storytelling to the fields and practices of human rights, post-conflict peacebuilding and transitional justice. In addition, Jessica Senehi attests to the relevancy of storytelling in her scholarship on storytelling and survivors of violence. One of her observations is that narratives can be a “means of resistance and a compelling call for redress of wrongs. [Narratives also] describe moral approaches to conflict resolution and problem-solving.”

With over 2 million sub-Saharan African refugees and asylum seekers currently driven away from their homes as a result of armed strife, political oppression, torture and other forms of persecution, the stories of forcibly displaced persons continue to bear witness to their human rights plight and the violations they faced. However despite this disturbing reality, the human rights stories of refugee communities living in refugee camp environments are not widely accommodated in transitional justice processes in post-conflict sub-Saharan African countries

285 Ibid.
using truth commissions to redress the human rights wrongs of violent pasts. This study sought to find answers to this exclusion by exploring avenues of inclusion for refugees’ voices, perspectives and lived experiences. Consequently, the following research questions were posed to the respondents in my study: What are your lived human rights experiences? In what ways can human rights stories of refugees be part of transitional justice and peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin? To explore their responses to this question, I employed a narrative methodology, which proved to be an ideal method as it allowed participants to “give an account of their experiences, and give voice to their forced displacement and ‘new’ identity in “ruptured life courses and communities.”

Research Strategy

The section below describes the research strategy that guided this study. It provides an overview of qualitative research and proceeds to describe narrative methodology and explains the rationale for using this research method.

Qualitative Research Strategy

Qualitative research is utilised when a problem or issue needs to be explored at the micro level with a sub group of people. This form of inquiry provides an understanding of complex issues because it empowers the researcher to directly engage with subjects, go into their homes, places of work and provide them the opportunity to share their perspectives. Additionally, one of the key benefits of qualitative research is its grounding in the local context or setting of the participants. It allows for the researcher to collect data that is descriptive of people’s behaviour,
places, people and conversations. Moreover it permits participants’ narratives to be located in their own words. Commenting on the nature and processes of qualitative research John Creswell states:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry. The collection of data takes place in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive establishes the patterns or themes. The final report or representation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problems and it extends the literature or signals for a call for action.

This study used a qualitative research design to explore 18 male and 15 female refugee participants stories that explored the following: (1) the lived experiences of refugees and the relevance of their human rights stories to truth-telling or the storytelling process of truth commissions in their countries of origin; (2) the refugees’ perceptions of the use of truth commissions as a conflict transformational tool that promotes post-violence peacebuilding and reconciliation in their countries of origin, (3) their views on how refugees could contribute towards peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin, and (4) their hopes and dreams of living as members of a transitional community in a refugee camp setting.

Narrative Methodology

When someone is telling a story of the path she traversed, she is mentally walking over the path again, and the empathetic listener is vicariously walking with her.

Central to the exploration of the participants’ narratives and perceptions was their use of narrative methodology. Narrative methodology is part of a range of qualitative approaches which include ethnography, phenomenological research, grounded theory, and the case study.295 According to Barbra Czarniawska, the term narrative is “understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events chronologically connected.”296 Thus, Michael White observes that “we enter into stories, we are entered into stories by others and we live our lives through stories.”297 Narrative is also described as simply “like life itself ... international, trans-historical and trans-cultural.”298 Linda Johnston sums some of the features of narrative methodology in the following manner. “The study of narratives is a flexible approach … that can be used in a variety of settings … tellers of the narratives are the experts of their own stories … and (in the PACS field), narrative theory and practice (sheds light for example on) stories about conflicts and … how people see a dispute.”299

Taking into account this study’s focus on human rights stories, the use of narrative methodology was ideal by providing the opportunity to understand human rights narratives from the perspective of survivors of human rights abuses. This method helped me to shape the research instruments, which was comprised of face-to-face interviews and one focus group discussion.

---

295 John Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry, 57-68.
Rationale for methodology

Storytelling gives voice to silenced life experiences because it humanises research by reminding us that the “telling of stories (is a) universal human activity.” As Ellis and Bochner suggest, “narrative unfolds with flesh and blood … encouraging empathy, identification and a humanisation of content.” Storytelling is also used in a number of creative intervention processes in the broader Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) field. Storytelling is widely used as a peacebuilding and conflict resolution tool to redress conflict and human rights abuses. In the realm of conflict resolution, storytelling has allowed for people’s personal experiences to be explored and insight gained about their narrated personal understanding of the causes of conflict, experiences and meanings of a conflict, and perceived resolutions of conflict. The narrative research method has also shed light upon the competing narratives of opposing groups. For example, narratives play a role in understanding within in-group identity ethnic conflicts. As Carter and Byrne discuss, “stories of past events shape perceptions of political possibilities. When histories offer competing interpretations of the nature of intergroup relations, conflicts may be increasingly characterised by misunderstandings and mistrust.” One of the examples they cite is Northern Irish history where there are competing stories between the Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists regarding the causes of the “Troubles.”

303 Ibid, 45.
competing narratives is, as Senehi states, that they “can generate sympathies with a portrayal that
demonises a certain group or misrepresents history.”

In instances of ethnic conflict, narrative
analysis allows for the complex dynamics of a conflict to be better understood by outlining the
meaning and sources behind stories. For victims and survivors of persecution, “testimonies are a
way of talking about an extremely painful event or series of events. The formality of testimony
provides a structure within which events can be related and feelings expressed.”

Narrative methodology can also guide what Monk and Winslade describe as narrative
mediation by allowing for a narrative conflict resolution approach in an ethnic conflict. As Linda
Johnston also observes, through the analysis and untangling of competing narratives, third party
intervention can assist disputants arrive at a place where they can listen and understand the
‘other’s’ story. Through the retelling and sharing of stories, conflict parties can search for
ways to redress the hatred they have for one another and thereby bridge ethnic divides. This
type of narrative conflict resolution approach is utilised in reconciling some local communities
including Palestinians and Israelis as well as between descendants of Holocaust survivors and
Nazi perpetrators. This storytelling reconciliatory method has been used for example by Dan

---

Bar-on in his work with post-violence divided societies. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC) through its hearings also engaged in this form of narrative conflict resolution to encourage national peace and healing.

Sharing narratives can act as a starting point for healing people’s deep wounds and in promoting a spirit of national reconciliation. For example, the South African narratives also provided a picture of the violent apartheid past and allowed for truths of those silenced by the conflict to be heard and for their human dignity to be restored. Scholars like Martha Minow and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, address the multiple roles that personal narratives play in contributing towards, healing, forgiveness, and conflict resolution in post-violence societies.

In her reflections of truth commissions in Latin America and South Africa, Batchelor comments on the benefits that truth commissions have found in their incorporation of the narrative approach for understanding and redressing the past. She also notes that “the developing field of restorative justice reflects the mounting degree of respect for narrative methodology as beneficial to both victims and offenders.” In addition, Lederach observes that narrative methodology “creates the formative story of who we are as a people and place .... [it is not just a] stage of problem-solving but a journey of discovering what these events mean for who we

---

are.” Further, Winslade and Monk speak to the manner in which the narrative design can assist with the deconstruction of a dominant societal discourse. In particular they explore a dominant colonising discourse where the colonisers emerge as the “image of everything” and the colonised are the less human and more backward. This perception of one group’s superiority over another is evident in racial or ethno-national conflicts.

The value of narrative methodology is also seen in indigenous peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes. For example, as Batchelor observes, in African communities the role of narrative conflict transformation and peace cultivation has played an important role for centuries because communities consider narratives as part of the traditional peacebuilding system. A similar observation is made by Hamdesa Tuso, who asserts that “stories are important forms of discourse in mediation” in indigenous processes of conflict resolution. Linda Smith, who writes on indigenous experiences and imperialism, attests to the instrumental role that indigenous storytelling plays in helping indigenous people to discuss and understand their colonised past, their “painful struggles and persistent survival.” Moreover, the narrative analysis of indigenous systems reveals that the traditional narrative peacebuilding approach has worked where other modern strategies have failed. These indigenous approaches elicit complete narratives that can create the space for communal reconciliation as they require face-to-face

interactions and encourage all parties in the conflict to tell their story. An example of this narrative process was practiced in post-ethnic violent Rwanda during the *gacaca* process which concluded June in 2012. “*Gacaca* refers to a traditional Rwandan method of conflict resolution at the village level. Reconciliation between violators and communities is core of the *gacaca* traditional custom.” This indigenous method guided a narrative disclosure of facts, and truth in public meetings, which were presided over by community leaders. The *gacaca* system enabled Rwandans to deal with their genocidal past and encourage dialogue to forge reconciliation as it made victims and perpetrators realise that in many ways they were both victims of a horrible past.

All of these examples underscore the point that narrative methodology is an ideal instrument for exploring the human rights narratives of violence-affected persons in the Dukwi Refugee Camp. Throughout the field research this method facilitated the retelling of participants’ human rights stories, and a close examination into how these stories can be part of the public processes of acknowledging and redressing past wrongs, as well as consolidating peace in a post-violent environment. The narrative method also facilitated a sense of community-building and peacebuilding particularly during the focus-group discussions.

---


322 Ibid.
Participants and Location

The segment below describes the location where the study took place. It also provides a snapshot of the demography of this study’s participants.

Location

This study was situated at the Dukwi Refugee Camp in Botswana, which according to the UNHCR Botswana Field Office in 2011 constituted a total population of 3105 people made up of 1913 males and 1192 females. The Government of the Republic of Botswana’s (GOB) Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security is its custodian. Together with stakeholders that include the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Botswana Red Cross Society (BRCS), and Skillshare International, the GOB provides basic humanitarian support and protection to the camp community. The camp is located in the northern part of Botswana. From Gaborone, the country’s capital city, it is about a six to eight hours drive to the camp. This long stretch of road runs through small towns, villages, and Botswana’s second biggest city, Francistown. The drive is usually pleasant; one only needs to watch out for the occasional domestic animals that wander onto the road which for the most part are goats, cows and donkeys. The turn-off to the camp takes you off the tarred road onto a dirt road and the camp itself is fenced and hidden behind some vegetation. From the entrance, the dirt road leads to the central zone of the camp. Along the way on the sides of the road there are some dwellings that comprise a mix of homes made from mud with thatched roofs, tents and some concrete block structures. In the central area lie office blocks for service providers including BRCS, UNHCR, the Dukwi Police Station, a clinic, the camp commandant’s office and warehouses where monthly food

---

323 Statistics obtained in 2011 during my field research from the UNHCR Field Office, Dukwi Refugee Camp.
rations and other items are distributed. There are also makeshift stores set up by community members where basic commodities are sold, such as bread and toilet paper. Although a couple of stores are made from concrete blocks, most are made from aluminium sheets.

Spread throughout the camp’s sandy and dry terrain are more dwellings of community members. In their homes, furniture can include modest furniture, mattresses given by UNHCR, and empty paraffin cans that serve as sitting stools. Located in different zones are communal water collection points and pit latrines. There is also staff housing, the camp’s primary and kindergarten schools, vocational training centre, resource centre, burial site, a community hall and a couple of more structures as well as open areas for soccer games. Generally, the camp’s atmosphere is bustling with music in the background from different parts of Africa. There is constant movement of community members who are up and about with their daily lives, the noise of children playing in the open, groups of men and women huddled in different spots engaged in their conversations, some hanging out at makeshift bars where local beverages are served, and others tending to their gardens.

I still recall some distinct sights from my visits to the camp that have remained imprinted on my mind. Among others, these include the time I attended a funeral at the camp and visited the burial site for the first time. I was overwhelmed by the mounds of earth that served as a final resting place for the men, women and children who died in exile. I also recall the time when there was no ambulance in the camp, seeing a young man hastily pushing a wheel barrow with an unwell relative sitting inside, rushing him to the camp clinic. I could not help but think of how injustice creates realities of desperation. There was also the sight of seeing community members queue for their monthly food rations and as some participants of this study express later on in Chapter 5 of the study, their experience of queuing for food is one of the dehumanising realities
of refugee life. Prior to the persecution they faced in their home countries, they had worked and provided food their families and now they saw themselves as dependants, reduced to begging for food. Furthermore, I recall the periods around World Refugee Day when the atmosphere seemed charged with energy as the community came together to commemorate the day, remembering and drawing awareness to the plight of refugees. There are also those periods of social activism that I recall seeing. For example, a group of women engaged in an awareness campaign march for the international “Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence.” In essence, this camp’s location appears to provide a place of refuge and safety and it allows community members to strive each day to make a life for themselves in the midst of their challenging realities, unknown futures, healed and unhealed wounds of past persecution.

I choose this camp for the study for the following reasons. First, the camp is home to refugees and asylum seekers from 13 African countries that are either in a conflict, post-violence stage, or are faced with political tensions. Some of these countries, in particular those which are considered to be in a post-violence state such as Rwanda and Uganda, have adopted transitional justice and peacebuilding mechanisms to redress their violent past and to transition towards building sustainable peace and justice. Second, bearing in mind that the refugee situation is a human rights problem, the camp is comprised of persons whose testimonies illustrate that they are survivors of human rights violations that were orchestrated against them in their home countries. Third, as a citizen of Botswana who had worked directly with members of the camp’s community in the past, the location was ideal for me because it did not present concerns of accessibility to the community.

324 Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender Violence Campaign is an international campaign that was started in 1991 by the Women’s Global Leadership Institute to draw awareness to gender-based violence and advocate for an end to this type of violence.
Image 1: I took this image during the field research. This is the main area of the camp where some stakeholders’ offices are located as well as small shops owned by some refugees. The structures in the back are some of the shops in the camp.325

Participants’ Demography

The research was comprised of open-ended semi-structured interviews with 33 participants and one focus group discussion with 18 members of the same group. The participant’s demography includes: nationality, gender, age, reasons for displacement and number of years spent living as a refugee in the camp.

Nationality: One participant originated from a North African country and the remaining participants came from the following sub-Saharan African countries: Angola, Burundi, DR

325 The small shops and other small scale business have been established by refugees to compliment the basic assistance received from the GOB and other stakeholders. The shops, which are predominately owned by Somalis and a few individuals from the Great Lakes Region, sell basic commodities like canned fish and toothpaste. They also sell food rations they’ve bought from other refugees who opt to sell some of their monthly rations from the UNHCR so that they can obtain money and purchase other basic necessities not provided such as relish or toilet paper.
Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Namibia (Caprivi), Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

**Gender and age:** As stated earlier, at the time of my field study the population in Dukwi was 3105, the male population represents 62 percent of the camp population and females constitute 38 percent. I had initially planned to work with 30 participants comprising of 15 male and 15 female adults. However, I ended up working with 33 participants, with 18 men and 15 women as a result of having more male volunteers participating in the research. The youngest participant in the study was 25 and the oldest was 69 years.

**Academic and professional background:** The educational background of the participants ranged from primary school level to university level. Most had worked prior to their refugee flight in agriculture, teaching, tailoring, politics, and business. Others initially came to the camp as young persons.

**Reasons for displacement:** The number of years that my study’s participants have resided in the camp ranged from 3 to 18 years. The reasons for their displacement all met the UNHCR criterion that defines a refugee. It is someone who has fled his or her country with well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and is unwilling to return to their home nation fearing persecution.326

---

Image 2: I took this image to illustrate one of the accommodation structures in the camp. Like all housing structures which are primarily one-roomed, the tent serves as a bedroom, kitchen, and living room all in one. Other forms of housing structures are made from mud or brick with aluminum sheets or thatched roofs.

Table 5 below summaries the participants’ individual profile identifying their countries of origin, gender, age, level of education, reasons for displacement, and the number of years living in the camp.

Table 5: Profile of Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Reason for Displacement</th>
<th>Years Living as a Refugee in Dukwi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Post-Graduate Diploma</td>
<td>Religious persecution</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Teaching Diploma</td>
<td>Armed and ethnic conflicts</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Political persecution / torture</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>BA / MA in Social Work</td>
<td>Armed conflict / ethnic persecution</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Childhood Education Diploma</td>
<td>Political persecution / electoral violence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>BA in International Political Economy and Public Administration</td>
<td>Political persecution / electoral violence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bachelor of Laws</td>
<td>Armed conflict</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Ethnic persecution</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>BA in French and Philosophy</td>
<td>Political persecution / armed conflict</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>BS in Environmental Relations</td>
<td>Political persecution / electoral violence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>BA in International Relations</td>
<td>Political persecution</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Political persecution / armed conflict</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Computer Science Diploma</td>
<td>Ethnic persecution</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Ethnic persecution</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>High School / Business Training</td>
<td>Armed Conflict</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Education/Diploma</td>
<td>Reason for Internship/Conscription</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>High School / Electrical Engineering Diploma</td>
<td>Armed conflict / xenophobic attacks</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Political persecution of Caprivians</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Political persecution of Caprivians</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Education Diploma / Previous coursework in Psychology</td>
<td>Political persecution / electoral violence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>BSC Geology</td>
<td>Political persecution / armed conflict</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>BA Geography and Economics / Post-Graduate Diploma in Education</td>
<td>Political persecution</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Religious persecution / armed conflict</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>High School / Marine and Fishery Diploma</td>
<td>Armed conflict</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Accounting Diploma</td>
<td>Political and ethnic persecution / armed conflict</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>BA in Humanities</td>
<td>Ethnic persecution / armed conflict</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Political persecution / military concerns</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Religious and ethnic persecution / armed conflict</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>High School / Child Care Management Diploma</td>
<td>Political persecution / electoral violence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Armed conflict / ethnic persecution</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Primary Education Diploma</td>
<td>Political persecution / electoral violence</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Political persecution</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Bachelor of Laws</td>
<td>Political persecution</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>South Sudan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>University student (enrolled at the University of Botswana)</td>
<td>Armed conflict / forced conscription</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures**

This subsequent section outlines the procedures undertaken to conduct this study namely, the ways in which participants were selected, the data gathering techniques and research instruments I utilised and research ethics procedures I followed.

**Selection of Participants**

The participants of my study were chosen in collaboration with the UNHCR, BRCS camp officers and community members in the camp. This collaborative effort resulted in a list of
potential participants with the final group of participants being chosen through purposeful sampling. According to Michael Patton, purposeful sampling involves the selection of information rich cases for an in-depth qualitative study. As he further submits,

the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.\textsuperscript{327}

In this regard, the sampling frame includes participants from countries that had a truth commission or were in the process of implementing a transitional justice approach, participants recognised as Convention refugees, and had residency in the camp. In addition, the criterion required that the participants were fluent in English.\textsuperscript{328} Once prospective participants were identified, I directly contacted them in person or through their mobile numbers to confirm their willingness to participate in the study as well as to schedule interview appointments.

\textbf{Data Gathering Techniques}

\textit{Your sources are not dead documents or statistics, but living people}\textsuperscript{329}

\textsuperscript{327} Michael Patton, \textit{Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods}, (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1990), 169.
\textsuperscript{328} According to Michael Patton there are sixteen common types of purposeful sampling for qualitative research which include criterion and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling “is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance … The purpose of criterion sampling is to pick all cases that meet some criterion such as all children abused in a treatment facility.” Snowball sampling “is an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases … The purpose is to identify cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study, good interview (participants).” (Patton, 1990) 169-189. These purposeful sampling approaches guided the participants’ selection process that I used for my study.
The field research relied heavily on exploratory semi-structured open-ended questions that provided space for participants to retell their personal human rights stories. A focus group discussion with 18 participants from the aforementioned group of 33 also served as another avenue for data collection. The focus group took place after the interviews and the 18 participants volunteered to participate as they were available for the date set for the focus group. According to Priscilla Salant and Don Dillman, focus groups are helpful in stimulating people’s thinking and eliciting ideas about specific topics.\footnote{Priscilla Salant and Don Dillman, \textit{How to Conduct Your Own Survey} (New York: John Wiley \\& Sons, Inc., 1994), 29.} In this regard, the focus group discussion allowed for continued deliberation on human rights storytelling, truth commissions and peacebuilding. The focus group was designed in a workshop style that included skill-building activities on the above-mentioned subject areas. In addition, the data for this study were obtained from my analysis of official documents and government publications on Botswana’s immigration and refugee policies as well as documentation from stakeholders working with the refugee community in Botswana.

At every stage of the data collection as a researcher I showed sensitivity, respect and responsibility towards the stories and views shared by my study participants. In line with Harsh Mander’s views on researching people’s stories, I ensured that in executing the research methodology, I demonstrated active listening and the values of “patience, humility, willingness to learn from others and to respect views and values” shared.\footnote{Harsh Mander, “Words from the Heart: Researching People’s Stories,” \textit{Journal of Human Rights Practice}, Vol. 2 Number 2, (2010): 252-270, http://jhrp.oxfordjournals.org/content/2/2/252.full.pdf (Accessed April 29, 2011).} I ensured that I was sensitive to the needs and concerns of participants, by creating an accommodative schedule that was suitable for them. I took care in creating safe spaces for both the interviews and focus group discussion.
session to make sure that the participants felt safe and relaxed in sharing their stories and perspectives with me.

**Research Instruments**

The narrative interviews produced stories that clearly spoke to the human rights mistreatment that my study participants faced and their lived experiences as refugees. Interviews took place in a private office space that I was temporarily and generously allowed to use by the camp commandant within the perimeters of the camp commandant’s office block of the Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security (MDJS). I ensured that the office space was private and comfortable for each interview and I offered refreshments to each person. I also interviewed a few of my participants in the privacy and comfort of their homes and two interviews also took place at local cafés in Francistown and Gaborone where both participants were comfortable meeting me at. The interviews usually started with a trust-building conversation before leading into the interview questions. The topics ranged from a more general discussion of their pre-flight lives, their lives as refugees living in a camp environment, their thoughts about peace and justice processes in their countries of origin, their perceptions of themselves as co-partners in peacebuilding, and more specifically the human rights mistreatment they faced in their home countries. (Please see **Appendix 1** for the Interview Schedule).

Each interview was face-to-face and ranged from one hour to a couple of hours with the longest interview lasting 7 hours. All of the interviews were conducted in English as participants were conversant in English. I audio-recorded every interview and transcribed it verbatim.
In addition to the 33 interviews, I conducted a combined focus group discussion and workshop with 18 of the 33 participants who participated in the interviews. This group comprised of 9 males and 9 females. Due to having prior commitments, the remaining participants did not participate in the focus group. Discussions took place in a vacant classroom in the camp that was a neutral and non-threatening environment. The space was generously provided by one of the stakeholders in the camp, the Skillshare International Office. When planning these discussions, I was aware that in this camp, women do not often participate in the discussions when men are around. Therefore, I divided the group in two during our focus group session with male participants constituting one group and females the other. The consent form participants signed prior to the interviews informed them of this subsequent component of the research, which was comprised of a one-day focus group and a skills building workshop. I included the workshop component because as a researcher, I believe it is important to give back to communities you work with. I felt that a skills-building workshop was an ideal way of doing so. The objective of the workshop was to empower, share knowledge and enhance participants’ community-building and peacebuilding skills. I designed the workshop to include a brief presentation and group discussions about human rights, transitional justice, truth commissions,
storytelling and peacebuilding – subjects that were all relevant to the research. I also included interactive group activities that allowed for experiential learning. Some of the activities included a storytelling bracelet-making activity, and a dot game on minority issues.

The focus group component also aimed to further research on the participants’ views on topics that fell under the broader fields of transitional justice and peacebuilding. In this regard, some of the material covered included forgiveness, reparations, victims’ healing, human rights and peace. This workshop and focus group segment of the study lasted for an entire day. I provided complimentary human rights theme-based T-shirts and workshop material. Additionally, catered lunch and refreshments were offered during the breaks. The safe and relaxed atmosphere that was created through ice-breakers and interactive group activities allowed all of the participants to interact openly and honestly across different age, ethnic, national, religious and gender backgrounds.

![Image 5: Building where focus group and workshop session were held](image)

**Data Analysis**

A narrative analysis that was theme based guided the framework for the inductive data analysis of this study. For example, Bogdan and Biklen state that data analysis involves the
process of systematically analysing and organising data to arrive at the research findings.\textsuperscript{332} It entails preparing and organising data such as transcripts for analysis, drawing out themes and presenting the data in the form of discussion.\textsuperscript{333} Moreover, Pranee Liamputtong states that “data analysis is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations that are the foundation for published reports. [It] entails classifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material to extract the meaning and implications to reveal patterns or stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative.”\textsuperscript{334} Liamputtong\textsuperscript{335} and Creswell\textsuperscript{336} also suggest that once a researcher has become familiar with the personal stories, and determined the categories, themes should be identified inductively based on how often they reoccur. The analysis was guided by emerging themes in the data that provided answers to the objectives of the research.

**Ethics Approval and Maintaining Confidentiality**

*The ethical challenge is for researchers to add value to the lives of the people they are researching, recognising them as participants in the process and not simply as sources of data*\textsuperscript{337}

Both practitioners and scholars point out that ethical issues ought to be discussed in every field research project.\textsuperscript{338} Ethics, as Druckman states, refers to the treatment of participants

---


\textsuperscript{335} Ibid.


engaged with a particular research project.\textsuperscript{339} For Bogdan and Biklen research ethics are comprised of “principles of right and wrong” that an involved group accepts.\textsuperscript{340} They note that most academic fields have ethical codes that guide the research work undertaken. They identify two key issues that dominate the “ethical guidelines in research with human subjects” namely, the notion that subjects should volunteer to participate in the research with a full understanding of the nature of the study, and that measures must be taken not to expose subjects to any risks.\textsuperscript{341} In this regard, the research subjects should be afforded protection. For example, when interviewing a victim of violence the interview may trigger disturbing and painful memories of the past and lead the participant to a distressful state. In this kind of situation the researcher would need to decide whether to continue with the interview or to refer the participant to a counsellor. Therefore, researchers need to be aware of the vulnerability that their participants may be subject to.\textsuperscript{342}

Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden,\textsuperscript{343} also note that ethical guidelines are executed through forms that cover the description of the researcher’s study such as the researcher’s planned use of findings, and other important information. On these forms the subject’s signature is required to indicate “informed consent.” As Druckman outlines, “there are strong norms against deception in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{341} Ibid.
\bibitem{342} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
the conduct of scientific research.”\textsuperscript{344} And in this regard, human subject review boards play a fundamental role ensuring that deception is dissuaded and also in reviewing a researcher’s material from the proposal to the participants’ consent forms. These kinds of measures also ensure that the research subjects are not exploited or harmed by researchers.\textsuperscript{345}

Summarising these considerations, Bogdan and Biklen outline some of the key ethical principles to consider when doing research:

(1) the subjects’ identities should be protected so that the information collected does not embarrass or in other ways harm them. Anonymity should extend not only to writing but also to the verbal reporting of information that has been learned through observation; (2) treat subjects with respect and seek their cooperation in research ... research should neither lie to subjects nor record conversations on hidden mechanical devices; (3) researchers should abide by research contract and (4) tell the truth when the write-up is done and report findings.\textsuperscript{346}

At every juncture of this study these ethical considerations were observed. My research that involved human subjects had to be approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board. In addition, the Government of Botswana through the Office of the President and the Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security also had to approve and grant me permission to undertake this study in the camp. All the participants of the study were adults over the age of 21. Participants were well informed about the purposes of the research, the nature of their involvement, and how the findings will be used. Each participant’s consent was obtained before the interviews and focus group / workshop sessions began. Steps were taken to address the emotional challenges that may arise from sharing stories about human rights abuses that the participants faced. In this regard the participants were given the name of the camp psychologist

\textsuperscript{346} Ibid, 39.
and counselling services offered by the Botswana Red Cross Society. Participants were also able to take breaks at any stage.

The participants’ anonymity and confidentiality was strictly observed by assigning and identifying each participant’s transcript and record by alphabetic code. The participants were also offered the option of using pseudonyms. A majority of the participants requested to remain anonymous. In order to respect and honour their wish of anonymity and preserve confidentiality, all of the study participants are identified by pseudonyms. In this regard I gave my study participants African names that mean peace and originate from different countries of the continent. Although I know the identity of the participants, their names have remained strictly confidential. Throughout the research process, data and other confidential research documents were securely managed. The research transcripts and audio files were stored in my computer that has a password and is only accessible to me. Participants were informed about the management of data on the consent form. They were also informed that the transcripts and audio files would be destroyed five years after the research is concluded. They were offered the opportunity to review or change their transcripts if they so wished. No deception was used in carrying out this research. No information was deliberately withheld from the participants. There were no financial benefits for the participants. Finally, they were advised about how the research findings would be used and were assured that copies of the research would be available for them to peruse at the offices of the stakeholders in the camp.
Validation and Reliability

According to Creswell validation in qualitative research aims to assess the accuracy of research findings, and provides a “detailed thick description” of the research undertaking.\textsuperscript{347} Creswell outlines validation strategies that he suggests researchers should consider when conducting qualitative research. Among others his proposed strategies include prolonged observation and engagement in the field to allow for informed reporting, the use of multiple sources to corroborate evidence, and the clarification of the researcher’s biases. In line with some of Creswell’s strategies, my previous work experience with the refugee community in Dukwi assisted me in providing informed reporting. With respect to the triangulation of data, in addition to the interviews and focus group discussion, I used multiple sources of information that included GOB and camp stakeholders’ reports and internet-based documents among others. In addition, I conducted an extensive literature review on the main themes of this research such as those of post-violence forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. I ensured that I provided a “rich, thick description”\textsuperscript{348} of the findings that will allow readers “to determine if these findings can be transferred.”\textsuperscript{349} I also identified my biases to ensure that they did not affect my approach to the research and interpretation of the research data.

Reliability addresses the ability to replicate research and arrive at the same conclusions. Creswell observes that in qualitative research, reliability can be enhanced through various ways that include keeping detailed field notes and using a good quality tape recorder. I took some of these steps to ensure reliability of my research. For example, I maintained detailed field notes and used a high-quality audio recorder. I also ensured that I carefully transcribed the recordings


\textsuperscript{348} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{349} Ibid, 209.
to further ensure that a rich description of the research is provided. Although this research was situated in a sub-Saharan African context, readers may find that the issues raised by the participants are transferrable to other global contexts. The global statistics of refugees that was previously mentioned in chapter 2 of this research illustrates that the plight of refugees is not just an African concern because it is a global concern.

**Role of the Researcher and My Reflections**

_The human rights researcher’s role [is] ... essentially [a] humble one -- that of a kind of a porter of other people’s loss or suffering. You ground yourself ethically, listen intently, record accurately, and then strap the stories onto your back in order to carry them out into the wider world._

**The Researcher’s Role**

When undertaking this research I was sensitive to the ongoing dialogue in the broader forced migration, PACS, human rights and transitional justice fields on researchers’ ‘responsibility to the story,’ service to the voices of victims of human rights and how researchers place themselves in the stories they tell. The prevailing discourse from practitioners and scholars like Madlingozi, addressing research on victims’ stories, indicates that researchers’ ‘responsibility to story’ entails resisting the “theft of victims’ pain” and speaking about victims without empowering their agency to speak for themselves.

Against this background of concerns about the ‘responsibility of the story,’ also raised by Philips, Mander, Gready, Pittway, Bartolomei and Hugman, I deliberately ensured that

---

352 Ibid.
the thesis captured direct quotes from the participants as a way of allowing them to speak for themselves. I was sensitive to the current discourse illustrating the growing research fatigue that victims of human rights have had from re-telling their stories over-and-over, and receiving limited or no support and feedback afterwards.\textsuperscript{356} As stated by one victim of South Africa’s apartheid regime:

They just want us to be victims and tell our stories so they can help us. I am sick of telling my story. It makes them feel good to show that they are helping us. They don’t really want to change things and what good does telling our stories over and over do?\textsuperscript{357}

A similar reflection is offered by a refugee woman in Thailand who laments:

They asked us to lead them to women who had been raped so they could record their stories … Women were so upset after the interviews, we did not know what to do. We never heard from them [researchers] again – we decided then that we would never work with the researchers again. They stole our stories. We can gather the stories ourselves from our own people – you can help [with training].\textsuperscript{358}

This fatigue reverberated in the voices of some of this study’s participants. One of the participants posed these questions to me: “what is in this for us, how do our lives change after telling you our stories …. [things] have been like this for 10 years and counting and I have no change, people come in and out for our stories …. [and] how do you ask about hopes and dreams

\textsuperscript{356} Ibid.
when the environment does not allow you to hope and dream?"359 Despite his fatigue this participant opted to continue with the interview and stressed the importance of having research studies benefit participating communities.

These reflections clearly underscore the importance of researchers needing to constantly be aware of the ‘responsibility to story’ as they undertake research with vulnerable communities, and be acutely aware of this responsibility especially when working with communities that already feel over-researched with no tangible results for them in return. Therefore, with my research I am aware of the responsibility that I have to the personal narratives shared with me. I recognise the importance of having this research benefit this community by allowing their voices to raise awareness about the plight of refugees and also the need for post-violence peacebuilding and transitional justice processes to benefit them. In this regard chapter 7 which presents this study’s findings stresses this notion of inclusion.

Personal Reflections of my Field Work Journey

This community is amazing ... the human spirit is alive in each individual despite everything that he/she has been through. Their reality of struggle, suffering, and limitations needs to change for it is another form of injustice ... another conflict. Their stories are a school of life: they are teaching me to press towards service, towards contributing towards a positive change in their lives.360

Robert Yin encourages researchers to keep a journal and “capture their own feelings and reflections” while conducting their field research. He suggests that in qualitative research, journaling plays more than a private role as it can also serve as a principal research instrument and help to also reveal a researcher’s biases later on in the research leg.361 I embraced Yin’s

359 Statement by Kagiso, research participant.
360 Mavis Matenge, Excerpt from Journal – I documented this reflection in my journal during the interviewing process in Dukwi Refugee Camp, 2011.
361 Robert Yin, Qualitative Research from Start to Finish, (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 175.
suggestion and throughout my field research journey, I captured my reflections in my journal by keeping detailed field notes.

Every step of the research journey presented a learning moment. For example, I was aware that the interviews and the sharing of human rights stories would likely be emotional. I especially thought this would be the case for the women. I was surprised and caught off-guard when after a couple of interviews the men were more emotional. It appeared as if for the first time, the men, were given the chance to tell their stories and be listened to as they shared heartfelt painful feelings of the inhumane mistreatment and injustices they had faced in their home countries. At times, with the intensity and rawness of emotions present in the interview room environment, I struggled with the fact that the storytelling process seemingly was pressing the participants to relive a horrid past. The participants, though, wanted to continue telling their stories. Those that needed to pause for a break did so. All participants were also aware that there were counselling services available in the camp should they wish to access them. Moreover, quite a few of the participants expressed that the telling of their stories was helpful for their journey towards healing. These journeys towards healing are presented in chapter 6.

Additionally during my study, I realised the value of trust and relationship building when undertaking field research. As I had worked in the camp before I established relationships with many people so that some of the participants whom I knew expressed that they felt free to share their stories with me. As one of the participants commented; “We would not have shared our stories if we did not know you and if you had not worked here before because we would not know you and what you would do with our stories.”

---

Furthermore, I observed that small gestures such as providing juice and biscuits during the interviews were appreciated by each interviewee and contributed to a relaxed atmosphere as this gesture allowed for relaxation periods for my interviewees to share refreshments and moments of engaging in informal dialogue with me prior to starting the interviews.

I was also reminded of the lesson to ‘never burn your bridges’ in life. I say this as I greatly benefitted from the support and assistance I received in the camp from officers I had worked with in the past. I believe that having these connections contributed to the tremendous support I also received from officers I had not met or previously worked with. At times I felt that this was a communal research project as assistance was provided to me from all directions such as accommodation, transport, meals, and the provision of materials helpful to the field research. All of the stakeholders were extremely supportive.

Finally, at some stage I grappled with listening to and documenting these stories shared with me by the interviewees. There was a part of me that questioned how I could theorise about personal struggles that were a daily reality for the participants. How do you theorise about such a reality? This personal inner struggle became a journey that transitioned me beyond the abstract to the reality of having a growing and deepening understanding of my responsibility for both the story and the storyteller, and equally important, the need to find ways of honouring the stories shared with me as a researcher.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the research methods employed in exploring the human rights stories of refugees study participants residing in a refugee camp setting, their perspectives towards peacebuilding and reconciliation processes and their relevance to transitional justice and
peacebuilding processes in their countries of origin. The chapter also outlined procedural measures taken and ethical considerations made in undertaking this study in a refugee camp setting. It addressed research design dimensions and the analysis process, and it concluded with my role as a researcher and my reflections on the field research journey.
Chapter Five: Refugees’ Human Rights Narratives and their Lived Camp Experiences

Introduction

The next two chapters present the research findings of this study. In these chapters the term survivor refers to individuals who have suffered violations of human rights and to family members who lost loved ones as a result of human rights abuses. The purpose of this chapter is to present the human rights narratives of refugee women and men living in the Dukwi refugee camp. The aim is to deepen our understanding of their human rights experiences of surviving persecution and their lives as camp refugees. The participants’ narratives depict the normal lives that most of them lived prior to their forced displacement. They also illustrate how overnight their lives were turned into human rights journeys of victimisation, struggle, survival, and resiliency. The narratives further highlight the link between the respondents’ fears, hopes and dreams with their human rights experiences.

To this end this chapter first explores the human rights stories of this study’s participants and how the persecutions they faced in their home countries affected them. The chapter outlines participants’ human rights journeys before their persecutions. It addresses the persecutions they faced in their home countries and the ways in which they fled from the persecutions until their eventual arrival at Botswana’s Dukwi refugee camp. Finally, the chapter explores their lived experiences as camp refugees. To this end, it looks at how the persecutions have impacted my participants’ lives by forcing them into a life of exile as camp refugees. It addresses their ongoing human rights struggles that involve the day-to-day challenges faced by camp refugees, the challenges of embracing the label of refugees, and the socioeconomic and gender inequality challenges experienced in the camp. This segment also explores how their resiliency helps my
participants deal with the struggles of camp refugee life as well as their ability to dream and hope for peaceful futures where they have freedom, peace and where their human rights are respected.

Key to this chapter is the close exploration of how refugees’ narratives can fit into the broader human rights testimonies of truth commissions in post-violence sub-Saharan African societies. According to Roger Duthie, displacement is a human rights issue because “the displacement of people from their homes and communities as a result of human rights abuses is an important factor in the contexts in which transitional justice [and peacebuilding] normally operate.”

Transitional justice theory and practice underscores the centrality of human rights discourse in post-violence transitional approaches. This is evident in restorative processes of transitional justice such as truth commissions, or the retributive methods of tribunals, or transformational procedures like vetting as well as restitution measures such as reparations. Transitional justice redresses past human rights wrongs perpetrated by repressive or authoritarian regimes, leaders of rebel groups and other figures involved in carrying out heinous violent crimes. The rights and freedoms addressed through transitional justice processes in post-violence societies are anchored in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

As the bedrock of human rights, the UDHR outlines internationally agreed upon human rights norms that address the dignity and worth of the human person, the equality of persons, and the freedoms, justice and peace of the human family. For refugees, these rights in many ways remain elusive despite the fact that gross human rights violations such as rape and torture are often at the center of forced displacement. Fortunately with the growing body of research and advocacy on transitional justice and displacement, it will become more apparent that the plight of

---

refugees warrants acknowledgement and inclusion in human rights discourse situated in transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts.

**Human Rights Journeys**

*Human Rights* reflect a universalising notion of humanity and involve equal rights and freedoms that, at minimum all human should enjoy.\(^{364}\)

This section of this study’s participants’ human rights stories first retraces their lives before they faced persecution. Next, it outlines the types of persecution they faced which ultimately forced them to flee their homes and countries in search of security and refuge.

**Life Before Persecution**

I asked the participants during the early stages of the face-to-face interviews, “How was your life like before it was violently changed by the abuse and threats to your personal security?” One respondent, who was displaced by Somalia’s violent armed conflict and had lost family members in the ongoing mayhem, described a pre-war environment where “life was sweet before the conflict.” I went further to ask all the respondents what they missed about this peaceful stage of their lives and many mentioned that they missed their loved ones and the normalcy of their lives before the human rights violations and displacement.

From their stories, it was evident that during their pre-persecution and pre-flight lives, they had lived in a peaceful milieu. This idea of the right to peace is proclaimed in the international *Santigo Declaration on the Human Right to Peace*, \(^{365}\) which was adopted by the


International Congress on the Human Right to Peace in 2010. In its mix of rights, the Santiago Declaration presents among others, the right to education on and for peace and all other human rights (Article 2); and the right to human security and to live in a safe and healthy environment (Article 3). The Declaration finds its footing in United Nations (UN) frameworks related to the right to peace such as the *Vienna Declaration Programme of Action*, which was adopted in 1993 by the World Council on Human Rights. In its preamble, the Vienna Declaration recognises that “human rights derive from the dignity and worth inherent in the human person” and speaks to the need to fully realise human rights including the right of peace for all.

Against this backdrop of rights discourse relevant to peace and safe environments, the first part of the chapter broadly looks at the peaceful lives that the participants lived prior to their displacement. Generally most of them revealed that, prior to their flight, they had good lifestyles, they were self-sufficient and in control of their lives. This is what Suluhu from DR Congo had to say on this issue:

Before I left my country, life was ok …. When the first war came in 1996, things changed. After that, life became hard. We were living without peace.

Similarly, Jawara from Somalia talked about the peace that was present in his neighborhood before the start of his country’s civil war in 1991. He said that to date the conflict continues to ravage his country:

I was born in an old neighborhood of Mogadishu called Anzilotti, an Italian name. We were colonised by the Italians, so we have some Italian names. Somalia was also colonised by Britain and France. Anzilotti, which is a very old part of Mogadishu and it is where I grew up. My father was a Naval Engineer, I have two brothers and three sisters, and they all went to school as my parents were educated. My mother was a teacher in the school. In the 1990s war started in Somali. Before the war, life was sweet, good and beautiful. Anzilotti is big, very close to the sea. As a kid I used to play soccer and swim a lot and do gymnastics on the sand dunes …. I don’t think it will ever be like that again.
The participants also described the socioeconomic benefits they had accrued from the stable, normal and local social environments. For example, they had the benefits of working as farmers on their lands, being employed as teachers, or in political careers. One mother, Kuthula recalled how her professional and family life was progressing prior to Zimbabwe’s political violence, which since 2000 has characterised this country’s political landscape. She commented that,

Well, all I can say is that life was good. I was working and my husband was also working. During that time we were only having two kids, they were not yet three. The environment was super. Zimbabwe is a nice country I can say, we were staying in Harare at that time. We were staying in the police camp where I worked. My work provided accommodation in the camp. Life was good. I could live the way I wanted to live, do what I wanted to do, and I was free. I had the choice of education, had the freedom of advancing myself and educating my kids.

Lumana from DR Congo also noted that people lived as trained professionals, flourishing in their professions. He outlined the following in his story:

In 1982 …. I went to France for training as an Intelligence Officer …. and went again to Belgium for training. After I finished school, I got married; my wife was from the DR Congo. In 2000, I transferred to work in security intelligence …. in Kinshasa …. My life was good, had nice home and cars, and my children were going to school, I was having a nice life.

Many of my interviewees expressed that they missed their pre-flight lives in their home countries. For example Lumana emotionally reflected on his separation from his children and on the loss of his wife whose life was brutally ended:

I miss my late wife a lot and I miss my children. They are not here with me …. When I escaped from prison I came here [Botswana] but my wife was arrested by government people. She was tortured …. until she died because they wanted to know where I was.

Another respondent, Adowa from northern Uganda shared the following in his story:

I miss the fun we used to have as a family, the peace. I miss the togetherness, having all your nephews, nieces, uncles, parents, brothers and sisters. The tales from the grandparents who unfortunately today I don’t even have one, they are all dead.
It is also important to note that a few of the respondents recalled their pre-flight lives as one of struggle and persecution. This reflection is closely associated with the cycle of human rights abuses that are prevalent in quite a number of African countries. For example, as a result of violent conflict, since his childhood Kagiso who hails from Burundi has primarily lived in exile. This is what he had to say:

I grew up in Burundi …. went to primary school and I first became a refugee in 1988 …. while in Standard 3 [Grade 3]. [My family and I] fled to Tanzania and stayed there for some time. Although they eventually returned to Burundi, in 1994 they were displaced again by armed conflict. Today I still live as a camp refugee.

Chibanda has also lived as a refugee from the time he was 8 years old and this is the only life he has known. He reflected that while living in his home country,

They burnt our house; I was small, maybe 8 years old. It has been a long time now I am 32. We …. ran to the border by Mali and crossed into Mali …. I cannot remember how long we stayed there but … I don’t like to talk about this because I don’t think it helps …. You see I am here I have refugee status what is the next step …. No exit …. what next? I am suffering from January to January. The international community may know my story but they are not going to help me …. Someone will read my story and feel pain, so what? I am still in a cage.

Apart from these few testimonies where violence was present from an early stage, generally, most of the narratives reflected a pre-flight, pre-persecution reality of living normal and happy lives in peace and stability.

**Encountering Persecution**

The participants went on to tell me stories about the sudden violent episodes that abruptly changed the course of their lives. These occurrences threatened their inherent human dignity, right to life as well as their freedom from fear.\(^{366}\) For some it was the sudden outburst of an armed conflict, for others it was falling victim to politically-motivated violence, and for some

their persecution came as a result of other family members’ involvement in politics. Commenting on the changes that occurred as a result of armed conflict Nagaya who is originally from Rwanda revealed that:

I was still at school until I finished in 1994. I had just finished when the war started the Rwandan genocide. My father was a Hutu and my mother a Tutsi, so [my siblings and I] were mixed. When the war started, the Hutu were killing the Tutsi so we got confused. We did not know which ethnic group to belong to.

Uxolo disclosed how her family was displaced from Namibia after her father was subjected to politically motivated violence. He was at the time an active member of the Caprivian cessation movement. She stated that,

Changes came as the police started visiting. Sometimes they would question the younger one asking him where our dad was. They suspected my Dad of something, my Dad is Caprivian …. One afternoon when I came from school I found the house messed up and I was asking my Mum what is going on and she said go and pack what you can we are leaving …. That evening my uncle came to pick us up but my Dad was not with him, we just got into the car and drove all the way to some village where we found my Dad with some luggage. We kept on questioning and no one would give us answers. So we thought that maybe this is the way to the new life. We slept in this village …. in some kind of thatched shelter. It was just thatch on top but the sides had nothing, by then I was around 11 years …. and was supposed to be doing my Standard 7 [Grade 7] …. The next morning we headed for the river and there was a man that came with a canoe and we were told to get on the canoe. I asked my Dad how come we are using a canoe to cross over, he said just get in …. When we got to the other side …. my Dad …. finally said to us ‘welcome to Botswana.’ I asked him what do you mean, he said we are in another country … we were in a national park. The people that helped us cross the river told us to walk a certain way until we reached a military camp. My Dad left our luggage in the bush and as we were walking a military car approached us and asked where we were going. My Dad said we were going to the other Caprivians …. They told us to get into their car …. we did not even go for more than a kilometre and saw lions on the road …. I just saw my Mum start to cry …. when she saw the lions …. At the military camp they

---

cooked for us and gave us blankets ... The next day they took us to Maun State Prison, we were there for 3 days, the girls were locked up with the ladies and the boys with the men. In all these experiences lives were radically changed as threats of atrocity set in and my respondents’ rights “to live in peace…. and remain in their respective countries” were disrupted. Single men, women, and families were suddenly forced to abandon these rights and exercise their right to seek asylum. This right to seek asylum is stipulated in various international and regional human rights documents such as the UDHR and the *Africa Charter on Human and People’s Rights* (ACHPR). For example, adopted in 1981 by African member countries of the African Union’s (AU) predecessor - the Organisation of African Union (OAU); the ACHPR, stipulates in Article 12 (3) that “every individual shall have the right, when persecuted, to seek and obtain asylum in other countries in accordance with the laws of those countries and international conventions.” The framers of these UN and OAU documents were conscious that threats to human security such as armed conflict and other forms of human rights violations by either state or non-state actors would cause forced displacement or refugees fleeing war. In this regard, those facing danger would need to search for refuge, peace and security outside their national boundaries. As the personal narratives below demonstrate, this right to seek asylum played a life-saving role for those who have fallen victim to the persecution of their rights.

Types of Persecution Faced

“Please tell me about the human rights mistreatment you faced,” I inquired of each participant as I continued to learn more about the trajectory of their plight. Responding to this question, a rape survivor of the Rwandan genocide tearfully and painfully recalled the barbarous act of being subjected to sexual violence. Nagaya narrated how she was discovered in hiding by Hutu militia men.

The guys came to the house .... searching everywhere .... One of them saw me hiding under the bed. I told them that I was .... alone. They were four of them .... I was still young, hey, they raped me .... They said I would be their wife and if I left that house they would kill me. All four of them raped me.

This violation and other forms of ethnically-motivated persecution caused Nagaya to flee her country in search of refuge and security. Her story echoes Duthie’s observations that massive human rights violations and forced displacement are “integrally linked.”371 As Duthie observes, evidence that human rights violations lead to displacement is visible in the definitions that deal with displacement such as the term “refugees” found in the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. It is also evident in the forms of violations that displaced persons faced. The links between refugees and human rights are also apparent in other examples in Africa, Latin America and Asia where a handful of truth commissions have included human rights narratives in their documentation of survivors’ testimonies. These commissions include those in Liberia, Guatemala and East Timor. For example, East Timor’s Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation examined the role that displacement played as a weapon of war as well as in situations that included loss of livelihoods.372

372 Ibid.
The participants’ stories also revealed to me that their fear of persecution set in as they became victims of human rights violations which included torture, xenophobic attacks, ethnopolitical conflict and other abuses. These atrocities threatened their “right to life, liberty and security of person.” Captured below are some extracts from their stories of the horrors they faced. A large portion of this chapter is dedicated to these stories in order to provide the much needed space for survivors in their own voices to narrate their human rights experiences.

Fearing persecution during the Rwandan genocide, Nagaya further recalled how she hid and feared losing her life:

People got scared …. when that plane went down, everything went downhill from then …. The Presidents were coming from Tanzania when their plane was shot …. On the radio … they were saying …. everyone must remain at home …. Then they started killing Tutsis. In my family we decided to separate and flee …. right away …. My brother said instead of all of us dying let us separate. I went with another family and hid with them. The husband was from Burundi…. he had a Tutsi wife and two daughters …. During the day, the husband, a Hutu …. was the one going out. He would come back and tell us that …. they were killing people. He said that they …. were putting barriers, and if they found you in another neighbourhood and you were Tutsi, they would kill you. He said they were cutting people with machetes. We remained in the house, we could not even eat, we were shivering scared.

Hetep a survivor of ethnopolitical persecution and a former Secretary for a leading opposition party in DR Congo, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), recalled the fear he felt following his capture and torture in a safe house and prison.

In December 2000 after I did that press conference …. the police came to my place and arrested me. I was not put in a prison. I was put in what …. I can call a safe house …. While staying there …. they were saying that I wanted to bring trouble in the region …. I

---

373 Ibid.
374 In 1994 the Presidents of Burundi (Cyprian Ntaryamira) and Rwanda (Juvenal Habyarimana) were killed in a plane crash. The Presidents were returning from Tanzania where they had been discussing ways to end ethnic violence in their countries. The crash occurred near Kigali, the Rwanda capital. Following the crash, fighting broke out in both countries. In the case of Rwanda the violence escalated into the genocide.
was staying in the region for Laurent Kabila. He is from Katanga. He is a Luba that is his region …. If you spoke something bad against him, automatically you were said to be against him. So you would be taken to prison. I was tortured but not so much but enough to give me a lesson of fear. They just took me, they gave me food once. It was not edible but it kept me alive. I slept on the bare floor with no mattress…. When they assassinated Kabila …. I was still under house arrest. After he was killed his son Kabila junior …. took over. After he took over, he suspected 150 people saying they were involved in the death of his father …. I was automatically linked to the assassination. This is because of my … last press statement where I said, if Kabila is not careful, he will die like Mobutu. They said I knew about the assassination. After that, I was transferred to the prison in Buluyo … In the prison that is where I was now being tortured …. When I reached there they took my clothes and gave me the prison clothes and said now you are here you have to give us information. For me I was thinking now it is finished. When you are at that place, there is no way you can come out. I was thinking that now I am going to die. They were forcing me to tell them the reason Kabila died. They were convinced that I knew about the death of Kabila. They beat me in the morning, just beating; using iron rods and kept beating …. you can see here [showing me the marks]. Now the marks have disappeared a lot. They put an iron on me. They …. would beat me in the morning and during the day they would send me to walk and collect water pushing the drums you had to make sure that you push at least 6 drums per day …. During the night they would make you undress and pour water on you and you have to sleep on that pool of water and in the morning they would come again and beat …. I spent about 6 months there before I escaped from hospital after I got sick.

Another one of my study participants, Salaamata who initially sought refuge in South Africa until he became one of the victims of the 2008 xenophobic attacks on African immigrants and refugees narrated his testimony to me as follows:

They came and entered the shops. There were many of them. Us we don’t have anything. They were having everything. We did not know that they were coming. We were just doing our business, we did not think about this, they came and entered in the morning. At that time we had no choice, we just had to run to save our lives. When they came into the shop, they took some things, some beat the shopkeepers inside, there were Zimbabweans and Mozambicans …. Things were dark, we went back to Johannesburg. I had no choice but to go to the police station. There were many people like me. The police told me to go behind the station, and I saw many refugees who I joined. It was during winter and we were sleeping outside the police station. Luckily some angels some people of the Christian community helped us with blankets. We stayed there outside for 3 weeks. They brought temporary toilets, but there were no bathrooms. It was very bad, it smelt. After two weeks under the parking lot they put a tent around …. Then they took us to a

375 Laurent-Desire Kabila was President of DR Congo from 1997 – 2001 after overthrowing Mobutu Sese Seko. His Presidency ended after he was assassinated in 2001. A few days later he was succeeded by his son Joseph Kabila who was re-elected to office in 2011.
temporary shelter in Southern Johannesburg, in Turrfontein. They gave us those white tents, for 4 people in one. We stayed there for 2 months. After 2 months in Turrfontein …. God bless the Muslim and Christian communities, because if Muslims came at lunch time, the Christians came at supper time. They brought us food, rice, maize meal. Initially we were not getting food from the South African government but later in Turrfontein the South African Red Cross would give us some packaged food …. Eventually we made our way to Krugersdorp …. We were having small money in our pockets and we decided …. to leave the country …. We ran to Botswana …. to Gaborone. We had to jump the border when we were by Mafikeng.

Selam, who fled armed conflict in Somali, recounted the following:

It was better to stay in the house otherwise you would be mistreated, we are a very small tribe …. I don’t remember how old I was when they killed my Dad, maybe 10. Anyway, my mother came and told us to leave before they harmed everybody else in the family. My brother and older sister had already disappeared …. I remember one time there was shooting in the camp and people were running, killing each other …. My mother, younger sister and I ran … We left by boat and went to Mozambique this was in 1999 …. I was terrified. We did not know where we were going. We were just going to a better place, where there is peace. Before we left, sometimes we could not even go to the shops …. There was fighting everywhere. You’d pass bodies; at times you’d see a dead woman with a small baby sucking her breast. In Mozambique we stayed in a mosque for some days. Then we went to Zimbabwe in a truck, me, mother, driver and younger sister, she was a small baby …. When we arrived in Zimbabwe, we found someone to pay to help us border jump …. Then they dropped us in Gaborone and we went to a police station. At the station they asked us some questions then they made us spend the night in a cell …. I was the one speaking. I knew little English then, after that they took us to another office for the Botswana Council for Refugees (BCR). It was BCR that brought us to the camp.

In addition, Fereta who as a teenager escaped forced conscription during Sudan’s civil conflict recalled that;

The Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) ambushed the place where we were staying. Someone was carrying a microphone saying tomorrow early in the morning no one is allowed to leave this town. Everybody should report themselves at the grounds that acted as a stadium where people would gather. So early in the morning they came, woke us up with canes. If you delayed they would beat you …. We were taken to a training centre called Mapoko military training. It was all boys. From there after staying a day, we were told to go and fetch water from a stream. This is when some of us escaped while fetching water. Bullets were flying all over as we ran. We were many. We travelled about 2 days, at night. During the day I slept in the bush, because during the day they would spot you. I eventually crossed illegally into Uganda. On my way I came across a truck driver, I explained my problem that I had escaped from the training center and that I did not want to be caught. He agreed to take me to Kampala. In Kampala, I found work at a
piggery place, while working there I told the owner about my situation. He offered to help me.

Luam, who is a mother from Somalia, described in graphic detail the nature of the street-to-street fighting in Mogadishu that went on day and night. She also describes her flight from Kismayo to Kenya to escape the mayhem. She tells her story in great detail, describing the horrors at the Utanga Refugee Camp:

I continued to stay with my aunt in Mogadishu and soon the war started in 1991 .... I was still young, 18 years old. Things were so difficult. Anytime you tried to go out, you felt like they were going to kill you. Day and night you were hearing the bombs, the shooting. You could not go out. It was my aunt who always went out to find something for us to eat. After some time in Mogadishu, my aunt came with a certain truck she took all of us to Kismayo .... In Kismayo .... we did not have a house. We were staying in a certain space the government had allocated to displaced persons. It was a yard just out in the open. During the day we sat somewhere in the shade and my aunt used to cook for us whatever she got I don't know where from. There were no toilets, nothing .... We eventually took a boat from Kismayo to Kenya. We came to a place called Shogra, a show ground where they used to keep the show animals, small houses, whatever. That time that is place that the Kenyan government gave to the refugees in Mombasa .... The place was so dirty so horrible. Every night there was a rape, all the time you heard screaming, small girls who did not come with their parents, even those who are having parents. The good thing is that my aunt she was having all of us .... so she was having boys and I was the only girl. The more boys then people feared. My aunt she used to hide me and say do not go out in the afternoon, after 4pm I was not allowed she'd say when they see you they may do something bad to you. There was no life there....Then they made a refugee camp called Utanga Refugee Camp .... In this camp they gave us .... beans and samp. There was no house, no tent, there was nothing at all. There was this place, which is fenced you go into the bush to cut something, which is like wood, and make your own house. They gave you something to cover, like a UNHCR plastic sheet. There was no mattress there was nothing, so we just slept on the floor .... I decided to go came back to Kismayo. I had no family. This father of my children, I met him in Kenya at the camp. We were not married then .... In the camp we were just friends but no relationship. I got to know him in Kismayo because his family also returned .... In Kismayo I did not have money I did not have anything. I regretted that I did not stay in Kenya. I ended up staying with the family of my children’s father as I did not have anything, no protection. I also had no choice but to get married to him because if I was not under anyone, I could be raped or killed .... you don’t have choice. That is your protection for your own good, whatever they say to you, you had to listen. I had my children in Kismayo. Soon my husband and I went to Mogadishu to try and find a job but there was nothing. There was fighting all the time. We eventually ran out and stayed at a displaced persons camp .... One day I was nearly raped by some guys. They came to the camp where we were staying and caught me. At the time I was pregnant. After they
caught me, one of the men saw I was pregnant he said, “ahh, she is pregnant leave her.” One of them said the pregnant ones are the best. The other said let us go we can get other ones. So that is how I escaped …. Eventually over time my husband came one day and said he had gotten his aunt to sell a goat and cow so we could leave the country … We left Somalia and came to Beira in Mozambique. We travelled by boat and when we arrived we stayed in the mosque for about 3 days. We met another guy who showed people how to enter into Botswana. At the mosque they helped us with transport money. We travelled with truck drivers to Zimbabwe and finally to Botswana.

Malimo is a political activist from Caprivi, and supporter of the cessation movement. He described the fear instilled in him as he came face-to-face with guns pointed at him by government agents. He thought he was going to die that night. Here is what he recounted in his own words:

I told them … that all I knew was that Caprivians wanted independence from the rest of Namibia …. They asked me if Caprivians going to Botswana will arm themselves and fight for independence. Soon they left, but intelligence people would come now and again. After about a week in…. they came again. This time they were aggressive, they pointed guns at me one in front and one at the back and they said now you will tell us the truth. Why are the Caprivians renouncing the government? I was really scared as I had not come face-to-face with a gun before. They said ….we know you were involved in politics in the village of Mr. Muyongo.376 When they came the third time …. one of them was holding my shirt by the neck and twisting me. They said that the next time they would take me to the cells. After this situation, I told my wife that we should not stay and be killed. I told her that we should join the others in Botswana.

Dembe is a mother from Zimbabwe, who is desperate to see change in her country. Consequently she joined the opposition movement hoping to contribute towards political and economic change. Instead, as a member of the leading opposition party in Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), her life was threatened causing her to flee the country. The following is part of her story:

Life became tough …. it began to change economically just because of the political issues, because of the sanctions that were imposed on Zimbabwe. This was around 2002,

376 Mishake Muyongo is a former member of the first Namibian Parliament that was formed after Namibia gained its independence in 1990 from South Africa. Muyongo a key leader of the cessation movement fled Namibia in the late 1990s and now lives in exile in Denmark.
things started getting difficult. It was now difficult to get things from the shops, unless you had someone who could give you through the back door, the prices were high. They could just change. In the morning it was one price in the evening it is different …. During the elections in 2008, that is when things were now worse with the political issue. After the first round of elections in April when MDC was leading and the results were delayed, people were being beaten and tortured. We were no longer free in our own country. We could not even be free to say anything …. My husband was not involved in politics. I was in the women’s league for MDC since its inception as a political party. I had joined politics because of the hardships we faced. Let me to say, we wanted change. I wanted change. I said to myself, we cannot keep suffering like this…. However, I did not disclose my political status during the day, because the ruling party youth were beating the opposition if they knew you were supporting the opposition. So in the afternoon, I would attend the rallies for the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). At night I would attend rallies for MDC, because if the ruling party supporters said to you, say the party slogan and if you did not know it, they would beat you. So when they said – “Pamberi ZANU-PF – Forward ZANU-PF” you’d respond saying “PASINE MDC – DOWN MDC” and you repeat …. So in the afternoon in the daylight, I would be a ZANU-PF member, and in the evening, at night I went to my party. After the 2008 elections this is when I disclosed my political status …. When the results were released, we were now celebrating thinking MDC had won. We were now out. Instead of wearing our party T-shirts in the evenings, now we were wearing them during the day …. However, when I disclosed my party status, I created problems …. They [ZANU-PF youth and veterans] came one evening to my house and they said …. we want you to accompany us. They said we want you to tell us what is happening we thought you were ZANU-PF and now we see you are MDC. They were now beating me. It was after this these beatings that I decided to go to Botswana.

Udo is a political activist from Uganda who escaped political persecution. He described in great detail his support and work for Dr. Besijye during the national elections and how the state’s security agents beat his uncle to find out his whereabouts. Udo realised that he had to flee the country or he would be killed by Museveni’s agents. This is his story:

At University I was part of a political activist group called the Ugandan Young Democrats. That is where I started my activism and we were anti-government in our views. We were against things like corruption which was rife. Like any government that seemed to be good at first, Museveni’s government had derailed from its position after coming to power. Museveni had promised that he would stay in power for about 10 years

---

377 Yoweri Museveni is the current President of Uganda. He has held this post since 1986 when he deposed Milton Obote who had previously deposed the notorious dictator Idi Amin in 1979.
and leave but he wanted to continue staying in power. In 1999 Dr. Kiiza Besijye\textsuperscript{378} fell out with Museveni. He had initially been in Museveni’s Movement, the National Resistance Movement (NRM). Besijye wrote a dossier, which singled Museveni for having lied to the people of Uganda. Museveni wanted him to be court marshalled .... but members from his constituency protested. Instead, Besijye tendered his resignation from the army. Few months after that, he declared his intent to stand for President and the ‘pressure group’\textsuperscript{379} called for a reform agenda. Most of the political activists at the time were against the government of Museveni .... and were looking for the elections to be held in March in 2001. At the time I was chosen to be head of the Youth Mobilisation Desk for the central region. I did campaign work and went around the region. Unfortunately we were earmarked by members of Museveni’s regime, primarily members of the intelligence, the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) formerly known as the Violence Crime Crack Unit (VCCU). They followed us during the campaign and gave us a difficult time. As the campaigns went on, towards election time, many members in our group started disappearing and were taken to the so-called safe houses.... I was staying in Kampala with my uncle. The voting day came and our candidate, Besijye, who was earmarked to win the elections unfortunately, did not. Museveni’s government did not allow it.... In August 2001, Besijye was put under surveillance and they started doing it to other members of our group. I thought that maybe I would survive but unfortunately towards the end of August the security agents located where I was staying with my uncle who was also an activist. They came to his place around 8pm and using gun butts, they hit his door until they entered and insisted on knowing my whereabouts because I was not at home that time. I was in the neighbourhood with my comrades. My aunt said that they hit my uncle badly on the head and he was bleeding profusely.... They threw him in a military Landover, even with his wife seriously pleading with them. They did not listen. They went to an undisclosed destination and my uncle’s wife called me on my cell and narrated to me what had happened. I decided not to go back home. I went into hiding in the suburbs of Kampala in a place called Kibuli and I stayed at a friend’s place for about 2 weeks. I heard over the radio that Besijye had managed to escape and fled to South Africa and had gone into hiding. Fortunately I had the contacts of our Campaign Manager. I called and informed him about what had happened as I realised that my circumstances were bad. He asked if I had any means of leaving the country. I told him I did not have enough money on me. He organised some for me, which he brought in the night. I asked him so how do I travel.... Under a pseudonym he organised a temporary travel document for me that allowed me to travel in the East African region.

Some of the women also revealed how they became victims of human rights abuses because of their husbands’ roles as political activists. For example Kuthula remembered how she

\textsuperscript{378} Dr. Kiiza Besijye is the current leader of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), which is the leading opposition party in Uganda. He contested the election in 2001, 2006, and in 2011 he lost to Museveni.

\textsuperscript{379} Pressure groups are also known as advocacy groups. They utilise advocacy to influence policy and public opinion.
was interrogated and tortured as her interrogators sought to know of her husband’s whereabouts. She recounts the pain she suffered in great detail as she struggled to keep her young children together. She shared the following story:

It was more than interrogation. They were torturing to get answers for questions that you don’t have answers for …. There were some other things I could not tell them that now he was in a refugee camp in Botswana. I knew that I would never be able to leave the country if I told them. They beat under the feet; beating under the feet to get the answers and shocking …. We know how we will deal with you. Their dealing meant putting pressure on me through abuse. I don’t know how I can put it, it was abuse. They would use the open wires for shocking electricity just to get answers. It was hell, it was hell. I was forced to leave my baby who was still very young, still breast-feeding. It was so pathetic. You know when you are just taken and you spend three to four days away from home, being asked things, being abused …. I am telling you, sometimes, I don’t want to lie, I hated my husband. I felt like if he was here I was going to punch him …. The person I was blaming was my husband. I was thinking that he was now safe while I was in a mess with the kids. You can image with a small baby, I really felt anger towards him. I felt it so much that I felt I needed a divorce I even planned to have a divorce…. Then my husband called me and tried by all means to cool me down, but it was something else. He was telling me it is better I leave the country whether I divorce him or not, they would kill me, they would think I was part of the plan. He said those people will kill you. Leaving the place though was tough.

As they narrated their stories, the participants also talked about the assistance they received during their flight to safety and freedom. The segment below captures their flight from persecution; in particular it narrates how they fled from their home countries and journeyed to Botswana.

**Fleeing Persecution**

Participants referred to the boats and the buses they used to escape or the days and weeks of walking they had to endure as they fled persecution in their home countries. In particular, they talked a lot about the role that transnational truck drivers played in helping them to pass through different countries and international borders until they were either in an adjacent country or were in Botswana. For example Fereta, who is from Southern Sudan, suggests that truck
drivers were not human smugglers. On the contrary, the truck drivers represented an escape route for people on the run seeking refuge:

Along the way I was seeking help from the truck drivers. I told them why I was running from Sudan …. When I arrived here, I did not have enough money to get to South Africa having paid all the truck drivers, so I handed myself over to the authorities in Botswana. Adowa who is from Uganda describes in great detail escaping attacks from the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and how a truck driver stopped to give him a lift to Kenya. This is what he had to say:

I ran as far as I could and I found myself on the highway leading out of Gulu (Uganda), towards Kampala (Uganda) …. I was lucky enough there was a truck that came and gave me a lift. I had run only with the clothes I had. This truck driver was from the North West district and was heading to Kenya …. So I ended up in Kenya.

Jawara also described how truck drivers assisted her and her family on part of their journey from Somalia to Botswana:

We lived there (Somalia) until 2002. We could not continue to live there because of the intense fighting. Finally we went to Kismayo sea port next to Kenya and from there we took a boat until we reached Mozambique …. Some members of the Botswana Defence Force had been in Somalia so that is how we heard of Botswana, so we knew where we were going. From Mozambique we travelled through Zimbabwe then we reached Botswana. We travelled by trucks. At the Zimbabwe and Botswana border …. we jumped over the fence that is how we came here.

Similarly, Udo from Uganda used a labyrinth of truck drivers to move from one country to the next. Udo was fleeing political persecution in Uganda:

From Uganda I managed to negotiate my transport until I reached …. Mwanza port in Tanzania. I was free, so I proceeded up to Dar-es-Salam …I got into a bus and proceeded up to the border between Tanzania and Zambia so that is where my travel document for East African countries ended. I had to think of how to continue whether to use truck drivers. I negotiated with one truck driver who could take 50 dollars to travel from the Zambia and Tanzania border to the Zambia and Zimbabwe border. He had some salt bags in his truck. It was a long truck so he hid me under the canvas, in between some of the bags. He told me that there was a friend who came from South Africa to Zimbabwe that he would get in touch with and hand me over to him. When we reached the Zambia and Zimbabwe border he managed to get in touch with his friend to come up and take me to
Bulawayo. Still I negotiated 50 dollars; it was another long journey eventually we arrived at Bulawayo.

Amani is a young mother from DR Congo who described how a ‘Mr. B’ helped her and her family cross into Botswana and freedom. She shared her story with me as follows:

Mr. B …. said I can take you up to Bulawayo [when we got there] he spoke to a truck driver to help us cross and get us to the United Nations office in Gaborone.

Tayo summed it up best when he explained that as people flee from persecution, they often leave with just the clothes on their back, with no documents, or with forged documents. As a result those without documents or with forged ones end up looking for truck drivers to transport them and to smuggle them into countries where they can best seek asylum. This is what he had to say on the issue:

When you are travelling and you don’t have documents, you try to fix documents …. We got a truck and it got us through the border and then we came to the UNHCR in Gaborone and asked for asylum.

In addition to the assistance that the participants received from truck drivers while on their flight to freedom, they also received assistance from faith groups. For example, a number of participants mentioned how at different points during their flight they sought help at either a local mosque or church in whichever city or town they were passing through. Udo describes the assistance he received at a mosque during his journey to Botswana:

He [truck driver] told me that he was stopping in Bulawayo so it was quite tough for me the money was not enough …. I managed to go to a mosque where I found one old Imam. I narrated my story to him and he accommodated me for two nights and he asked me why don’t you go to Botswana? …. The Imam asked me if I knew about Botswana and I said yes from geography. He said Botswana is a peaceful place. I asked how to get there. He said there are boys who go there every two days. I said I don’t have any travel documents. He said well they also border jump so eventually he connected me with them and those are the people that helped me to border jump into Botswana.

The narratives outlined above vividly demonstrate that human rights violations are one of the key triggers of forced displacement in sub-Saharan Africa. My study participants’ stories
illustrate their persecutors’ infringement of and denial of people’s civil and political rights, and socioeconomic and cultural rights. In light of this research’s goal of exploring the nexus between refugees’ narratives, truth commissions and peacebuilding, it is evident from the aforementioned stories that there is a pretext for commissions to respond to the plight of refugees. Truth commissions are set on improving human rights and as persecuted persons; refugees need a human rights response to their plight. For example, Eric Weibelhaus-Brahm’s work on truth commissions, democracy and human rights promotion focuses on this link between truth commissions and human rights. He asserts that truth commissions have widely been welcomed by human rights advocates as a key approach for responding to legacies of gross human rights violations. The narratives of refugees definitely reflect in many ways their journey of human rights struggles.

As Weibelhaus-Brahm further observes, over the past three decades truth commissions have become recognised as “victim-centered” bodies that provide the space for human rights survivors to tell their stories and have them officially acknowledged. They’ve played a role in revealing narrated truths about past human rights wrongs and have made recommendations about ways to avoid future violations, and ways in which survivors of abuse can be compensated. Article 2 of the UDHR stipulates that “everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” A human rights analysis of the participants’ narratives illustrates an infringement of this right as the various forms of state and non-state persecution targeted participants and their loved ones on the

381 Ibid, 4.
grounds of their ethnicity, gender, political affiliation and opinions as well as social origin and other status. These atrocities suggest that a more inclusive public space can be created by post-accord societies to allow for the stories of refugees to be articulated, documented and acknowledged. As Michael Humphrey and Estela Valverde note, “human rights [discourse in truth commissions] is being used to express …. injustice …. [and allow survivors of abuse] to reclaim their personhood.”382 The inclusion of refugees in the human rights discourse of truth commissions in their home countries would enable them to voice the reclaiming of their rights and lives.

The subsequent segment, which traces the continuation of my participants’ human rights journeys in a refugee camp context, further affirms the need to explore ways of including refugees’ human rights narratives in the work of truth commissions. Their stories of their lived experiences as camp refugees continue to employ a human rights discursive pattern. This theme of rights outlines how, as human rights survivors, my participants make meaning of their new lives following the violent distress they experienced that forced them to pay for safety, freedom and peace. Their camp experiences emphasise personal struggles with displacement and their forced refugee identity highlighting infringements forced displacement has had on their socioeconomic rights and gender rights. Participants’ stories also reveal how their resiliency enables them to strive to survive in the camp and their stories also outline lessons that participants believe can be drawn from their experiences. Finally, their stories reveal their personal fears, hopes and dreams about their futures.

Lived Experiences as Camp Refugees

To begin with the participants’ lived experiences in a refugee camp are explored and in particular the human rights struggles they now face as camp refugees.

Life after Persecution in Countries of Origin

Living as camp refugees. I asked the participants, “How is life like living as a refugee, and what does it mean to be a refugee?” I sought to learn how the persecutions they faced had affected their lives. One of the mothers, Kuthula, who struck me as an impressively strong, resilient, hard-working and focussed individual, emotionally responded that:

Being a refugee …. sometimes makes you feel like you are a nobody; you don’t feel like you have a choice …. The other time I was thinking that even if I were to call my name, I don’t think I can accept that’s my name. I don’t think this is me. You even refuse yourself, that this not me – this is not the life I should be living. There is no life in being a refugee.
You are reduced to someone who does not think, you cannot plan your future. You just live, with no hope. Living with no hope is pathetic. Living without plans is pathetic. Even if you say you are going to be a nurse, you can’t be trained. You are just a refugee. You can’t do anything unless it is an offer coming from someone who is saying we are sponsoring this. We refugees are lacking exposure, lacking education, lacking so many things.
We are not like other human beings.
We’ve been reduced to be …. like an animal that does not think, because someone has to think for you. Someone tells you …. today we have changed plans, now you are all living facing this side. Someone thinks for you. You don’t think for yourself.
[It is] more like you are nothing.

Her response in many ways echoed the feelings of the loss of human dignity that permeated other narratives shared with me by my study participants about their lived camp refugee experiences. Their narratives reinforced the notion that the persecutions robbed them of their basic rights and affected their self-worth and inherent dignity.

Outlined in its preamble and some of its articles, the UDHR recognises that human dignity serves as a cornerstone of human rights as it highlights the “dignity and worth of the
human person” found in the equality of rights and freedoms. Through this lens of dignity, every human being has the right to recognition, the right not to be treated inhumanely in degrading ways, the right to identity through nationality, and the right to be a member of society. Similarly the ACHPR also acutely considers the idea of human dignity recognising that fundamental human rights emanate from the traits of humanity and dignity of a person. Article 4 of the ACHPR stipulates that, “human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right.”

A close human rights analysis of the narratives on refugee camp experiences reveals a perpetuation of human rights struggles. For the participants, their lives seem to be an ongoing journey of human rights concerns, which started with disruption and persecution, followed by a perilous journey that led to their current life living in exile. As my participants’ stories below demonstrate, they believe that they’ve remained subjects of human rights violations as displacement infringes on their inherent dignity. It is only in their spirit of resiliency that the participants cling onto the hope of discarding the “helpless victim identity” to instead reclaim their sense of self-worth and live like “other human beings.”

**Human rights struggles experienced as camp refugees: Day-to-day life.** Many of the respondents portrayed their lived experience as refugees in a negative light. From their language it was evident that they felt that persecution had condemned them to a life in limbo with limited freedom, stress, and hardship. As Khotso from Zimbabwe stated, refugee life is like “hell on earth. It is like seeing some light in a tunnel and thinking that at the end of the tunnel there is a hole …. Only to find out that actually it is some light that is protruding from a small hole that

---

383 Article 4 of the ACHPR.
you cannot come out of. That is what the situation is like here in the camp.” Similarly, Kuthula from Zimbabwe describes how the camp’s culture is one of dependency for the refugees because there are no jobs and people are dependent on daily food rations to eke out a meagre existence to meet their basic human needs:

Life in the camp is terrible when you are not working and do not have means of living it is pathetic. No financial means, just depending on food rations, it is pathetic! You don’t know bread because you cannot afford to buy it. You don’t know eggs. You don’t know these other relishes like tomatoes. Anything which requires you to pop out money, you don’t know it.

Fereta also highlighted that people are depressed because they have nothing to do except experience the stress of living in a refugee camp environment. He also commented on the uncertain future that refugees face in the camps. There is no stability so that day-to-day living requires great courage. This is what he had to say on the issue:

In the camp life is stressful. There is no future … You cannot even imagine how your life will be like …. It is like you move from stress to stress. [Daily], you wake up and stay in the tent. You stress. You sit all day and wait for evening to go back to the tent to sleep. ….You reflect you ask yourself where this life is taking me. From this period [of becoming a refugee] there is no stability …. Like the Sudanese especially the Southern Sudanese. We’ve been moving up and down. You are here 1-2 years and then you are displaced. You are that side and then you are displaced. You are here then you displaced again. So there is no stable life. You cannot say I am doing this; there are no concrete plans to make. There is no stability; you cannot say you are going to cultivate land …. and whether you will go to school. For example, in Southern Sudan, if you ended up in school in …. the liberated areas, you’d be under big trees and the chalk boards would be put there …. During the raining season, you hold your book like this [demonstrates by holding book to cover his head]. The life of a displaced person requires courage. Out of my school mates who went to school with me, I can say I am the only one who has continued with schooling. The majority have either died and others joined the rebels…. Some who are alive might have gotten married.

Reflecting on the feelings of hopelessness found in living as a refugee, Uxolo from Somalia indicated that it isn’t easy. One’s existence is spent trying to crawl out of a dark room into the light:
Living as a refugee is not something easy that someone can go through. It is the worst life that somebody can ever go through. Living as a refugee is like being put in a dark room with no water and no light. You live trying to crawl out of that room …. it is not easy. It is not a good life. It is torturous life.

Commenting on the hardship and limitations of refugee life Tayo from Burundi compared living in the refugee camp to the metaphor of the goat tied to a stake who doesn’t know if it will be slaughtered or freed. He suggests that the government of Botswana should give refugees citizenship so that they can be free to live in the outside world:

I feel like it is not acceptable to live in the camp. It is like being a goat that is tied in the kraal and is waiting for its owner to release it …. It is just like that. As human beings we are not supposed to be tied like this. It would be better if the government made a law for refugees to have freedom of movement. You cannot tie someone in the camp like a goat and just feed them like you feed chickens in their cages and at the same time the food you are giving does not sufficiently feed them.

Refugees are human beings. They have names.
To live in the camp is like a punishment. If they cannot give us freedom of movement, they should give us citizenship or advise UNHCR to give us resettlement because some of us can never go back home. They can just look into it and help us but to live in the camp is the worst life ever. When they [officials] come for Refugee Day\(^{384}\) they think that we are enjoying here because they see us dancing during the event. They think that we are comfortable but the real fact is that no one can ever enjoy being a refugee because it is not a life that someone can think about.

Similarly, Emirembe who is Zimbabwean commented on the day-to-day hardship and struggles of living as refugees. She shared a story with me of how her daughter said that the family should have remained in Zimbabwe:

When we arrived they pitched tents for us …. They said “here is your tent and your belongings, your pot, blanket, mattress, and the other utensils, which you share with four other people.” That is what you are given. That is it. There is no second round [of provisions]. So the shared utensils are 1 bucket, 1 dish, 2 pots and metal cups, which we share. To bathe you fend for yourself. There is only one tent, so it is real challenge. You put a dish here and bathe in the tent there. It is really difficult. I remember one day it rained heavily and the tent just came down. Now everything was wet and I went outside and my daughter said, “Mum what you did was a bad mistake. We should have stayed

---

\(^{384}\) World Refugee Day is commemorated annually on June 20. As an initiative of the UN Refugee Agency, this day is used to raise awareness on the status and concerns of global refugees.
home. Maybe they were not going to kill you. Now we are struggling here while our food and beds are home.” So, it is really a challenge, it is something really touching.

In addition, Luam from Somalia summed up the fact that refugee life is enforced by human rights violations, and how living the refugee life is not a real choice made by most refugees. She narrated her story in the following way:

A person living as a refugee is a person who does not have a choice. To be a refugee is not something that you want for the rest of your life. A person who is in a refugee camp is someone who is from a place of suffering and had to overcome that suffering by asking …. a certain country for an asylum.

In addition to the aforementioned day-to-day lived experiences in the camp and what they meant to them, this study’s participants talked about the struggles they have encountered with having a refugee identity. Their narratives about these struggles are captured below.

**Human rights struggles experienced as camp refugees: Labelling refugees.**

Participants also discussed how they struggled with the refugee camp identity they’re forced to adopt as persons living in exile. They expressed how they felt robbed of their own identity and are forced to view themselves through a lens of victimhood and dependency where they were made to feel like a “nobody,” and a “hopeless person living in isolation and rejected.” This aspect of their human rights stories revealed how abuse by government agencies and non-state actors forced them to confront redefined identities, the challenges of one day feeling empowered and then the day after experiencing persecution, disempowerment and loss of dignity.

For example, Kayiroo from Burundi reflected on the refugee identity issue as follows:

It is a painful situation. We are different from others. Sometimes I used to say …. the bad thing in life is to be a refugee. It is a hopeless life. We have no future.
Similarly, Amani, who hails from DR Congo, expounded on the identity of dependency that has resulted from her living in the camp she describes as a prison. She stipulates that living in this child-like dependency zone means she can’t make decisions or impact her child’s life:

> It is not a good life being a refugee. It is like being in prison. In prison you are fed the way the officers planned. For example, you would eat cabbage with no option or choice. It is the same in the camp. It is like you are a child …. It is like you are still living like in prison. You have no decision of your own. For example, when we were growing we could say I don’t want to go to this school. Today as a refugee, I have no say over my child’s future. As a refugee …. I feel like I am not a mother, not a parent enough.

The respondents expressed the internal pain they feel when summing up their feelings on the chapter of their human rights lived experiences in the camp. They also expressed how they had lost ownership of their lives and rights. As Tayo shared with me, “I don’t know how I can explain …. it is painful. It is just a small word, but it is more than the word painful. It is too painful life …. My life will be never be the same again …. Everything has changed.” The participants also perceived that they felt “robbed of their future,” and that their lives had been interrupted. As Suhulu explained, “I wanted to go to the university …. but because of the war I missed that opportunity. I miss my friends, I miss my homeland, and I miss everything.” Moreover, Juwara expressed to me that “I never wanted to leave Somalia …. I was forced by the conflict and had to pursue safety.” He expressed the despair, fear, hurt and trauma he has experienced. In addition, Amahoro’s story indicates, “The scary thing is that the memories cannot go away. They are just stuck with you …. I always blame life and say life is not fair.” Or as Udo from Uganda lamented, human rights abuse orchestrated against the refugees did not give them alternatives. He indicated that “[refugees] had no choice but to become refugees …. I could be dead had I not escaped.” Amidst these struggles of dealing with the refugee identity issue and the reality of the refugee camp life, my participants also shared with me their stories about the
socioeconomic challenges they face as camp refugees. The subsequent section outlines some of these challenges.

**Human rights struggles experienced as camp refugees: Socioeconomic challenges.**

Respondents discussed the adverse impact that persecution in their home states and refugee life has had on their socioeconomic rights, loss of economic status, joblessness, poverty, and restricted freedoms such as freedom of movement. They noted that some of these challenges were also heightened by an encampment policy\textsuperscript{385} enforced by the government of Botswana. They were also reinforced by the country’s legal framework on refugee protection. Botswana’s national refugee legislation that was adopted on April 5, 1968 has reservations made to a few of the articles of the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* including reservations on wage-earning employment (Article 17 paragraph 1 and 3), freedom of movement (Article 26) and naturalisation (Article 34).\textsuperscript{386} Based on these reservations, with respect to wage-earning, the government has the prerogative to decide whether or not status refugees can access employment opportunities in the country or be naturalised. Moreover, the government can wilfully control the movement of refugees. Emirembe from Zimbabwe reflected on these struggles the following way:

\textsuperscript{385} The encampment policy refers to the restrictions on the freedom of movement of refugees and asylum-seekers in Botswana. According to the UNHCR field office in Dukwi Refugee Camp, “prior to 2008, refugees in Botswana had freedom of movement, and the right to work [despite reservations to the same]. From 2008, the government applied a strict encampment policy which requires exit permits to leave the camp, and work/ residence permits. In practice, few [permits] are being granted. Refugees/asylum-seekers found outside the camp without permission are detained; sometimes in prisons and/or at the Centre for Illegal Immigrants, despite [the fact that] there [is] no lawful provision for such detention, and no lawful sanction for breaching the unwritten encampment policy.” (UNHCR Botswana – Regional Protection Meeting, 26-28 January 2011).

Life in Dukwi is a challenge …. I have never lived a life of selling for survival. I have never lived a life of working very hard in the garden for survival. I have never lived as a maid. These are the things you have to do here. I don’t know the life of a maid. In my country I hired maids. Now for me to be a maid is a challenge …. The one blanket I was given in 2008 is now finished. With the mattress, it is like I am now just sleeping on the ground. When you sleep on it, in the morning you are not even refreshed …. So please let me go and fend for myself. I will buy a bigger mattress…. Why don’t they let us go out there and look for jobs?

Amani from DR Congo questions the refugee policy system because it makes refugees dependent, and docile without the will to struggle and make things happen for themselves:

Why are they keeping us here to be dependent….It is not normal, giving us food and not allowing us to go outside … this is something I don’t understand in this camp. You see sometimes people have courage to struggle to get a better life…. Let us struggle for that better life…. I thought the UNHCR plan was not to just give food to someone for 11 years and counting. By just giving me food, I don’t think it helps me. I don’t know what they are thinking. When I go back home, will I be given food? Right here, the more you give somebody food the more they stay relaxed. Whether it is enough or not, you make them lazy, you spoil their humanity.

I do not feel it is right at my age to be asking for things. Sometimes I get angry why should these people keep us here ... it is like they do not want refugees to grow, they want us to be beggars forever. If I go back home what will I do? If I am given citizenship here in Botswana then what will be fed?

Respondents also expressed that they wanted to be given opportunities to demonstrate they can be self-reliant individuals. They underscored that for most refugees, self-sufficiency and independence was part of their reality prior to the human rights abuse and their violent displacement thereafter. For example Juwara from Somalia illustrates the refugees’ capability to be self-sufficient even with all of the limitations in the camp. He said that the Somali community unites to support each other through various socioeconomic challenges:

For a long time now we’ve saved and shared the food rations we get from the UNHCR. We sell them in New Stance which is the village nearby here. At times the police have chased us. We [Somalis] don’t have weekends. We don’t have to go to clubs and drink, we save. So we’ve saved the money we got from selling our food rations and then we’ve bought different households goods. From the camp we’d [find ways to] go to South Africa by border jumping and buy from the Chinese there and bring the items here to sell
One Somali guy got a job with a car dealer in Gaborone. He came up with an idea that we save and put money together and buy a car. [This communal system works this way]. If for example I don’t have a car, many will contribute towards my car. I will only have to pay for the car. I don’t have to pay for it right away. So 30 people will contribute, and then I’ll have a car. Later on I will have to pay back the community. This way each one of us is helped. This is the way we help other Somalis who come to the camp. It is our way of living. Through this support at least today I can buy extra food for my family. Before, 10 years ago, this was not possible. So this is how Somalis are progressing in the camp. Today we even employ other nationalities in the camp to work in our homes as private tutors or maids.

Pursuant to the socioeconomic challenges this study’s participants also shared stories with me about the gender-rights challenges experienced by women and young girls in the camp. Below is what they had to say on this issue.

**Human rights struggles experienced as camp refugees: Challenges of gender rights and inequalities.** In addition to the socioeconomic rights challenges, the participants also outlined challenges that women and girls are faced with in the camp. In particular their stories focused on sexual and domestic abuse which they attributed to socioeconomic injustices. Citing numerous examples they noted that the absence or limited supply of basic female products such as underwear and body lotion led some girls and women to engage in prostitution in the neighbouring village and in the camp. For example Kikoendi from Angola had the following to say on this important issue:

> It is hard for the ladies if they are not doing anything. They just sell themselves, bitching around. You see small girls already having babies, you feel pity for them. They are not given anything here to make themselves beautiful. The men who have piece jobs[^1] can give them something, so they go and sleep with them.

Also Alaafia from DR Congo noted that “they [women and girls] want to wear something nice.”

[^1]: Piece jobs in Botswana refer to informal day to day or part time jobs. Some examples of piece jobs include housekeeping, gardening, farm and manual labour.
In contrast Luam from Somalia believes that women who are domestically abused are uneducated and feel hopeless and powerless in the wake of the beatings they receive from their partners if they have a family:

Some women are ok. Some are not ok. A human being is like these fingers on the hand, are they the same? They are not the same. Some are abused, and those ladies are ignorant, they are illiterate. They don’t know anything; they cannot do anything, whatever their husbands say they accept. They feel like where I am …. I am not with my family, where can I go? She has 3-4 children, so she says no, if I leave this man where am I going to go with these children. How am I going to raise these children alone? So the situations are like that … I have seen many women with bruises on their faces and you ask who did this, they say my husband they just accept it.

Similarly, Safia believes that the patriarchal culture reinforces men’s control over women in the camp:

Here it [domestic abuse] is too much. I have heard many stories of how husbands are abusing their women. There is nothing that the women can do. Our community tells you “go back to your husband.” I cannot feel like I have my rights. They don’t see women as having rights. Even if I am suffering, I must sleep with him. There is no way of resolving these problems in the community; our men are very proud…. I am not allowed to ask for divorce and yet he can or even marry other women. If I ask for divorce he feels like he is nothing. I am a wife; I am a woman …. My daughter she asked me, “why was I born as a girl? What is a woman?” …. The problem is women are not educated. Most women are … always under the husband, even working harder than him, but always under him.

Nye from Namibia argues that young girls in the camp are raped and taken advantage of by male predators because they are not educated and don’t have older women to mentor or protect them:

Women are beaten and raped. Girls are taken advantage of, 13, 14 year old girls. They say this is accepted because they are giving the girls what they do not have. I call it the raping of young girls. Men are taking advantage of kids, it is rape, and rape is rape. They are taking advantage of their situations, taking advantage of their lack of their knowledge.

Selam from Somalia also recalled how socioeconomic and gender-related challenges played a key role in her decision to get married young while attending high school in the camp:

I grew up in the camp …. I remember going to fetch water …. we used to carry on our heads, 20 litres of water even 40 litres. Then I was very strong. Now at least when you have a wheelbarrow it is better. I was happy when my mother bought a wheelbarrow; it was easier to carry the water ….. When I reached Form 3 [Grade 10], I found a rich guy
[shop owner in the camp] …. I decided that it was better to get married …. He used to see me passing from school and he’d buy me drinks and chips. I said this guy is very rich. Then somehow we got married in 2001. When I got married I was 16 and he was 35. In our culture it is normal especially when the girl is mature. When you get your period you are mature …. Anyway, I got pregnant. I used to wear a big jacket to school so the teacher would not see that I was pregnant, but somehow she found out that I got married, that they made a wedding for me …. I just left school when my stomach was big now. I am very happy, he is a good husband. I am the only wife.

Despite the human rights struggles outlined about their lived experiences as camp refugees, my study participants also shed light about how their resiliency empowers them to strive to survive these struggles on a daily basis. Moreover, they shared with me lessons they felt that their human rights journeys present. These narratives are outlined below.

Human rights struggles experienced as camp refugees: Overcoming struggles through resiliency. Further inquiry into the human rights stories of the respondents revealed that despite the daily struggles of their lived refugee experience, they chose to triumph over adversity. They revealed a resilient demeanour that is in line with the resiliency literature that seeks to understand the human ability to overcome life’s stresses and shocks such as violent armed conflict.\(^{388}\) As a process, resiliency is perceived as a way in which individuals can navigate through and adapt to threatening situations.\(^{389}\) For example, Hetep from DR Congo outlined how adaptation and the quest for survival meant reclaiming his sense of human dignity and self-worth:

> You really need to have courage to live the life of a refugee. You wake up in the morning you don’t have anything. You go to find a piece job like cutting trees. You live on beans.


Even a person who is not educated can just insult you. So that is why I am saying it really takes courage. You have to accept your situation.

Similarly, Khotso from Zimbabwe argues that when he evaluates whether it is best to return home or remain at the camp he realised that he has resiliency and the knowledge to cope with daily challenges in the camp. So he has hope. If he were to return back home he would suffer and would likely be tortured and killed:

Well it is a matter of weighing things. I tell myself that despite the fact that I am living in squalor conditions …. it is ok to live in a squalor condition and get the chance to improve myself. It is better than going back home to suffer and know that anytime something can happen to me. So when you weigh the two [realities] you end up finding that the difficulties that you are facing here [in the camp], you would rather try and stand up to them and try to fend them off, because they mainly present challenges. These challenges are within my reach, I have the capacity and capability to fight them but I don’t think that I would have such ability if I was home. So this is the very thing of survival. It is what gives me hope that someday things will be ok. I will be out of this trouble and this is one thing that I am trying to help others see. That, if you live with hope, you will always develop the strength to fight whatever challenges come.

Safia reflected on the source of her resiliency, which is her children. She fights hard to survive in order to support her children and ensure that they have a future:

I feel like I have a big wound in my heart. I have five kids. Sometimes I want to kill myself then I think what will happen to my kids. Then I think, let me just continue because of the kids.

Similarly, Musango also realises that his resiliency in part relies on working to support his children to meet their needs:

You realise what circumstances you are in and say I have to find a way of working for my children and my future and theirs in the midst of this situation.

Salaamata also highlights similar sentiments about surviving the storms of life, and working to support his family:

It (is) very tough, but no problem, because if you are alive you can get what you want …. now we are here …. we are surviving.
In many ways the participants’ demeanour of resiliency reminded me of a poem written by William Ernest Henley entitled “Invictus,” which speaks volumes about the resiliency of the human spirit and its ability to overcome trying times in life. The poem kept Nelson Mandela going when he was a prisoner on Robben Island. It reads as follows:

Out of the night that covers me,
    Black as the Pit from the pole to pole,
    I thank whatever gods may be
        For my unconquerable soul.

    In the fell clutch of circumstance
    I have not winced nor cried aloud.
    Under the bludgeoning of chance
    My head is bloody, but not unbowed.

    Beyond this place of wrath and tears
    Looms but the Horrors of the shade,
    And yet the menace of the years
    Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

    It matters not how strait the gate,
    How charged with punishments the scroll
    I am the master of my fate
    I am the captain of my soul.$^{390}$

The themes woven throughout this poem mirror the journeys of struggle, resiliency and survival that the individual and collective voices of my participants speak to in their stories. It speaks to the lessons that they believe their stories offer to humankind. These lessons are presented in the subsequent section.

**Human rights struggles experienced as camp refugees: Lessons from our struggles.**

The participants were asked about lessons that could be drawn from their refugee experiences and human rights stories. They revealed the value they found in storytelling about human rights

---

$^{390}$ William Ernest Henley, “Invictus,” *Echoes of Life and Death*, (Portland, ME: Thomas B. Mosher, 1908), IV.
experiences. For example Amahoro from Burundi stated, “My story can help others and teach about acceptance and the need to realise a common ground.” Additionally some believed that the storytelling process provided an avenue for awareness-raising and advocacy for persecuted persons. For example, Emem from Eritrea felt that through storytelling on human rights, others will hear and learn of the need for peace and the need to avoid creating refugee situations. Fereta from Southern Sudan also shared with me the pride he felt in narrating his experiences as well as having the space to tell her story of struggle and survival:

I’m proud to tell my story, we learn from experiences of struggle and victory. We learn from our stories, from our history. I am proud to share my story. It is not only me who is a refugee; there are others who have faced worse situations than me. If there are some people out there who feel rejected and have lost hope, such stories can help reconstruct their lives. In addition …. history teaches us to correct past mistakes …. it teaches us to maintain good paths of life. So I am proud to share my story. Coming from South Sudan, given the fruits of the suffering we went through, we are now able to celebrate the fruits of the struggle with our independence. This means a lot. It shows that if you struggle whether individually or nationally with objectives, at the end of the day you will be victorious.

Fereta’s story underscored the messages or lessons that the participants believed their stories brought to what he described as “life’s big classroom.” The interviewees thought their stories comprised lessons about the need to educate and raise awareness about refugee issues, respect for human life and dignity, the need to protect and uphold human rights, the necessity of redressing social injustice, as well as promoting conflict prevention, nurturing empathy and compassion, and educating people about discrimination and intolerance. For example, Musango reflected about refugee issues and the need to protect and safeguard human rights, asserting that “the international community needs to know that refugees live a disturbed life … and that human rights need to be secured for everyone.” Tayo from Burundi spoke about how refugee stories illustrated the prevalence of social injustice in their countries.
In addition, Juwara spoke about conflict and conflict prevention, outlining that our stories educate people “about the destructive nature of armed conflict. It completely disrupts lives. Conflict denies people… peace, prosperity, equality and justice … there is need to stop wars.” Amani from DR Congo also stated that “there is a need to solve conflicts when they emerge. Most governments delay when they hear about small problems. They ignore them. However, those small problems became like the fire of matches when you throw it somewhere it starts slowly until it builds.” Alaafia built on this notion of conflict prevention, reflecting on the “individual responsibility that we all have to create peace” so that peace starts with individual responsibility. Udo also noted the importance of respecting human life and dignity, stating that “there is need for people to realise that they should respect human life, and for leaders and politicians to respect human life.”

The intersection between refugees and human rights issues was a critical component of refugees’ stories. The participants believed that displacement and life in exile equated to an ongoing human rights struggle. This view of displacement also highlights the intersection between refugees and transitional justice. In her research on displacement, transitional justice and reconciliation, Megan Bradley alludes to this link between displacement and transitional justice, providing evidence of transitional justice processes that have redressed human rights abuses related to displacement. For example, she cites domestic and international tribunal cases where arbitrary forced displacement was prosecuted as a war crime. This was the case in post-accord Bosnia and Cambodia where forced migration was prosecuted as a “legal violation.”

---

392 Ibid.
Bradley also refers to the 2004 Report of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General on the Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies, which highlights the need to have transitional justice programs that “pay special attention to abuses committed against groups most affected by conflict, such as … displaced persons and refugees.”

This study’s participants’ stories on displacement that feature concerns about human dignity, gender and socioeconomic rights underscore this need to include displaced persons in post-violence interventions as highlighted by the UN. To borrow an observation made of a displacement situation in the Middle East; “the experiences of refugees within the camps are dire and unacceptable. The lack of opportunities available to refugees is an impediment to their welfare and their right to live a dignified and prosperous life.”

Further probing of the nexus between refugees’ human rights narratives and truth commissions illustrates the important empowering role that human rights storytelling plays for survivors of persecution. This was evident in the way in which the study participants were able to give voice to their plight and express the ways in which human rights violations have impacted their lives. Storytelling created for them an avenue for discourse on human rights truth-telling. The process allowed them to call for durable solutions to the violation of displacement, which reinforced other rights concerns such as socioeconomic and gender rights. The empowerment behind storytelling was evident in the narratives of a number of human rights survivors who accessed their countries’ truth commissions. For example, Humphrey and

---

Valverde mention that for transitional societies like South Africa the human rights discourse acted as “discourse of resistance to state repression, then as a framework and methodology for successor state to manage demands for justice and promote reconciliation.”

John Paul Lederach, a veteran of the PACS field also concurs with a similar observation. He stresses that truth commissions give space to human rights storytelling that plays an integral role in post-conflict situations as it provides a vital forum for the past to be addressed and for experiences to be acknowledged.

The discourse on storytelling describes it as a transformational tool. In his analysis of dialogue, for example, Paulo Freire, asserts that “true word” or [true stories] nourish human existence that enables men and women to transform their world. This is evident in the participant’s stories of hope, dreams and resilience. Addressing the nature of storytelling, Senehi describes it as a “social construction of meaning” a process that helps to build a community through the sharing of experiences. She further describes the process as “an intimate experience” that nurtures social interaction through its inclusive, collaborative and non-coercive manner. Senehi notes that throughout time, stories have played a fundamental role in societies as agents of diplomacy, cross-cultural relationship building, and mediation. She views storytelling as an important intervention tool in conflicts and in peacebuilding, and also as an

effective tool for “social change and growth.” Storytelling allows adversaries in a post-conflict phase to gradually grow in getting to know each other through open dialogue and to allow for mutual exchange between the teller and listener. Senehi further extends that “constructive storytelling is characterised by everyone having access to and inclusion in the storytelling process. It allows for a diversity of stories to be told and presents an opportunity for the de-silencing of experience. In these ways, the storytelling process is congruent with the concepts of mutual recognition … empowerment … and critical consciousness that are fundamental for (building and nurturing) peace.”

Consequently, the South African truth commission used storytelling to facilitate its human rights violations hearings. By using this interactive approach, one of its goals was to facilitate the restoration of the human dignity of victims of abuse. The Commission’s Act noted that it would “develop a complete picture of the gross violations of human rights that took place … restore to victims their human and civil dignity by letting them tell their stories and recommend how they could be assisted.” In its move to provide a complete picture of past abuse, the Commission explored four types of truth: forensic or objective truth, personal

---

narrative truth, social or dialogical truth and, restorative truth. Relevant to this chapter are personal narrative and restorative truth because they empowered survivors to be de-silenced and tell their stories as well as creating the space for perpetrators to acknowledge the injury and pain caused to survivors. The stories told and the confessions relayed, created an avenue for South Africans to begin to move forward collectively, severing ties with the atrocities of the past as they became part of the collective historical narrative.

My research participants’ voices have illustrated that this form of transitional justice and post-violence peacebuilding process is equally pertinent for the personal human rights narratives of refugees. The relevancy makes the narratives “fit” in the broader scope of these post-violence measures. Additionally, the theme of resiliency and the lessons outlined in the participants’ stories also connects with the typical responsibilities of truth commissions in particular those that provide a platform for survivors’ stories, address their needs, and empower them through de-silencing thus including them in an “inclusive vision” of post-violence peace and nation building. For example, the characteristic of resiliency displays what Jessica Senehi and Sean Byrne define as “empowering storytelling.” They suggest that this form of storytelling allows anyone to take on the role of storyteller and it creates opportunities for a diverse range of stories to be told. As they further note, “empowering storytelling” is seen as transformative because it enables previously silenced stories to gain prominence. With respect to the study participants,

---

405 Ibid.
empowering storytelling emerged when they expressed how they sought to courageously remain resilient and find ways of coping with the ordeal of their human rights struggles. As Fereta from Southern Sudan stated “it takes courage to be a refugee.” Through their empowered voices, they were also able to communicate lessons learned from their direct experiences that they felt needed to be shared in order to promote a human rights culture. These lessons varied from coexistence to human rights. In addition to these lessons, participants shared with me some of their fears as camp refugees and the hopes and dreams they have for their futures. These stories are captured below.

**Human rights struggles experienced as camp refugees: Fears, hopes and dreams for the future.** Inspired by their resilient outlook, I further asked my study’s participants about their fears, hopes and dreams in the midst of their human rights journey. Their stories underscored how their resilience helps them to survive their human rights struggles that persist in the refugee camp. Despite the fears they had about their unknown futures as refugees they still held onto their hopes and dreams of peace, freedom, living a better life, and personal and professional development. To begin, this section first outlines the personal fears of the participants, next it traces their hopes and dreams for the future.

The fears that the respondents expressed the most were primarily tied to their experiences as refugees. Over half of the participants expressed that they feared remaining as refugees for the rest of their lives. Khotso from Zimbabwe said that “my fears are to find myself failing to come out of this situation.” Hetep from DR Congo who has lived in the camp for over seven years said, “Can you see my age, I am still here I don’t know when I will go back to my country … I fear that I will die … here.” In addition, Kikoendi from Angola feared for her children’s future, some of whom have only known camp life. She commented, “My one fear is that I am worried about
the future of my children. I grew up as a refugee and I’m still a refugee, I don’t want the same for my children.”

The fear of remaining refugees was also closely associated with fears of living in the kaleidoscopic reality of an unknown future. These sentiments were expressed by Kuthula who said that “I fear the future … this is the thing I fear the most. I worry much about it because I do not know what the future is holding.” Similarly, Emirembe articulated that “I have many fears. If I stay here for a long time and I go back home after 5-10 years where will I start? I will arrive empty handed … carrying nothing. Who will feed me the next day at home when I arrive? These are the worst fears I carry. I always wish things can change back home so that I can go back and progress with my life, not to stay here forever.” In addition, Salaamata stated that “I fear not having an identity. I wish to get a nationality, I need that. I feel that not having a nationality … is very difficult. I want to survive on my own; I don’t want to survive as a dependent on someone. At this age when you are not working when you reach 40 or 50 years, who will be take care of you?” There were also a few respondents who expressed their fear of deportation and personal security. This fear of deportation was expressed, for example, by Selam from Somalia who articulated that “I fear going back to Somalia where there is a war … my fear is going to a place where there is no peace. In Botswana there is peace, people are free.”

Despite their fears, the respondents found that they were able to get through their current human rights journey by allowing their hopes and dreams to serve as an anchor for their lives. For example, Khotso shared with me, “my hope in life is to find myself free, and a lot of people that I have lived with here – free. To have the freedom of maybe going back home and when they get back home they really find true freedom. If they are going to be integrated here they should find true freedom, if they are going to be resettled they should find true freedom as well.”
Similarly, Dembe reflected on his “hope in life to be someone who has a better life and can achieve something in life and sustain my family.”

In addition to anchoring their lives in hope, my interviewees also articulated that their dreams served as pillars of strength for them for the future. These dreams reflected their resiliency because despite their plight, they dreamt of becoming future cabinet ministers in their countries governments, or presidents, successful entrepreneurs, or becoming people that made a difference in their communities. They envisioned themselves reliving peaceful and normal lives, progressing in life, creating families outside of the camp, and seeing their children excel in life.

For example, Adowa shared the following dream with me:

I dream of a better future for Africa in general. Africa should not be looked at as a continent of the dark, with leaders sticking to power. I dream of a continent that is at peace that means, everybody within the continent is happy with the situation that they find themselves in. I dream of playing a role in achieving this peace. I dream of being somebody in charge of peace and reconciliation, bridging the gap between perpetrators and victims.

In a very interesting and colourful story, Musango dreams of being a national leader like Joseph in the Bible:

I still want to be a politician. I want to be the way Joseph (in the Bible) was when he was taken to Egypt wrongfully. But his situation turned into a good thing …. I would like to be a politician to the highest level, in fact to be a president.

In addition, Alaafia dreams of living in a peaceful place with her children:

I dream that I will find a place where I can have peace, a place where I cannot have stress anymore; a place where my children can have a future.

Moreover, Uxolo wants to become a lawyer and builder, and she dreams of bringing the community together to forge a peaceful and tolerant society. This is what she had to say on the issue:

I dream of becoming a lawyer one day and have my law firm, to be in a position where I can return home and reclaim my Dad’s land and build houses. I dream about helping
people, to give back to the community. That is one thing I want to do, help people ….

When communities come together something really good can be built out of that.

In addition, Fereta also dreams of giving back to the community that has sacrificed to make his and other people’s lives richer. He wishes to share his story with others to teach tolerance and peaceful relations:

I dream about attaining an education, which can help me construct my own family and even support the needy ones. I need to also contribute because in order for me to live up to today, there are people who have sacrificed and helped me to live this long. I need to be able to contribute to the society. When you are given you should also be able to give out. I would like to see myself building a peace process in other countries that are not peaceful and share my story and experiences.

Similarly, Lumana wants to live in peace and tranquility. This is what he said:

My dreams are for one day for God to take me somewhere where I will be having that peace. Everybody needs to live in peace.

A few of the mothers expressed how they were now just resolved to dreaming about their children futures. For example, Safia was more concerned with seeing her children’s dreams materialise:

I don’t have any dreams, only for the kids. Let me tell you the truth, I did not chose my life, it was chosen for me. I am just living. As a woman I have suffered. I don’t want them to be like me. I feel empty …. I am dead already, I am not alive. Now I just help my kids to dream. They chose what they want to be, and I dream with them. My dream is just for the kids, to get a new life, especially the girls.

As these hopes and dreams revealed, many of the study’s participants hoped for a better life, and new opportunities as well as solutions to their current plight. They also hoped to one day be reunited with loved ones who were still alive. Others hoped for peace to reign in their home countries and they also expressed their hopes for their future freedom. They dreamt of promising futures for themselves and their families.

In sum, the trajectory of human rights storytelling in this chapter uncovered a picture of the participants’ plight, and their resiliency found in their struggles to overcome various forms of
persecution as well as survive living as camp refugees. This notion of uncovering a human rights picture is captured best by Priscilla Hayner\textsuperscript{408} who has widely written on the subject of truth commissions. She states that, through interviews with human rights victims, truth commissions literally record a “hidden history.”\textsuperscript{409} This uncovering process illustrates that the absence of narratives of sub-Saharan African refugees from their countries’ truth commissions contributes to the perpetuation of hidden histories and current realities of human rights struggles.

**Discussion and Analysis**

This chapter presented the personal human rights narratives of refugees. What emerged from the stories was a fuller picture of the different kinds of abuses that participants have experienced. It was apparent that their human rights struggles did not stop with the forms of persecution that ranged from xenophobic attacks to torture at home. From the time of their persecution to their present day refugee status, the participants have lived a challenging human rights reality. This reality is reiterated by Richard Towel’s observation, that “human rights are [intrinsically] linked to all parts of the refugee experience.”\textsuperscript{410}

Evident in the stories were four key linkages that display the relevancy of refugees to transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts. These links provided answers to this study’s research objectives. They demonstrated why refugees should be included in the work of TRCs and peacebuilding and also how they could be included. These linkages are as follows: (1) refugees and human rights; (2) refugees and storytelling; (3) refugees and peacebuilding; (4)

\textsuperscript{409} Ibid, 25.
refugees and truth commissions. The four linkages are analysed and discussed below in further detail.

**The Human Rights Link**

*Every human being should enjoy human rights as equals with other human beings, with every right and possibility to determine both their future and the destiny of their countries. This surely means that nobody should be denied their statehood on any basis whatsoever, or turned into permanent refugees with neither the right nor the possibility to build a national home they can truly call home.*

Addressing the human rights enforcement and implementation mechanisms of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity, Philliat Matsheza and Leonard Zulu, note that “human rights are concerned with the personal dignity of the person. They are the means by which an individual can attain and pursue common values aimed at promoting and achieving human dignity.” This take on human rights underscores that all persons whether displaced or not, are bearers of basic human rights. “These (rights) are claims that every individual has on their State.” Unfortunately as my interviews stories narratives illustrated, rights violations by state and non-state actors deny many of these rights to their citizens.

For example, the testimonies of the study’s participants illustrated that certain rights abuses remain prevalent in the Sub-Saharan African countries they originate from. These abuses include ethnic violence, armed conflict, and political violence, which was usually associated with electoral violence. For example, some participants from Zimbabwe who largely represented members of the opposition movement; the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), became victims to political violence before and after the country’s 2008 electoral process. Similarly, this was the case with the Caprivians who fled post-independent Namibia after facing a violent

---

413 Ibid, 9.
political clamp-down when they sought cessation from Namibia. It was also the case for some participants from DR Congo. They and other study participants faced persecution in the form of torture, sexual violence and xenophobic attacks. A couple of my participants were also persecuted on the grounds of their religious affiliation.

It is also apparent from the participants’ stories that human rights violations have had a devastating impact on them. The violations robbed them of loved ones, peace, stable lives, human dignity and self-worth. As Suluhu from DR Congo questioned, “When you are in the middle of suffering, how can you see or experience peace?” Suluhu’s question strikingly reflects the refugees’ plight and struggle for their rights, which is a struggle that many camp refugees face. How can there be peace and justice while many live in limbo in a protracted displacement situation? How can rights be realised when year after year people live in an unknown future, where children are born and grow up only knowing camp life? Visibly the journey of human rights struggles continues for the displaced. It is a journey that warrants human-rights based responses in order to empower refugees to reclaim their inalienable human rights that permit them to “participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised.”

**Human Rights Storytelling Link**

*The truth about stories is that that’s all we are. The Okanagan storyteller Jeannette Armstrong tells us that “Through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I’m not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form, I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns.”*

---

The truth about stories is that that’s all we are ... the Laguna storyteller Leslie Silko reminds us, “They are all we have, you see ... You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories.”

Amstrong and Silko’s ideas above, captured in Thomas King’s literary work on culture and storytelling, depict the vital role that storytelling plays in our communal environments. King includes a remark by Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri who observes that “We live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way.” Okri’s words can easily be connected to the human rights experiences of my study’s participants. From the point of persecution in their home countries, they begin to live the story of human rights struggles planted in them by abuses and forced displacement. Unless refugees’ stories in sub-Saharan Africa are given voice in transitional justice and post-violence peacebuilding, they cannot be heard or understood and a sustainable and lasting peace cannot be built.

As their narratives have revealed, safe spaces for human rights storytelling are needed in order to inform national and international stakeholders about their plight and to redress abuses that have affected them. For example, these stakeholders could include architects of future stakeholders from the refugees’ countries of origin. Truth commissions’ human rights hearings reiterate the need to provide safe spaces for storytelling to redress past abuses and give voice to survivor’s experiences as was the case with the South African commission. At a more grassroots level, there are also community-based programmes like the Towards Understanding and Healing (TUH) in the city of Derry in post-accord Northern Ireland, programmes which underscore the

---

importance of creating communal space for storytelling. The TUH programme engages in post-violence peacebuilding, reconciliatory and community building activities. Key to its activities are storytelling and dialogue practices that allow survivors of the Northern Ireland Troubles to voice how they were impacted by the conflict. As Maureen Hetherington notes;

Storytelling is an effective tool of dealing with the past and has the potential to promote reconciliation. Storytelling is a process through which we come to know ourselves and other people. The stories we tell to ourselves about our experiences, and the stories told about us by those we consider to be ‘friends’ and ‘enemies,’ help to shape our identity.419

This statement rings true with the experiences of this study’s participants. Most interviewees shared with me a sense of gratefulness for having a space to tell their stories and “release” the pain they had been carrying for some time. The experience was cathartic and empowering.

Because this study’s participants provide insight into ways in which their stories can be included in truth commissions’ process in their countries of origin, their reflections are explored in more detail in the subsequent chapter that looks at the roles of truth commissions and the themes of post-violence healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

The link between sub-Saharan African refugees and human rights storytelling cannot be overstated because it emphasises the importance of giving survivors of abuse the space to tell their stories. As Julia Chaitin observes, “telling one’s story through oral or written means, has been shown to be a key experience in peoples’ lives especially those who have undergone severe social trauma.”420 Jeffrey Soins also makes a similar observation in respect to human rights storytelling during truth commissions’ proceedings stating that “survivors of human rights

---

violations are central to the overall mission of truth commissions …. They contribute to the achievement of truth commissions’ social goals …. because their words and experiences are the raw data from which patterns of human rights violations can be identified and their causes deduced.” Thus, through the mode and process of storytelling, experiences can be shared, meaning created, needs identified, and practical solutions sought.

**Peacebuilding Link**

*Out of experience of an extraordinary human disaster that lasted too long, must be born a society of which all humanity will be proud ... let there be peace for all.*

The reoccurrences of armed conflicts and other abuses of states citizens influence the climate of both positive and negative peace in sub-Saharan African countries. In this region post-violence societies transitioning out of violent conflict and away from repressive regimes need post-violence peacebuilding initiatives that are transformative and create possibilities for social rehabilitation. For example, my participants’ stories clearly demonstrate that their persecution and displacement had impacted their state of peace. The violations of their right to have peace had also affected their well-being. The participants explained to me that they now lived a life of exile where both direct and structural violence affected their “quality of life, including personal growth, freedom, social equality, economic equity, solidarity, autonomy and participation.”

Against the backdrop of human rights challenges, it is evident that survivor-centered peacebuilding is required when working with “violent ridden societies.” In this regard, the

---


narratives of survivors can serve as a starting point for exploring ways in which this form of peacebuilding can take shape and enable survivors to reclaim their right to peace. As survivors of abuse they have an understanding of the pragmatic ingredients that can help cultivate peaceful conditions. Thus, the inclusion of survivors in post-violence peacebuilding should also include redressing the adverse impact caused to their sense of dignity and self-worth. This rehabilitative aspect is mentioned by peace scholar, Ho-Won Jeong who notes that peacebuilding in post-violence societies should go “beyond political and military stabilisation.” Peacebuilding operations [need to go beyond] political and strategic considerations and incorporate concerns of those affected by violence and other forms of abuse.\(^{424}\)

This take on peacebuilding and its link with refugees was reiterated by the former High Commissioner for Refugees, Sadako Ogata, who observed that refugees represent a “vast majority of people [who have] fled the cruelest of human inhumanity – [they have] escaped genocide, ethnic cleansing, and the most massive violations of human rights … [In a state of impoverishment and lack of jobs, they require peacebuilding activities that can help them re-stitch their sense of self-worth and dignity in seemingly intractable displacement situations].”\(^{425}\)

**Truth Commissions’ Link**

*Truth commissions seem to satisfy – or at least begin to satisfy – a clear need of some victims to tell their stories and be listened to.*\(^{426}\)

---

\(^{424}\) Ho-Won Jeong, Peacebuilding Post-Conflict Societies – Strategy and Process, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2005), xi.


From the lessons my participants outlined about their human rights journeys, it is evident that they valued being given the space to tell their stories and share lessons about their lived experiences. For example, a prominent theme in the lessons indicated that they felt that human rights storytelling provided an avenue for awareness-raising about their experiences as refugees. They also highlighted the importance of educating people about human rights concerns. These lessons also connect with some of the key features of truth commissions. For example, truth commissions provide an avenue for awareness-raising on human rights issues through the public gathering and documentation of narrated statements from those affected by human rights abuses. Engaging refugees in this transitional process would empower them to tell their stories and share lessons about their experiences, which can contribute towards some of the goals of truth commissions preventing future violence and human rights abuses. Furthermore, engaging refugees in truth commissions would empower them to contribute to the shaping of their countries’ post-violence human rights discourse.

Also relevant to the operations of truth commissions were concerns raised by my participants about their socioeconomic and gender rights in the camp. First, with respect to gender rights, their narratives focused on gender-based violence concerns that women and young girls often face in the camp. The discourse on gender and displacement shows that “gendered violence” remains a pressing challenge in forced migration as females in refugee camps find themselves vulnerable to exploitation.\textsuperscript{427} As Priscilla Hayner points out “refugee flows caused by war disproportionately comprise of women, children and the elderly.” Hayner further observes that “when women come into contact with fighting forces they may suffer physical violence of a

different nature than that perpetrated against men … often extraordinarily cruel and degrading.”

For example, she states that sexual violence is predominant within violent conflict situations. In some cases it has included mass rape used as a weapon of war to inflict shame and devastate communities. For example, during the Bosnian and Rwandan genocide, mass rape was used by both the Serbs and Interhamwe as a weapon of war. Evidence of this intersection between gender, displacement and sexual violence was also highlighted by the study’s participants who narrated stories of the sexual abuse they faced during violent conflict in their countries and during the perilous trek to Botswana.

Given these types of sexual abuses, and cognisant of the fact that women’s and men’s experiences in conflict and other human rights abuse situations differ, steps at both the international and national levels have been taken to promote gender-sensitive responses to persecution. For example, under the 1998 Rome Statute sexual violence in times of armed conflict is now recognised as a war crime. Both the Rwandan and the Former Yugoslavian Tribunals tried several Rwandan, Serb, Croat and Bosnian men for sexual violence during the war as a crime against humanity and an act of genocide. Several truth commissions also adopted a gender-sensitive perspective in their proceedings. Examples in Sub-Saharan Africa include South Africa and Sierra Leone. In South Africa, gender hearings took place and in Sierra Leone, perpetrators’ role in perpetuating sexual violence against women was integral to the Commission’s mandate. These gender-specific approaches have now been placed under the newly emerged legal concept of “gender justice.”

---

430 Ibid.
Gender justice is based on the ideology of rights, and can be defined as the:

Protection and promotion of civil, political, economic and social rights on the basis of gender equality. It necessitates taking a gender perspective on the rights themselves, as well as the assessment of access and obstacles to the enjoyment of these rights for both women, men, girls and boys and adopting gender-sensitive strategies for protecting and promoting them.\footnote{Pam Spees, “Gender Justice and Accountability in Peace Support Operations,” International Alert, (February 2004), http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/gender-justice-and-accountability-peace-support-operations (Accessed July 28, 2012).}

Therefore, with respect to the study’s participants’ narratives, it is evident that gender justice pursued by truth commissions is also relevant to their gender-related concerns. As momentum builds in redressing rights-based issues of gender inequality and discrimination, considerations should be made to further explore gender justice within the context of refugee rights. This exploration will help promote an understanding of women’s human rights experiences not only in conflict, violence and repression, but also in their displacement.\footnote{Ibid.} Refugee communities as survivors of human rights violations stand to benefit from being included in gender-sensitive transitional justice and peacebuilding processes.

As noted, earlier participants also raised concerns about their socioeconomic rights and displacement. Clearly evidenced was the adverse impact that persecution and life in exile has had on their socioeconomic rights. Living as camp refugees, they now face the challenge of having limited or no access to employment. Therefore, they are not self-sufficient and they struggle with poverty. Thus, socioeconomic rights must also factor into the work of truth commissions especially in situations where reparations are recommended for survivors of human rights violations. My respondents’ narratives indicate an emphasis on the importance of having truth commissions pay closer attention to redressing refugees’ socioeconomic rights that were violated. As Lisa Laplante observes, the entrenchment of socioeconomic concerns in truth
commissions would “help strengthen growing recognition of economic, social and cultural rights, as well as the right to development and thus provide local actors with a platform to legitimise their own lobbying efforts for socioeconomic reform.”\(^{433}\) Laplante further notes that such a redress would help uncover some of the root causes of political violence.

An understanding of these causes of violence is necessary for as the participants’ narratives illustrated, unless all of the root causes of violence are addressed then violence will beget violence. For example, the study’s participants articulated that for most, persecution begot a life characterised by structural violence in the camp. As a result, this exposure to violence has created stories of suffering where survivors feel that they have lost the “basic sense of self.”\(^{434}\) As Emirembe from Zimbabwe shared with me, her life living as a refugee is encapsulated by the feeling that “you feel like a nobody … You cannot even recognise your name.” Thus, it is evident in their narratives that socioeconomic injustices played a role in framing a sense of what Judith Herman calls the “damaged self.” As Herman states “traumatic events violate the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity. The body is invaded, injured, defiled.”\(^{435}\) Consequently, the international community’s efforts to take steps to redress refugees injustices including socioeconomic injustice and “expand the notion of justice within the transitional justice paradigm,” can allow for a journey of post-violence recovery to begin for survivors of human rights violations.

\(^{434}\) Judith Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery – The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror}, (New York: Basic Books), 52.
\(^{435}\) Ibid, 52-53.
Conclusion

The participants’ narratives underscored the role that human rights play in the plight of refugees’ experiences. They revealed that refugees are both resilient as well as survivors of human rights violations. What emerged from the narratives was a strong case made to include refugees’ human rights experiences in post-violence transitional justice and peacebuilding processes in the sub-Saharan African context. In making this case, the participants highlighted the need for human rights-based responses to their plight. They stressed that such responses acknowledge their human rights struggles and promote violence preventions and interventions, ones that can protect and respect their inalienable rights, and restore their inherent sense of human dignity.

Key to the study’s participants’ stories was the exploration of the intersection between their human rights experiences and truth commissions. In this regard, participants outlined in their stories the role that truth commissions can play in providing a platform for refugees’ voices in the broader human rights discourse, one that aims to redress past human rights wrongs and promote the recovery needs of survivors so that they can heal from their individual and collective traumas. Next, chapter 6 explores this intersection further as it turns to present the participants’ perspectives of truth commissions and their experiences with healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
Chapter Six: The Nexus Between Refugees, Truth Commissions and Peacebuilding

Introduction

Influenced by South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC), a number of sub-Saharan African commissions increasingly focused on promoting forgiveness, healing and reconciliation in transitional societies. These restorative attributes were evident themes in the human rights narratives of the participants of this study. Against this backdrop, this chapter explores the following four themes: (1) personal journeys towards post-violence healing and forgiveness; (2) perceived benefits and setbacks of truth commissions; (3) national reconciliation and (4) peacebuilding.

Personal Journeys Towards Post-violence Healing and Forgiveness

As stated above, the South-African commission has served as a leading transitional justice model for post-violence societies in the African region and elsewhere. It has also been widely examined to assess its success in promoting national unity and reconciliation in other societies transitioning out of violence. Some of the key aspects that have been assessed include the Commission’s role in promoting healing and forgiveness during its truth-telling process. For example, Dulla Omar asserts that the “Commission [was] a necessary exercise to enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation.”

Embodied in this Commissions’ work were public hearings that granted survivors of human rights violations an opportunity to relate their own accounts of violations.

they had faced and reclaim their human and civil dignity.\textsuperscript{437} These types of survivors’ hearings raise a number of pertinent questions namely; can truth and reconciliation commissions contribute towards healing and forgiveness? Does truth-telling or storytelling during a commission help survivors of human rights violations to heal? Can truth commissions advance national reconciliation as Dulla Omar suggests? In their reflections on truth commissions and in their body of narratives on healing, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation my research participants shed light on survivors’ response to these questions as they narrate their lived experiences and life in the aftermath of gross human rights atrocities.

To this end, the opening section of this chapter summarises the participants’ narratives that address issues of healing and forgiveness in a post-violence context. The section begins with a summary of the personal struggles that some of the participants had with the healing process. Next it presents a summary of the views of participants who expressed that they had healed or were in the process of healing from the human rights mistreatment they experienced. Similarly, the forgiveness section presents the challenges that some participants expressed they had in forgiving those who had mistreated them and then it summarising the views of those participants that mentioned they would be able to forgive their tormentors.

\textbf{Personal Struggles Experienced on the Path Towards Healing}

A series of probing questions on healing and the role that survivors’ human rights storytelling or truth-telling can play in contributing towards personal healing were posed to my study’s participants. A majority of the participants shared with me that they had not healed from the persecutions they faced in their home countries. They attributed their lack of, or limited

healing to a number of reasons. For some, healing was a journey that took time and could not be imposed on them. For example Khotso from Zimbabwe had this to say on the issue:

   [For me] healing is a process. [I’m] still in the healing process. I am still healing, what retains the pain is the fact that I can’t come out. I find that I am compelled in a situation and find it difficult to come out of it, it is really difficult.

Others described how they were still overwhelmed by pain from within. For example, Hetep from DR Congo remarked that, “I don’t have any peace from what happened to me; I have not healed.” Moreover, Isithangami from Zimbabwe also pointed out that, “I’m still carrying pain, and I have not healed.” Other participants, most of whom lived in the refugee camp for eight or more years, questioned how they could heal in their present circumstances. They connected healing to a change in one’s socioeconomic situation and improved livelihood. They highlighted that healing remained evasive for them due to their reality of living as refugees and having to face daily socio-economic struggles. They felt that these struggles were a constant reminder of the persecutions they experienced. Some of the participants shared these reflections with me. For example Chibanda said that, “No I have not healed, I am not ok, right now I am depending on UNHCR…. I am suffering.” Moreover, Emem who has lived in the camp for over 13 years mentioned that:

   No peace, no healing, I have [spent] 13 plus years [in the camp], I am supposed to be somewhere in life by now. The reality is that when people are in conflict their lives are always finished …. [it] …. is bad to be a refugee.

Amahoro who fled Burundi’s violent conflict outlined the risks he had to take to arrive safely in the camp. He reflected on the following in his story:

   [It is] tough to heal [and] find peace. As a result of war, life is now full of struggles. No I have not healed. If I was a lady I think I [would] just cry. Just imagine [a] situation where you arrive in a country, you don’t know where to spend the night. You don’t have anything to eat, no money. For example, in Zambia I had to sell my trousers and shirt to get money for travel …. I went to a young guy, explained my problem and the amount of
money needed. The money he gave was not equal to value of clothes, I just picked the money to continue with journey …. So in all of this, it is just taking risks not knowing what will happen to me, …. passing through bushes where there are crocodiles, just to have a life.

Khotso also compares his daily living in the camp to being incarcerated in prison. He said:

Healing at times is about …. social security. If my social security was intact then I think that I would be completely healed. In the camp, it is like I am detained to some extent. [In fact] life in a prison is better than life here where our freedom is in chains. It is like we are free but in chains. Can you imagine? The chains are tied around you and you are supposed to walk …. which means everything that you do no matter how little, it is … very difficult. [At least] in prison you know that you are compelled to the environment, your environment is the prison. You don’t have chains; you make the best [of your situation] within the prison walls. That is why you find that people in prison they forget and end up enjoying, they become free, it becomes their home.

Tayo, is a single man living in the camp who feels that men are neglected by service providers in the camp. This is what he has to say on the issue of healing while living in the camp:

You can say a wound is healed but it is not healed, thoughts are still coming back still reminding me of what happened to me, why I am here …. Now I am a mature person I only think about living my life, but how long will I live my life like this? So you people who are doing research tell United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 438 there are some [men] who have been refugees for a long time, but (UNHCR) is only [helping] women, which means we men are not human beings, I am about to reach 40 years, they (UNHCR) are only concerned about women-at-risk. What about me, I am a single man don’t I deserve to be helped?

Chibanda also questioned how she could heal while living in a harsh camp life and the struggle to provide food for her children. She lamented the following in her story:

How can I heal? There is no healing with so many problems. There is not enough food in the camp [or] clothing. We’re barely surviving. No, this one [healing] will take me a long time, even if I am here there is no peace, I don’t get what I am supposed to get …. they don’t have enough clothes, the kids they don’t have enough blankets, imagine being given 1 blanket each since 2008 when we first arrived here …. This is not good living, even the food we are given, 3 packets of beans for one month to feed those 10 kids it is impossible, 1kg of sugar in 30 days, that is not possible, 1 bottle of oil. It is not possible,

438 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the UN agency mandated to “lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees.” UNHCR - “About Us” www.unhcr.org (Accessed May 25, 2012).
it makes life very difficult …. There is a time we went for 6 months without paraffin, and we had to go outside to look for firewood. These are the challenges facing us.

Additionally, other respondents questioned how they could heal when the violent situations that had caused them to flee had not changed. The respondents who voiced this concern hail from countries that are either fragile states, are currently experiencing political violence or are faced with sporadic or armed conflict such as DR Congo, Somalia and Zimbabwe. For example Udo lamented the following in his story:

There is no peace, no healing, nothing has changed …. I have not made peace with the current government; the people who want to persecute us are still there I have not made peace.

This body of narratives revealed the struggles that some participants have with healing from the persecution they faced in their home countries. They expressed that they could not heal due to the pain they still carried, as well as the fact that they faced the challenge of finding an appropriate livelihood in the camp, and that it reminded them of the human dignity they had been robbed of.

**Journeying Towards Healing**

The narratives below embody the purpose set out by truth commissions to overcome abusive legacies and to promote social healing through the “public acknowledgement of stories of survivors.” As Andrew Schaap asserts through a public acknowledgement of survivors’ suffering, the dignity of survivors is supposed to be restored. “The [survivor] is brought back from stigmatised isolation into social belonging through the public sharing of pain. [And] collectively, healing occurs by addressing the legacy of …. violence.”

In this research although the majority of my participants voiced that they had not yet healed or were struggling to

---

440 Ibid.
heal, a few expressed that in this post-persecution period they had in fact healed. In telling their stories they explained why or how they had healed. In particular they attributed their healing to their spiritual faith. For example Lumana connected his process of healing to the strength required from reading the Bible. He narrated the following:

Like I am telling you, healing is in my heart. It is just through God sometimes when I am down, I just go back in the word of God [Bible] …. read and get comfort. When I am not reading the word of God …. sometimes I get crazy, because I have spent more than 10 years just here in the camp, doing nothing, just nothing. Next year I will be having 11 years.

Similarly, Zoleka highlighted the spiritual support provided to her by her pastor:

Yes I have healed half way, not fully. Even though there is peace in my mind, challenges are always coming my way …. I [ask] pastors to guide me on how I can live life, [and] spend time reading the Bible because that is where peace comes from, sometimes when I have a problem I consult the elders and they guide me and this brings peace to me.

In addition, Nagaya finds solace in the word of God when going through difficult times:

With time, I got healed …. I see everything in the word of God, I find peace there. When I am not reading it I start to think and get fearful about my past. So it is really God who helps us when we reach a difficult time …. So, I find refuge in the Word and church.

Kuthula also believes that her Christian faith has allowed her to move forward with her life:

With me maybe because I am a Christian I am ok. I am even wishing that things could be ok so that I go back at home …. I am fine, I want to go on with my life, I am not even bothered about those people home …. maybe I injured someone or two when I was doing my work, so it is not their fault, it is because of the politics, so it is not their fault.

In line with the public storytelling approach of truth commissions, some participants attributed their cathartic state to efforts they’ve taken to share their stories with others and also the assistance they’ve received from counselling services in the camp. For example some of my participants remarked that they felt released when they shared their stories with others. They observed that some of their pain had “disappeared” because they saw the sharing of personal stories as a “process of healing.” As Amahoro noted, keeping my story “deep down” would not
help others to learn from my experience. Malino also remarked on her healing process as follows:

I have healed, on my own, the one part that is still troubling me is the separation from the family there in Namibia.

Moreover, Adowa found that sharing his stories with others allowed him to move forward with his life. This is what he had to say on the issue:

I think I am finally getting there. [at first] it was hard to talk about it [human rights abuses faced] …. [but] if you don’t talk about this it gets stuck inside. So it is better to talk about it you never know [there might be] …. somebody out there who has gone through a much more difficult situation than yours. Once I got to talk about it I kind of felt better. I think I am getting there …. I can still be angry yes, but I think that now I see it as something that has happened. [It] cannot change, and it is still going to be there, you can never change it. The truth of the matter is that the abuse separated me from my folks from my sisters and brothers but that is the way of life. You can never tell what is going to happen tomorrow so you have to take what you have and continue with it.

In addition, Kagiso is the progeny of a mixed marriage between a Hutu and Tutsi. He shares his story with me of how much pain this caused and how he found healing through counselling:

I had counselling material that helped me a lot. At first there were those moments where I used to say [and] feel why should I live? [On the one hand] you leave your own country and you’re not accepted and [on the other hand] when [you’re] with own people [you are] not free. You are not given equal opportunities like others. So these are issues that used to hurt me a lot. Sometimes when I was alone I used to cry and say why did my parents intermarry [Hutu and Tutsi]?

This body of narratives demonstrates support for healing found in the process of sharing personal stories about wounds of the past. As Adowa from Burundi stated, “If you don’t talk about this it gets stuck inside. So it is better to talk about it.” Spiritual faith also contributed to a cathartic release underscoring the necessity of discussing social healing in the transition from violence to peace. This role of spiritual faith is explored in greater detail in chapter 7, which presents the study’s conclusions and recommendations. It is evident, though, that the painstaking journey of retelling human rights stories provides survivors of human rights abuses with opportunities for
healing and for their personal narratives to be acknowledged. As David Becker states “for traumatised individuals, healing means that they can integrate a horrible past into their present, that they can live in a different future in which they can gain a basic understanding of their past and they can work toward a different future.”

**Personal Struggles Experienced on the Path Towards Forgiveness**

Similar to healing, forgiveness has featured in truth commission interventions (e.g. South Africa). The subsequent section that deals with post-violence forgiveness examines at how my participants responded to the notion of forgiving their perpetrators. Vincent Waldron and Douglas Kelley define forgiveness as a “merciful response to violations of justice.” Mark Amstutz also describes forgiveness as an “interactive process in which the personal and collective injuries are healed.” In addition, Amstutz suggests that this process requires ingredients such as “consensus about past wrongdoings, remorse and repentance, renunciation of vengeance.” A number of truth commissions, such as the South African commissions, have promoted forgiveness as a tool for interpersonal reconciliation or communal reconciliation.

Despite this approach to promote forgiveness, the first section of narratives below speaks to the challenges that some survivors of persecution have with post-violence forgiveness. For example, a number of the participants voiced that they struggled with forgiving those who had orchestrated pain against them and their loved ones. They described the daily pain of dealing with the loss of loved ones and how this pain could never allow them to forgive. When expressing this

---

sentiment, quite a few of the participants cried and expressed the difficulty they had of coming to
terms with their loss and the lives they were robbed of back home. Memories of the violence are
imprinted on the hearts and minds of these participants. Mistrust, resentment, fear, and anger still
lingers. For example, Hetep, a survivor of violent conflict and torture argued that:

I will never forgive them. I will never forgive them because I never did anything. I did
not cooperate with a rebel like Bemba\textsuperscript{444}. But because of politics, someone mentioned my
name [as Bemba’s accomplice] and they made an innocent person [family member] die.

Selam, a survivor of Somalia’s armed conflict, shared with me that her pain is so great that she
cannot cope, so forgiveness of her family’s murderers is the furthest thing from her mind:

I cannot forgive. They robbed me of those I love. How do you forgive? How do you
forgive people that have not asked for forgiveness? I cannot forgive them they took
precious people from us, my grandfather, father and brother. My sister and brother they
are missing we don’t know where they are. How can you forgive people who did bad
things to you?

Similarly, Adowa feels that he cannot forgive because the perpetrators ended his childhood
before it began. “I have not forgiven. They took my childhood away.” Isithangami, a survivor of
political violence, indicates that her traumatic past hinders her from coping in the present. “I
cannot forgive. I have too much pain. No peace at all …. I always think of my past.” Other
respondents stressed that they struggled to forgive because human rights abuses still continue in
their home countries. They also mentioned that as a result of their persecution they were
confined to a life of struggle. For example, Emrimbe expressed the following in her story:

Forgiveness requires a solution. You cannot forgive if there is no solution to your
struggle. That one is not easy to forgive …. When the solution is here, that is when you
can forgive; when you are having a new life, not when you are still displaced.

\textsuperscript{444}Jean-Pierre Bemba was born in DR Congo. During the country’s armed struggle, he led the
rebel movement known as Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC), which eventually
became one of the political parties. From 2003-2006, he served as one of the country’s interim
Vice-President’s during the transitional government. In 2008, following an arrest warrant issued
by the International Criminal Court, he was arrested in Belgium. He is charged with two counts
of crimes against humanity and three counts of war crimes.
Udo, a political activist, also shared that he cannot forgive Museveni because of the persecution inflicted on him back in Uganda:

There is no forgiveness as (there is) no change. I have not forgiven them, because if they had stopped these things our political party would have been recognised. The situation is still the same. I do not have not kind words for Museveni.

Moreover, Nye said that she cannot forgive the Namibian government that continues to persecute Caprivians:

I don’t think I can forgive. Right now as I am talking to you there are some party members that have been political prisoners for 12-13 years. The Namibian government does not want to sit down, dialogue and compromise. There is still persecution.

Other interviewees agreed that forgiveness is a personal journey and should not be enforced by post-violence national processes. For example, Kagiso emphasised that,

Forgiveness is good but people should not be forced …. When it is just brought from up there like a mandate of government that we have to forgive one another, then at the end of the day, people will pretend. They will polish up their faces and say that have forgiven when they haven’t.

The narratives outlined above demonstrate the difficulty that some of the participants had in taking steps towards forgiving those who persecuted them and families. Their stories demonstrate that the journey towards forgiveness is not easy one to travel. They also reveal that this journey should be a personal one and should not be imposed on survivors of human rights abuses.

Journeying Towards Forgiveness

*Forgiveness is a norm, a rule. The best way to fight anger is forgiveness. The lack of forgiveness destroys you* (Khotso)

In his reflections on forgiveness and truth commissions, Desmond Tutu expresses the following:

In forgiving, people are not being asked to forget. On the contrary, it is important to remember, so that we should not let such atrocities to happen again.
Forgiveness does not mean condoning what has been done. It means taking what happened seriously and not minimising it; drawing out the sting in the memory that threatens to poison our entire existence …. Forgiveness is not being sentimental …. the study of forgiveness has become a growth industry. Whereas previously it was something often dismissed pejoratively as spiritual and religious, now because of developments such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa it is gaining attention as an academic discipline.\(^\text{445}\)

The body of narratives below is drawn from participants who said they had forgiven their perpetrators. Their stance on forgiveness mirrored some of Tutu’s observations on forgiveness outlined above. For example, these participants mentioned that although they had not forgotten the human rights mistreatment they faced, they had forgiven those who had mistreated them. Furthermore, despite Tutu’s suggestion that forgiveness is no longer just seen through a spiritual or religious lens, it was interesting to observe how these participants mainly attributed their ability to forgive to their Christian and Islamic faiths. Their journey towards forgiveness also suggests that there is much room for further investigation on the role of forgiveness in post-violence societies.

For example, Zoleka shared with me her story about forgiveness and how it is connected to her Christian faith:

> Yes I have forgiven them, what I am thinking about now is my life, my future…What helped me was the Bible. It says forgive anybody who has wronged you and love your enemies. As a Christian I had to forgive and love those that persecuted me and pray for my enemies. I have to pray for them and love them because if I still keep those things in me, I will be bitter and if I am bitter, I will keep sickness in me. Those things I have to forget and see the future.

In contrast, Musango has forgiven himself rather than the perpetrators of abuse. This is what he had to say on the topic:

> I have healed therefore, I have forgiven …. [Let me say that] I have forgiven myself and not them. I think that there was a time I used to blame myself for the persecution I faced

At church they talk to us about forgiving. Sometimes [the] pastor … says that even the President in your country who is killing your family members, forgive him.

Tayo also notes that to forgive is to be forgiven by God. The process sets one free. He also suggests that the distance between the perpetrator and the survivor of violence aids in the healing and forgiveness process:

Yes I have forgiven. I was ready to be a peaceful man … I don’t want to struggle with them. I don’t seek revenge. If I seek revenge, I kill them or they kill me. This is why I ran away so that I can really forgive them and live my own life and be far from them …. Those that killed my parents, those ones, God will forgive them. Actually when you are far from somebody [persecutors] then you feel relieved …. When you are far from them you just think about your life. So this [distance] can be the criteria for forgiveness although you still remember that someone killed your parents.

Alaafia also thinks that the strength of her Christian faith allows her to forgive her persecutors easily:

Yes I have forgiven. I will always go back to the Word of God [that] says you have to forgive to be forgiven. I ask for the grace to forgive those who hurt me in my life, and then I forgave.

These narratives raise questions about the way forgiveness is promoted in post-violence societies. For example, is it fair to promote blanket forgiveness to perpetrators of gross human rights crimes as some truth commissions have done? What role can forgiveness play in promoting and advancing post-violence peacebuilding? As some of my participants observed, steps towards forgiveness are not easy but as their faith-based perspectives revealed, forgiveness can help lift emotional burdens such as anger and resentment and liberate survivors of violent acts from a mix of painful emotions. But there are also those who may never be able to forgive. These are some considerations that future transitional justice can explore as mandates of truth commissions are developed in sub-Saharan Africa for transitional peace efforts.

---

Having focussed on healing and forgiveness, my participants shifted their focus to truth commissions. The following segment presents their narratives that outline what they perceived as the benefits and limitations of truth commissions.

**Perceived Benefits and Limitations of Truth Commissions**

As a transitional justice arm, truth commissions have played a huge role in bearing witness to the plight of survivors of human right abuses. In the process, from South Africa to Sierra Leone, pertinent questions were posed with respect to their helpfulness to survivors. For example, what are the benefits of truth commissions? How effective are they in responding to legacies of human rights wrongs? How useful are they to survivors of persecution? This subsequent section on truth commissions summarises the perceived benefits and setbacks of truth commissions that participants expressed. This first segment covers their positive perspectives and the next segment addresses their negative images of truth commissions.

**Perceived Benefits of Truth Commissions**

Those participants who had a positive take on truth commissions thought that these bodies could help transitional societies “rebuild their lives.”

For example Fereka, who was displaced by Sudan’s armed conflict, remarked the following in his story,

> Truth Commissions can educate people on peace, and the rebuilding of countries …. They can sensitise people at the grassroots, tell them that although these things happen, it is time for people to come together and rebuild the new country and forget about the past. It is important to carry this message down there. For me through education I have started rebuilding my life …. They [truth commissions] can carry the message of rebuilding.

Moreover, some of the respondents particularly felt that truth commissions could play a more beneficial role by equally serving as a reparations body to compensate the survivors of atrocities. They observed that most of the survivors’ welfare had been adversely affected by the various
forms of abuses they have suffered. For some, family breadwinners were killed as a result of armed conflict. Others had lost their agricultural land and were now faced with economic hardships. The interviewees felt that truth commissions’ mandates should include reparations that would also translate into some form of justice through the provision of compensation. For example, Kagiso, who lost family members during the genocide in Rwanda and was displaced by this brutal conflict, commented that:

TRCs should compensate victims and survivors. They should not just be a body for hearing and telling stories …. [For example] …. somebody has died then you tell me that you have killed my beloved one, so what? You see, whether justice takes place, but the person has died …. I wish there could be a kind of compensation. You know, like somebody has killed your beloved then the government should compensate …. Of course you cannot compensate life, but at least give something. [What do you do in a situation where] somebody has killed the breadwinner and the children are suffering? Then someone just comes and says I am the one who killed your father while the children’s lives are now in a mess. They are no longer going to school, no school fees. Then someone comes and says forgive me for I am the one who killed you Dad. So what? These are really the issues that take people back to hatred …. For instance look at gacaca in Rwanda. Some people say we’ve killed and ask for forgiveness but sometimes they might not be for peacebuilding. They may be building [contributing towards] another kind of hatred within people’s hearts. When somebody killed your beloved and you were not aware who it was and then this person comes and says I did it. You then develop hatred towards them. I would advise that it should end …. with a sort of compensation where the government has funds and says that those who lost their beloved will be given these funds. Or the government can offer children without parents to go to school freely. This is the kind of reconciliation that should be considered.

In addition, Nye expressed that truth commissions need to change the political terrain and create a new milieu in which survivors are included:

They [truth commissions] are good if it is more than just taking your story. They need to also help you, to change your situation.

Others observed that truth commissions had an important role to play with respect to providing safe spaces for truth-telling and in facilitating cathartic experiences for survivors of human rights abuses. For example Musango explained that:
Truth Commissions can provide space for dialogue with perpetrators where the victims do not have to revenge but seek for truth and understanding.

Similarly, Hetep believed that truth commissions can assist survivors of gross human rights violations. He argued that, truth commissions can provide space for truth-telling and help the innocent victims. Alaafia also believes that commissions can act as a reconciliatory tool by encouraging dialogue between perpetrators and survivors of abuses. She argued that, “truth commissions are ok, they can allow for dialogue between perpetrator and victim.” Similarly, Salaamata adds that the space to tell one’s story and be heard is a cathartic experience as, “truth commissions will allow you to talk about your pain rather than keep it inside.”

Moreover, for Emirembe, the process of telling one’s story is a cleansing experience for her:

When you talk it out, everything comes out and you will be clean. So it is good to have truth commissions to help with this. Your story is no longer suppressed within.

The act of telling one’s story, Uxolo says, is to be truly human and to be free:

Such processes are helpful. Like right now sharing with you it is helping me express a lot. There is so much people are keeping inside. I think you are the first person I am speaking to about these things. I have so many problems, and I cannot tell my Mum she has other problems. Her family is still in Somalia and the situation there is worsening. Telling her my problems is just adding more stress.

Those coming from countries still experiencing political oppression and persecution such as Zimbabwe and Uganda felt that truth commissions would not work under the guise of the current regimes. For example, Udo stressed the following in his story,

Truth commissions play a very important role and they can be good for a country like Uganda. But in the current circumstances I don’t think that Museveni is open to this … You’d need regime change for them to work.

Twenty of my participants believed that truth commissions could be beneficial by including refugee contributions in peacebuilding and national reconciliation efforts. As Kuthula said, TRCs could help to document the suffering refugees have been through. Similarly, Khotso noted that
truth commissions could help with refugee policies and deter violent behaviour and human rights abuses that cause people to flee. Other participants remarked that they could help in healing, forgiveness, reparations, and human rights education that ensures that the history of abuse is not forgotten. For example, this is what Kagiso had to say on this issue:

We need TRCs .... for the freedom. They can also help with .... some sort of forgiveness, .... forgiveness is tough, for some of us ... who want to go back home. Mugabe\textsuperscript{447} will tell you that I don’t have refugees.... We want to be accepted, we want the government to acknowledge us so that there can be forgiveness. Truth commissions can help with this acknowledgement.

Lumana also acknowledges that TRCs create the space for individuals to heal. He believes that “TRCs can help release the heart, help with healing.”

Nagaya also notes that having the space to tell one’s stories allows one to release the psychological pain held inside:

They can help us in telling our stories, because this is the only thing that healed me. My husband used to say to me, tell me about yourself, and tell me your story, so it helped to speak out.

Similarly, Alaafia said that telling her story frees her from the psychological burden she carries:

They can help us release the pain, the hurt. The way I am now, if I had no one to share with I would kill myself. So if these processes can be there to help people release, just releasing also helps to heal your mind. In sharing, you can receive advice.

Fereta is of the mind that TRCs provide hope for the future and the possibility of reconciliation between people:

They can help allow for people to live in peace, with no fear. There will be unity, no hatred among the people. They can help to provide hope, help with the reconstruction of lives, and encourage personal, communal and national reconciliation. Such processes are

\textsuperscript{447} Robert Mugabe is the President of Zimbabwe. In 1980 he was elected as Zimbabwe’s first black African Prime Minister. In 1987, Mugabe promptly assumed the post of President and he has held this office ever since. He was recently (2013 presidential poll) re-elected for another five-year term in office.
helpful in a way that a refugee is someone who has lost hope. So such processes help to
reconstruct lives, and encourage reconciliation. This helps refugees to see that life has
ups and downs. If at all peace is to come, reconciliation should happen – in families,
community and nation – from country then continent …. It is very important that
refugees are involved in the reconciliation process.

Nye argued that the TRCs’ public process keeps the narrative in the public eye so that nobody
can forget:

They will help to make people aware what refugees went through and we may get
durable solutions.

Emem also noted that the narratives of the TRCs become part of the historical record that cannot
be denied in the future:

They can help to ensure that the history of abuse is not forgotten. People have the
tendency of forgetting things.

My participants’ narratives spoke about the perceived strengths of truth commissions, in
particular the benefits they avail to survivors of human rights violations by providing them a
platform to tell their stories. David Crocker states that “in any society meeting the challenge of
transitional justice, victims or families should be provided with a platform to tell their stories and
have their testimony publicly acknowledged.”

Similarly, Dumisa Ntsebeza observes that through the telling of survivors’ stories, the TRC can act as a tool that helps “restore to victims of gross human rights violations … their civil and human dignity by providing them [the
platform to tell] stories of their victimhood.”

---


Perceived Limitations of Truth Commissions

Despite the aforementioned positive outlooks on truth commissions, some participants were skeptical that the goals of truth commissions could be realised. In particular, they addressed the goal of national reconciliation which is often closely associated with truth commissions. This is also something that Priscilla Hayner highlights as a key goal of truth commissions. Hayner further points out that commissions set out to realise the goals of assessing accountability for past wrongs, promoting respect for the rule of law and human rights, and developing socially constructed truth and recommendations for post-violence social transformation to prevent future violent acts. She underscores that “perhaps the most important aim of any truth commission [is to] prevent violence and the abuse of human rights.” Against this backdrop of truth commissions’ goals, some of the respondents underscored that as a result of deep-seated tribal divisions and undemocratic regimes that still govern their countries, national reconciliation will remain an elusive goal. For example Tayo who comes from DR Congo’s conflict-ridden eastern side of the country, shared the following:

Truth commissions are a good process but [they] will not work in DR Congo which is still divided along tribal lines.

Musango from Zimbabwe also outlined the political impediments to TRCs in the following way:

I’m not sure how it can help; it would be limited by the current political situation. However it is important to tell your story, if only the political dynamics could be addressed so you do not feel threatened by publicly sharing your story.

There were a few respondents who felt it would be difficult for truth commissions to assist refugee communities, stressing that their governments do not uphold human rights and civil

---

liberties. They felt they would not feel safe participating in truth-telling processes because there is no freedom of speech. For example Kuthula noted the following in her story:

The problem with our countries, truly speaking is that there are some countries where you are not even free to talk out issues because you are afraid of getting into trouble. These countries, governments…. when the truth is about to come out, or when you are trying to speak out, they can make you suffer for telling the truth. You suffer from it …. It is not easy to help refugees I don’t know who can. … Maybe if it is international organisations ….who voice our stories, but you never know if their voicing out will bring problems back to you. The moment you start voicing out your story, then the security agents try to find out where the story came from. This is the situation with these African countries. I don’t know what can really be done.

A number of my participants felt that truth commissions could not be of use to refugee communities because they could not change the tragedies of their past. For example, Isithangami who was forced into exile at an early age and witnessed the negative impact of persecution and forced displacement on family members reflected as follows:

They [truth commissions] cannot help refugees. I don’t think it is possible for them to be helpful. You can never make up for what someone has been through and is still internally going through. You cannot easily change their horrible past. Money cannot buy you internal healing and how do you repay someone who has mental problems because of what they have been through…. Even if you look at the reparations thing, look at the situation of the Rwandan genocide, up to today people still struggle with that issue. They may say they have healed or reconciled but still something inside is bothering them. I remember my friend from Rwanda. She would tell me some of her stories and when you listen to them you can tell that it is not something that will be easily resolved. When they say forgive each other it does not happen easily. It [ethnic conflict] is like it will always be something in their blood.

Another respondent from Burundi, Amahoro, questioned how truth commissions could help displaced persons economically if they were to decide to repatriate to their home countries. He recalled that when his family was first displaced in the early 1990s as a result of armed ethnic conflicts, they found their family land occupied by someone else when they returned home. He shared the following with me in her story:

We found quite a number of properties were taken …. they had taken our six cattle …. some things in the house were also taken. We also found they had taken over parts of the
farm land. My father kept on asking for his property. It brought a huge problem and they said if he continued to ask they would report that he was working with the overthrown government. So my Dad had to keep silent. I remember him saying that, “they have taken my livelihood. How cruel this world can be.”

This body of narratives demonstrates some of the skepticism that some of my research participants had about the work of truth commissions. They doubted if truth commissions could help transitional societies realise a “never again” state when it comes to violent conflicts and other gross human rights violations such as socioeconomic and gender injustice. According to Robert Rotberg the notion of “never again” has been a “central cry of truth commissions … the notion … captures the response of societies that are recovering their own equilibria, their own dignity, and their sense of integrity.” However as the skepticism demonstrates the “never again” notion is questioned by some as to whether it could be attained in their home countries through truth commissions.

The Road Towards National Reconciliation

The reflections on national reconciliation were discussed further and constitute the focus of this segment of narratives. According to Emmanuel Gymiah-Boadi national reconciliation “involves reconciliation at the level of individuals, political parties, ethnic and religious communities coexisting or seeking to coexist in the larger national community. National reconciliation is deemed as a key goal for societies emerging from a past of violent conflict and / or conditions of repressive and authoritarian rule.” Moreover, Priscilla Hayner states that in a post-violence context, reconciliation has been described as mutual conciliation between former antagonistic

persons or groups. Hayner also suggests that reconciliation is the strength of truth commissions as they promote a negotiated transition towards peace by redressing “past silenced or highly conflictive events.” Below are narratives that speak to the value of reconciliation as discussed by some of the participants.

The Value of National Reconciliation

First, when probed on their understanding of reconciliation, most respondents related it to “national unity or the nation coming together” and “mutual acceptance” where individuals look beyond tribal differences and accept one another as members of the human family. They felt that reconciliation “depends on all parties” being involved in reconciliatory efforts. For example, Selam made the following remarks:

Reconciliation is a good thing, it means national unity. It brings the nation together. I wish that Somalis would do it and there could be peace so we would forget what happened in the past and not think that this tribe should be higher than another.

Similarly, Amahoro equates reconciliation with the macro process of national unity. He argued that “reconciliation has no room for hatred … it is national unity first.” In addition, Fereta also perceives national reconciliation to be more important than individual reconciliation. He believed that, “reconciliation … means the beginning of reconstructing lives and nations.”

Others such as Suhulu connected reconciliation with forgiveness:

Forgiving them [perpetrators] meant trying to live with them …. I know that if you try to say let us make them pay back for what they did, then the next generation will do the same. Then it will always be a cycle of violence. I know that reconciliation is trying to remove all guilt …. for the sake of the future. You try to work together with them [perpetrators]. That is reconciliation to me, [and] it seems like a tough thing to do.

Musango also echoed a similar sentiment stating the following in her story:

---

Reconciliation meant forgiving and forgetting, starting afresh. If people have not yet forgiven and forgotten what happened, the thing will be happening every time. So, we need to forgive and forget and start afresh.

In addition, Kuthula underscored that reconciliation meant daily living in peace and harmony with everyone else in her country:

Reconciliation .... means forgetting and looking into .... what is it that I want to achieve, what do I want my country to achieve. I want my country to achieve peace and build peace with neighbouring countries. I want everyone to enjoy peace and for that I should think of things of peace instead of revenge.

When asked how they felt about reconciliation specifically in relation to their human rights experiences, a number of my participants generally saw it as a necessary process that should not be one of “lip service” nor “discriminatory.” They also felt that citizens of post-violence transitional societies needed to be educated about reconciliation. For example, Nagaya reflected on the necessity of reconciliation in order that she can heal from her traumatic past. She was gang raped during her country’s ethnic conflict. She reflected the following in her story:

We are living in the world with other people, no one lives alone. I need my neighbour and friend. Reconciliation is needed, we depend on one another. No one is able to do everything by himself. If there is no reconciliation, there is no improvement .... With those who raped me, well, when I look back at that experience, it is like a play. I believe that where my state of mind is today, I am able to reconcile with those that raped me and my family members. Reconciliation helps, it helps with healing. It helps to talk to release your trauma and pain. As a woman who was raped, telling my story is what helped me. It is so important in life.

Emem also noted that although reconciliation is a “good” process, it is difficult to attain. He noted that in post-conflict situations people may say they have reconciled but deep within they carry “war sores.” This is what he had to say on the issue:

Reconciliation is good, but asking for reconciliation is a big thing, you will never get anything. I have heard it before on the South African Broadcasting Cooperation (SABC) TV, forgive and forget .... But, let us talk about big fights, these past wars, for example, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Do you think that they have reconciled? It is not happening. People do not want to forget. People are still keeping things inside saying that they have reconciled. But, the war is still going on inside us, it is a war sore .... If reconciliation
truly comes from both sides openly it is good …. It needs dialogue and …. needs forgiveness. There is a story our prophet [Prophet Mohammed] told about one guy. This guy he’s been approved to enter heaven because the angels told him. Others who have not been approved asked why, what about us? So they decided to follow the guy and find out everything he did [why he had been approved and they hadn’t]. They found out that everything he did was the same as them …. he prayed the same. But there was one thing he did differently before going to bed. He would pray to God and ask God to forgive him openly for the mistakes he had done. For example, he prayed that if he had hurt people unknowingly, God should please forgive him. Then he would sleep. Look at how sensitive he was …. maybe he had done mistakes, and hurt others but he asked for forgiveness. If you forgive someone it is beautiful. Your heart is clean. So these are some of the things that are needed with reconciliation.

In addition to these statements on reconciliation, other participants had different perspectives on reconciliation. Their perspectives focussed on the challenges posed to the process of post-violence reconciliation. Their narratives are captured in the segment below addressing challenges to national reconciliation.

**Challenges to National Reconciliation**

A majority of my participants expressed doubt that reconciliation and durable peace could successfully be promoted by truth commissions. They insisted that deep-rooted tribal divisions in their countries would continually serve as impediments to peace. Interestingly they all used the term tribe as opposed to ethnicity to describe their different national ethnic groups. For example, when discussing Rwanda’s genocide, some of my participants referred to it as a tribal conflict as opposed to an ethnic conflict because the term tribe is what is familiar to them. Therefore in this section, the terms tribe and ethnic group are used interchangeably.

Participants reflected on their personal experiences with tribal conflict and abuse that was sparked by tribal tensions when expressing their doubts about reconciliation. They noted that divisive tribal roots first need to be addressed in order to achieve lasting post-violence national reconciliation and peace. Many of my respondents reiterated that they, and earlier family
members before, had had to flee more than once as a result of reoccurring ethnic conflict. This is what Kagiso had to say about tribalism, reconciliation and peace:

I grew up in Burundi …. I went to primary school and first became a refugee in 1988 while in Standard 3 [Grade 3]. We fled to Tanzania and stayed there for about one year and two months. The tribal conflict was caused by the overthrow of President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza Bagazi⁴⁵⁵…. Again, in 1994 when the President was killed in October, we fled to Tanzania …. People took advantage of the state of emergency announced by the new President and started killing …. They were motivated by tribalism …. In Tanzania, we were taken to the stadium called lake Tanganyika stadium were we stayed for 3 weeks …. and then we were taken to this camp where we were given basic food and a tent. We stayed there 1994, 1995 and in 1996…. my Mum said …. we better go back to Burundi and die. The problem is that …. in …. my country, generally there is no respect [for] human rights. There is the issue of …. categorising people by tribes. This categorising is against human rights. Of course when you continue to categorise people by their tribal groups that is segregation …. This hatred between Burundians (was) initiated by colonialism so people inherited what colonialism brought and allowed it to be part of the system. So, whoever is in power …. have his own tribe and leave the other tribes behind.

Another Burundian, Musango, who has a Hutu father and a Tutsi mother, shared this reality with me as follows:

If you go to your mother’s side they kick you out, the same with my father’s side. Sometimes I asked my father why the Tutsi hate us. He said, you are half breed you don’t have any place to belong. You are like the wind.

Similar sentiments were shared with me by another Burundian Amahoro who shares his observation about tribalism and its deep-seated roots in his country:

I was born into a mixed family. My parents are coming from different tribes. My father is Hutu and mother is Tutsi. Tribal conflicts are not new. They are a cycle. There were tribal problems in 1972 that my parents went through …. were Tutsi and Hutu killed each other …. We also experienced this when fighting broke out in the 1990s. With us being mixed we were hated by both sides, saying we are spies, coming from both sides. If you kill Tutsi you are killing your mother’s side. If you kill Hutu you are killing your father’s side …. Reconciliation means mutual acceptance, to accept me as I am …. But if you look at Burundi today, ask yourself, did these people forgive one another …. have the

⁴⁵⁵ President Jean-Baptiste Bagaza Bagazi served as the President of Burundi from 1976-1987. In 1987 he was deposed in a military coup and Pierre Buyoya took over the Presidency.
Hutu and Tutsi forgiven one another? If so, why are people still living in divided tribal zones?

Reflecting on this same issue a Rwandan participant, Nagaya, offered her thoughts as follows:

In 1994 it became too tough …. it was like one tribe was saying you have killed our President who was a Hutu …. It was like this tribe was retaliating, until it became hot and became a massacre …. [The massacre] was …. like someone killing a goat. The most important thing that can bring peace is for the government to start a new chapter. It should tell the people to forgive each other, build a new nation, and it should show them that there are no differences between tribal groups.

Similarly, Emirembe who is also Rwandan commented that tribalism is in the minds of her people:

Reconciliation is needed in Rwanda …. if there was no tribalism then the genocide would not have been there. But the genocide was there, the tribes were there. For example, why do we carry our ethnic identity cards if there is no tribalism? …. The problem is the minds of the people.

A Congolese lady Nye also, reflected similar ideas about tribal conflict in the DR Congo. This is what she had to say on the issue:

This tribal conflict in Congo it is like people fight for no reason. What are they fighting for? It is like a drama. Years ago, my father ran away from the same tribal problem. And now, I’ve also run away from the same problem.

A Somali lady, Uxolo also reiterated similar concerns with regard to Somalia in the following way:

Peace in Somali, all this tribalism all these people bringing tribal conflicts should come together sit at the table and sort out their differences whether from that tribe or this tribe at the end of the day you are Somali people.

When my participants reflected on the deep roots of tribal conflicts, they revealed that the undertones of tribal tensions are also evident in the camp. For example, Musango from Zimbabwe observed that:

On the Zimbabwean side tribalism has too much history and problems. Maybe with a TRC that is when things can be resolved …. [For example], the other day when we were at the funeral it started. The tribal tensions always start when we meet and there are no
agendas and we start talking on any topic – such as politics. At the funeral … they were some saying Mugabe was right for the gukurahundi. Others were saying no he was fighting people who were not fighting. So it got really emotional.

Amahoro also noted that tribal conflict prevented peaceful coexistence between ethnic groups.

This is what he had to say on the issue:

Tribalism is our biggest problem. It is a hindrance to peaceful coexistence, even in the camp this is a seed for tensions.

Nagaya made the point that tribal conflicts are deeply ingrained in the minds of people:

In our communities, Rwandese and Burundians those things of Hutu and Tutsi are still on our minds. Tribal conflict is engraved in our minds. We do not trust each other.

Khotso also noted that ethnic conflicts are difficult to transform. This is what he had to say on the issue:

In our community we have this problem of tribes. [For example] in our nationality, there is a very big tension between Ndebele and Shona …. Recently just a few months ago the Shona’s went to report that the Ndebele’s are having a political party in the camp. They were saying that they didn’t want to stay in the camp any longer …. saying there is a new party now in the Zimbabwe for the Ndebele called Mthwakazi …. You cannot resolve tribalism, it is deeply rooted …. Our tribal tensions cannot be resolved because they go back to the times of Mzilikasi and the Ndebele’s are also bitter by what happened to the gukurahundi [when] most Ndebele were killed by Mugabe’s soldiers.

This mix of reflections on reconciliation highlights the challenges that bodies such as truth commissions face in promoting reconciliation in divided societies. As Juan Mendez says, “reconciliation cannot be decreed,” it is a “journey” that requires a change of attitude, “public

---

456 **Gukurahundi** is a Shona term that refers to the massacres of thousands of members of the Ndebele tribe in the Matebeleland region of Zimbabwe. Some of the primary targets included political dissidents that supported Mugabe’s opponents such as Joshua Nkomo’s supporters. The massacres took place in the 1980s and were carried out by soldiers of President Robert Mugabe’s regime. This violent episode has often been seen as a genocidal attack against the Ndebeles. For example, Genocide Watch a Washington based organisation classified the massacres as genocide – (http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-237352003/zimbabwe-global-group-describes.html).

policies and actions that confront conflict between persons, institutions, or communities head-on.” The reconciliatory process requires digging deep and addressing the root causes of violence in order to build peace.458

**Defining and Building Peace**

*Peace is to be content. (Khotso)*

*Peace is everything, without peace life is like fire. (Lumana)*

*Peace is freedom, safety and security. (Udo)*

*Peace can be there when people want it to be ... I am intrigued by animals. I see people who are said to be intelligent, educated, but at the end, they end up killing people unnecessarily. They are not like the animals that [only] kill for survival. (Emirembe)*

According to John Paul Lederach, when conflict breaks out, it is communities at the grassroots that witness first-hand deep-seated animosity and the violence it births. These communities often bear the brunt of violent conflicts. Unfortunately in the top-down post-violence peacebuilding processes, the grassroots are also the ones that have to wait for the seeds of peace to trickle down to their social environments. This is why scholars like Mac Ginty and Lederach propose bottom-up peacebuilding, where every social stratum is empowered to participate in post-violence peacebuilding efforts.459

This idea of grassroots involvement in building peace was explored by my participants as demonstrated in the body of narratives below. They discussed some of the key ingredients for peacebuilding and for redressing human rights injustices. They also discussed their perspectives on peace, the type of interventions that they believe are required to enable their countries to

transition towards durable peace and national reconciliation. Finally they shared their perspectives about ways in which refugee communities can contribute to post-violence peacebuilding.

What is Peace?

Jeong states that there is a broad social understanding of peace. He observes that for different people, peace implies different things. As he asserts, “some may identify peace as a lack of conflict ... peace can also mean coexistence of different cultures and societies.” Moreover, Jeong’s vision of global peace depicts a world where people within a society are on an equal footing, working, and living together in harmony. Other scholars in the PACS field such as Charles Webel describe peace as a linchpin of social harmony, economic equity and political justice.

When asked about peace, quite a few of my participants described it as “everything.” For example, Fereta shared the following in his story:

Peace is everything …. It means that in life for any progress to be achieved there should be peace. For example, for development to be achieved there should be peace. Violence is not a solution …. When peace is there, things can start moving. Nothing can function nor can you operate in a hostile environment, you need a peaceful environment. Peace to me means my life is safe and secure and that I am able to do what I want to achieve in my lifetime. I have dreams. These dreams I can achieve them .... in an environment where there is peace .... In life, a human being is not independent from the environment, so life depends on the status of the environment – whether it is peaceful or hostile.

Along similar lines, Dembe compared peace to “saving the world.” This is what he had to say on the issue:

---

461 Ibid, 7.
Peace is everything. Peace is important. It can build society and help a child to be someone…. Sometimes people put peace as food for our blood. If only we could really understand what peace means. This Arab writer writes that before our Prophet [Prophet Mohammed], our people were savages, killing each other. When Mohammed came, he gave them peace. Mohammed got support from them because of the peace he gave them and changed them into civilised people…. Our Prophet said to them, let us talk about peace. This is what he said, “If someone kills someone for no reason it is like he has killed the whole world. And if someone saves a life, he has saved the whole world.” So peace is like saving the world.

In contrast Musango, saw peace as safety and security:

Peace is safety for self and family. You know, maybe there is no absolute peace … but at least when you are guaranteed the safety of your own life and loved ones then there is peace.

Reflecting on their persecutions, others linked peace to acceptance of differences as opposed to discrimination, to love as opposed to hate, and respect for another life as opposed to disrespect.

For example Amahoro noted that peace means accepting differences, and loving others:

According to me, peace is just the acceptance of the other person. When talking about acceptance you are talking about love. You should love the other person. We should love one another, despite our differences, background, despite tribes and so forth. We have to respect and accept one another. For example, I have a wife here, if I don’t respect her I can’t be with her. Why should I be with her if I don’t respect her? So this is the major problem we are facing, like back home.

There were some participants who felt that they could not relate to the concept of peace because they had no peace in their lives. They perceived peace as socio-economic stability. For example, Kagiso expressed to me that he was living in protracted daily economic struggles:

There is no peace if no work, school, no freedom of movement. If I cannot provide for my family I have no peace.

Similarly, Emirembe reflected that peace meant to her the freedom to move, and not to be curtailed in a camp:

There is no peace living like this. Living in a protracted refugee situation, there is no freedom of movement therefore, there is no peace. It is difficult. What is peace in this situation?
She further reflected on this issue in the following manner:

Peace, that one is very difficult, because you never know if you will ever have peace. When I first came here, I spoke to some ladies from Namibia. I asked them how long they had been in the camp. One said 10 years and the other 11 years. I was shocked. The thought of staying in a refugee camp for 11 years was the worst thing I could hear. So when you talk about peace, you wonder what if I will be like that one who has been here for 11 years. There is no peace …. Nowadays my daughter is always saying, Mama, these days you don’t even look beautiful. When we were at home you never dressed like this. You never looked like this. So there is not peace, even the children can see that things are not normal.

As a researcher of Peace and Conflict Studies issues, I definitely had a learning moment by having this opportunity to have a glimpse of how peace is viewed through the lens of the ordinary man and women who are survivors of violent experiences and understand what it means to be denied the right to peace. As many noted peace is life, security, freedom, safety – everything. It was evident that that the participants believed that a state of peace was fundamental to one’s daily life.

Against this backdrop of peace, my participants went on to discuss what they perceived as key ingredients for peace. In their discussion they stressed the importance of peaceful coexistence. According to Louis Kriesberg, coexistence refers to persons or groups living together in the same environment without causing harm or destroying one another.\footnote{Louis Kriesberg, “Changing forms of Coexistence,” in Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence – Theory and Practice, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 48.} Moreover, Mohammed Abu-Nimer asserts that coexistence involves the development of “cooperative rather than destructive modes of interaction [between conflicting groups] in order to realise the full potential of the two groups.” It means the mutual recognition of rights and identities “based on
humanistic and pragmatic principles.”  

Abu-Nimer further observes that “to reach such a place, the conflicting ... groups need to fully explore, confront it and be able to realise their interdependency and humanness.”  

Captured below are participants’ narratives that illustrate ways in which they believe post-violence communities can live in peaceful coexistence.

**Towards Living in Peaceful Coexistence: Preventing Conflict and Human Rights Abuses**

My respondents outlined five ingredients that they felt could contribute to durable peace, national reconciliation, respect for human rights in their home countries – in essence an environment of peaceful coexistence. These ingredients are peace education, acceptance, justice, democratic leadership and good governance, and community-based dialogue.

**Peace education.** First the participants spoke of peace education. Eric Brahm describes it as pedagogy that sets out to promote a more peaceful society and which covers topics ranging from conflict management and development to human rights.  

Brahm notes that at its core, peace education “emphasises empowerment and nonviolence and involves building a democratic community teaching cooperation, developing moral sensitivity, promoting self-esteem and stimulating critical thinking.”  

In this regard, my respondents remarked that they believed that peace education has a vital role to play in preventing human rights abuses and ethnopolitical conflict in their countries. They felt that through peace education post-accord transitional societies could be educated about peace, forgiveness and acceptance. They suggested that peace

---


465 Ibid.


467 Ibid.
education should be part of the school curriculum whereby it is introduced to children at an early stage. For example, Amahoro from Burundi reflected that peace education in schools can help prevent tribal biases that are learned in one’s social environments. This is what he had to say:

Hatred between Burundians was initiated by colonialism. So people inherited what colonialism brought and allowed it to be part of the system…. Therefore, peace education should start with the children, so they can to be taught about living together …. So, maybe it can work if it starts at primary schools where people are not identified by their tribes but as students.

Nagaya also suggested that peace education should be a major part of transitional justice and post-violence peacebuilding processes:

During conflict everyone is hurt, therefore, after conflict we need to educate on peace. For example, the children of Rwanda were hurt. Until now, Tutsi cannot forget what happened. But, the Hutu were also hurt. I can’t say the Hutu did not die. They also died a lot after the genocide. When the Tutsi took over the country they killed some Hutus and put them in prison as some were angry, and were revenging the deaths of their loved ones. So we need to educate on peace and forgiveness. It will not be easy.

In addition, Kuthula observed the following in her story:

People need to be educated that there is no one tribe that can ever really survive without the other. We all need each other. We need to educate on …. coexistence, the issue of living together, accepting each other. We need to leave this issue of tribalism and focus on building the nation.

Acceptance. Second, my participants discussed the role of social acceptance. Angela Khaminwa states that coexistence is not static, it fluctuates based on social interaction and moves from passive coexistence to active coexistence. At the juncture of active coexistence there is a social element of acceptance, where communities embrace each other and their differences. This is the spirit of acceptance that the research participants identified. They expressed that human rights abuses and the challenges of tribal conflicts or tensions could be redressed by

---

promoting social acceptance. For example Hetep, stated that, “through acceptance, communities can learn to accept one another across tribal lines.” Some participants also felt that colonialism had played a major role in “sowing seeds of tribal division.” Therefore, they felt that in order to overcome tribal discords, the message of inter-tribal acceptance and coexistence needs to be cultivated by post-colonial societies to overcome legacies of tribal division.

**Justice.**

*Justice and peace are different, you can negotiate peace but I don’t think you can negotiate justice* (Tayo)

The third ingredient that the participants discussed was justice. According to John Rawls, “justice is fairness.” Through this lens of fairness, humanity “… assigns basic rights and duties and … determines the division of social benefits. [Human beings] decide … how they regulate their claims against one another and what is to be the foundation of their society.” 469 In essence justice permits the regulation of a well-ordered society including ways that “govern how we deal with injustice.” 470 In the field of transitional justice one of the ways in which injustice is addressed is through retributive justice. According to Michelle Maiese, retributive justice is a judicial measure that responds to legacies of crimes and holds wrongdoers accountable for their criminal actions. 471 It is this judicial measurement of retributive justice that some of my participants suggested was necessary in creating just and peaceful environments of coexistence as survivors’ calls for post-violence justice are adhered to. For example, Sierra Leone’s government and the United Nations established the Special Court of Sierra Leone in 2000 to

470 Ibid, 8.
redress the country’s legacy of conflict and human rights abuses and to hold perpetrators accountable. Similarly, in post-genocide Rwanda, the International Criminal Tribunal of Rwanda was established to prosecute persons responsible for genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.\footnote{Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, United Nations Security Council Resolution 955, 8 November 1994.} One of my participants, Kayiroo, explained that, “justice is the mediator between war and peace …. Justice is something everybody needs …. Without justice …. there is no reconciliation. Without justice the more you feel injustice and the more you hate.”

Others commented that the reason they had faced persecution in their countries was due to the fact that justice was absent and that the rule of law was not observed. For example, Selam is a survivor of Somalia’s violent armed conflict. This is what she had to say on the issue:

If there was justice in Somali nothing like what happened would be there. Those people that killed my family would be caught maybe they would be imprisoned or hung because they killed someone. In our religion we believe in an eye for an eye …. If someone kills they should also be killed.

Moreover Adowa commented that justice means equality:

Injustice brings in corruption, favouritism, nepotism, and tribalism. So when justice is there it stands against these wrongs and everyone feels fairly treated. They feel that I am equal with the next person. [However] …. when tribalism triumphs, then justice will never be recognised. [We] need justice that does not discriminate along tribal lines …. [where] everyone feels fairly treated before the law.

These perspectives on justice highlight the vital role that justice as a post-violence mechanism can play in transitional situations. Rama Mani alludes to this role in her observation that if we are intent on pursuing lasting peace and deeper and broader justice, it becomes clear that the two are inseparable and interdependent and cannot be addressed in isolation.”\footnote{Rama Mani. “Does Power Trump Morality? Reconciliation or Transitional Justice?” in \textit{Atrocities and International Accountability Beyond Transitional Justice}, eds. Edel Hughes, William Schabas, and Ramesh Thakur, 23-41 (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007), 27.} Grono further reiterates this notion by pointing out that peace is integral to justice as peace is not just about the
absence of conflict but that it also restores security. Addressing the impact of justice on survivors of crime, David Matas suggests that “justice creates a legacy for victims … it makes good the promise “never again” by setting up mechanisms to deter [similar crimes in the future].” Matas remarks reiterate the comments made by participants who see justice as a way of making right what is wrong and in advancing peace. These same participants, though, pointed out that in order to effectively advance justice as one of the pillars of communal environments of peace coexistence, transitional societies need democratic leadership that engages in good governance. Their discussion on this fourth ingredient of leadership and governance follows below.

Democratic leadership and good governance.

Leadership in Africa is typified more by disfiguring examples – Idi Amins and Robert Mugabes – than by positive role models such as Nelson Mandela and Seretse Khama … During the past three decades, roughly 90 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa’s leaders have behaved despotically, governed poorly, exacerbated existing civil conflicts, decelerated per capita economic growth and proved corrupt.

According to the United Nations, governance involves decision-making procedures and the ways in which decisions are implemented. Good governance is characterised by processes that are participatory, consensus orientated, transparent, responsive, accountable, effective,

---


efficient, inclusive, and follows the rule of law. This form of decision-making is usually associated with national leadership in a democratic context. These are leaders that exude participative leadership by allowing others to be involved in decision-making processes. Participation is a core characteristic of their leadership. Robert Rotberg asserts that democratic leaders “deliver high security for the state and the person; a functioning rule of law, education, health and a framework conducive to economic growth … They empower civil society … they knit rather than unravel their nations.”

The type of leadership outlined above by Rotberg was a topic of much discussion when my participants submitted that it represents the fourth ingredient for peaceful coexistence and national reconciliation. Some of the research participants spoke about the need for democratic leadership in their country that is able to respect and champion human rights, embrace multiparty democracy, and guides their societies in national reconciliation and reconstruction processes. For example, respondent Fereta from Southern Sudan articulated that:

The leaders need to come and talk to the people and say let us forget the past and start rebuilding our country. Let us leave behind tribalism, let us reconcile and preach the gospel of peace, tolerance, and forgiveness of the past and start rebuilding.

Reflecting on leadership and political repression in Uganda, Udo also commented that,

I think one of the issues could be a respect of the constitution. President Museveni changes it [the constitution] whenever he wants. Now he is becoming a life President.

---

Leadership needs to respect dissenting views from opposition politicians and ... clean itself in terms of corruption.

Moreover, Salaamata shared with me her ideas on leadership and human rights noting that it is important to “start by having a government that observes human rights.” In addition, Emirembe from Zimbabwe commented that African countries needed “new governments” for sustainable peace to emerge:

We need to change government in order to get peace. Change the government, there is no other solution. Just change the government .... if it were to change, I would run back to my country.

The participants underscored the need for national leaders to promote post-violence participatory peacebuilding measures that included measures such as community-based dialogue processes.

Captured below are some ideas offered by one of my interviewees on this matter.

**Dialogue.** According to Harry Anastasiou dialogue, is an open-ended and un-coerced communication that is widely used in the PACS field. The dialogical process allows for unrestricted communication that is useful for reconciling competing perspectives to a place of newfound mutual facts and truths. Freire also observes that dialogue is a relational and transformative process that involves love, faith in humankind, hope, trust, and critical thinking. Harold Saunder refers to dialogue as a process that centers on transforming deep-rooted disharmonious relationships. Thus, dialogue can generate the birth of “public peace processes” that can forge new relationships and community “practices, processes and structures of peace”. In 2001, the value of dialogue in community building and understanding was highlighted by the United Nations it declared that year the *United Nations Year of Dialogue*

---


483 Ibid.
Among Civilisations.484 Against this backdrop of discussion on dialogue, some participants suggested that dialogue was a necessary ingredient for nurturing social environments of post-violence peaceful coexistence. For example, Malino commented that “I think if people sit around the table a situation can be created where dialogue can take place then peace maybe can be realised.” Zoleka stated that, “Dialogue is a political solution that can bring parties together facilitate for an agreement.” In addition to these perspectives other participants were hesitant to make similar observations about peace and coexistence. They argued that there were too many obstacles in their countries that hinder peace and national reconciliation efforts. Presented below are some of the obstacles they outlined.

**Obstacles to Building Peace**

The participants who questioned the notion of peaceful coexistence mentioned that protracted violent conflicts in places like Somalia were an obvious obstacle to building a sustainable peace. They also cited other concerns such as politics, tribalism and nepotism. For example, Selam from Somalia expressed that the conflict in her country is now so complex that peace and reconciliation between warring factions seems impossible. She felt that there are now many layers to the conflict making the situation more complex and difficult to transform:

I don’t know if there will be peace in Somalia. It is now becoming worse with Al Shabaab who is a problem. The other day I saw a small boy from Somalia shown on the television news carrying guns. What do they know about guns, if only Al-Shabaab could be destroyed.

---

Other respondents focused yet again on the challenges posed by tribalism. For example, Chibanda from Zimbabwe highlighted that her country would need to be divided along tribal lines in order to attain peace.

It would be to divide the country along tribes for the sake of peace …. Mtwakazi now is also coming up and wanting for the country to be divided in two …. saying Mugabe should stay with the Shona and the Ndebele should be independent …. peace in Zimbabwe will take a long time.

A few of the participants noted that African countries will continue to face violent conflict and human rights abuses because there are groups in power that benefit from the “chaos”. For example, reflecting on the status of Zimbabwe, Isithangami noted that:

There is a very big problem with Zimbabwe because there are some people benefitting from the situation right now. There are those who are influential and still want the situation to continue. It is very tough …. Peace could have been brought with the 2008 elections …. but nothing was done against Mugabe. At times I feel like even some of these political parties are just playing …. So at the end of the day, Mugabe has his support and the other political parties move like the wind.

Finally, Emem questioned the reality of peace and reconciliation in a world lacking justice:

Justice does not exist. For example, the Americans want justice against Bashir [President of Sudan], but are the people [Sudanese] striking against him in Sudan, no. It means they love him. So do you want to kill someone that people love? Then you leave someone like George Bush killing others. Why can’t he go to ICC? Where is the justice? What is justice for me – fairness, whatever your racial, religious and tribal background …. I must look at you with fair eyes and that is when we’ll all know justice. That is why sometimes you just surrender to God, because we are not seeing justice here. The world is not fair …. today you don’t hear about Bahrain uprising and you just hear about Libya.

Subsequent to these reflections on peace and some of the ingredients needed for building sustainable peace, the participants addressed the role that refugees can play as co-workers in post-accord peacebuilding. In their discussion on this issue, they spoke about lessons that they have learned while living in exile as refugees in a relatively peaceful democratic country. This discussion follows below.
Refugees as Co-partners in Building Peace

You should not wish to see war. If you hear there is war somewhere just let it be there, don’t let it reach you. If it reaches you and you are not strong enough, it will take you out. (Amahoro)

A peacebuilding process is not about telling people how to live peacefully it starts from education, (soon) people end up finding themselves engaging in peace-promoting activities. (Khotso)

This segment presents my research participants’ views about the contributions that refugees can make to peace processes in their home countries. Gil Loescher, James Milner, Edward Newman and Gary Troeller state that “refugees are increasingly not seen as passive victims, but as active agents engaged in the politics of the country of origin, host country and region.” Moreover they note that the “broader recognition of the role of refugees and the regional dynamics of peacebuilding is an important precondition of the success of [peacebuilding activities].”

Therefore, when asked if and how refugees could contribute towards building peace and in redressing human rights wrongs in their countries of origin, a number of respondents felt that refugees could play an active role. They opined that refugee communities could draw from their experiences as survivors of persecution as well as from their exposure to living a life of exile. They suggested that refugees understand the price of war, peace, freedom and justice as well as understanding the traumatic impact of human rights atrocities on peoples lived experiences. For example, Malino averred that refugees have little material possessions yet they have hope that everything will turn around positively in their lives.

If there is anyone who has taken note of life’s situations, I think it is refugees. They are the people who have experienced life in all its shapes. For example they flee their

---

486 Ibid.
countries with very little such as maybe carrying two pairs of trousers, no shoes, and a towel for bathing.

Khotso is a survivor of many wars who believes that conflicts can be transformed by dialogue rather than through the barrel of a gun:

As a former soldier, I have been in a war. I have been in Somalia, I have been in Angola, and I have been in Mozambique although in Mozambique after the war …. I have seen what war has done to these countries …. It is high time that people start to learn to be passionate and solve national issues through dialogue and not by carrying guns.

Similarly, Adowa is of the opinion that refugees have a positive role to play in the rebuilding of society:

Refugees learn a lot from their plight …. They would not want others to have similar experiences. Having gone through all these experiences they can play a positive role in changing the mentalities of others in their communities. If they were to go back to their countries, they would have a broad picture that human suffering is not good.

Further, the participants suggested that from their experiences they had fine-tuned their skills that are relevant to peace work. For example Nye, who was involved with a peace group in the camp known as the ‘Peace Messengers,’ spoke about her experiences of working with the group.

She revealed that,

Peace Messengers …. was formed in 2003, some of the things we did included helping to organise some activities such as refugee day activities. We’d sing and remind other women that when they return [to their countries] they can continue the work [of peace] they did in the camp. Also if there were old people in the camp who could not clean or wash clothes, we would do that for them. We also took care of vulnerable children etc.

In addition, Khotso remarked that peace education is instrumental in instructing young children how to resolve conflict non-violently:

I believe that peace starts with educating people …. People who are educated can understand that they have an obligation to assist or help if a community or nation is in

---

487 Formed in 2003, the Peace Messengers were a group of refugee women that represented the nationalities currently living in Dukwi Refugee Camp. They pursued matters affecting women and children such as sexual and gender-based violence and also helped cultivate a peaceful social environment in the camp. [http://www.unhcr.org/4231a0724.html](http://www.unhcr.org/4231a0724.html).
trouble. If we can have an educated community, we become strong in solving our own problems. Therefore, start educating the children. As I am here in the camp …. I work a lot with the kids …. As someone said, the greatest discovery man ever made was creating common class – which is education …. In the old days only the children from the upper classes were being educated, development was quite slow. We had many wars, but now we’ve started coming out of those wars. Before, the only way people could solve conflict was through violence. Now you find that violence is still there but slowly it is diminishing because more people are being educated.

There were a few participants who opined that the role of refugees may be restricted due to the limitations of human freedom and the lack of funds to support peace efforts. For example, Amahoro observed that refugees are not free at all, and not in a position to advocate for changes to alleviate their plight. He reflected that “maybe in Europe not in Africa, they don’t have rights. Here … refugees first need to be free. They need to be free to be heard.”

Jawara questioned the likelihood of refugee contributions to post-violence peace processes:

To whom do you contribute? Maybe those in diaspora, [they can contribute] in terms of money.

The narratives in this segment clearly indicate that a majority of my participants believe that refugees should be afforded the opportunity to contribute to peace, recovery and rebuilding processes in their home countries. They elaborated further on this point by outlining lessons that they’ve learned about peace while living in the refugee camp as well as lessons learned from observing how peace, democracy, and human rights are promoted and nurtured in Botswana.

**Peace Lessons from Exile**

This first section presents the lessons that this study’s participants stated that they had learned about peace while residing in the Dukwi refugee camp in Botswana. These lessons ranged from trainings that they’ve received in the camp on gender-based violence, to their daily reality of living in peaceful coexistence as a refugee community in a multi-ethnic and multi-
cultural refugee camp. They proffered that these lessons were transferrable to other refugee camps and could also be used in their countries of origin.

**Lessons from Dukwi camp’s multi-cultural environment.** First with respect to lessons learnt in the camp, my interviewees had many stories to tell about the lessons they experienced from living in a multicultural, multi-tribal community that primarily focuses on tolerance, acceptance, communal coexistence and cultural sensitivity. For example, Zoleka suggested that people need to get along to survive in spite of the many differences that existed in the camp. He argued that “I have learnt that for you to live well with others, you have to accept them the way they are, without looking at the differences …. accept the way they are.” Moreover, Selam is also of the opinion that the multi-cultural context of the camp is an important crucible of learning for the many peoples that coexist there:

I have learnt to live with different nationalities. It is good to know other people, you don’t just know Somalis. Now I know other people for example, Namibians, and Angolans. I have learnt it is good to make friends with other people and learn their behaviours their culture, like the Zimbabweans I like the way they dance.

In addition, Musango who is originally from Zimbabwe contends that the camp is a critical space for fostering tolerant attitudes and behaviour:

Where I grew up in Zimbabwe there were no Muslims nearby, but here we are with them we are even teaching [tutoring] their kids. So I’ve learnt tolerance, to tolerate different people. I did not know that you can live with all types of people. I thought that Arabs are those types of people that are cheeky but I’ve found that some of them are fine people. It is surprising that you find that between enemy camps when the leaders are not there, people from enemy camps can relate properly.

Kagiso also highlighted the point in her story that the respect for others that people learn living together in the camp ensures that people find it easy to forgive and reconcile with others:

What we refugees learn from other cultures and different nationalities, we can take it home and practice it. It can help us especially with the point of reconciliation. For instance I have also learnt to say sorry, if I have offended somebody I must say sorry. I learnt a lot, I also learnt to …. to respect others and know that each of us have rights.
Jawara is also impacted by the experience of living in a multi-cultural milieu. This is what he had to say on the issue:

I have learnt many things. First I came to understand that problems did not happen only to me. They happened also to other people. I also learnt that it was …. not only my government that was weak to resolve armed conflict but other governments too. I also learnt to live with different people of different cultures and taboos. I have never lived with many people like this before so this is really something good. I have appreciated living in this type of community. If you can live here, you can live anywhere in the world because this community is kind of a multicultural community.

Interestingly, Khotso has recognised that the camp dwellers are all basically the same – Africans who need to care for one another:

I have learnt how to appreciate all of us as Africans. When you see an Angolan, you are seeing an African. When you see a Caprivian, you are just seeing an African. We are all the same, Africans. My time here has made me to learn how to care for another foreigner.

Safia has recognised that she has matured over the years of living in the camp so that patience has become a virtue for her:

I have socialised with members of different communities whom I never dreamt of associating with. I never thought of meeting an Angolan or Namibian in my life. With some, I have even learnt their languages, so if I go to Zimbabwe I guess I can survive. I have also learnt something about their lifestyles and also about myself. I have learnt to be patient in life. Things do not come easily. I’ve matured while in this environment.

The experience of living in a cross-cultural environment has provided Fereta with the opportunity to learn many new ideas about differences and the need to resolve conflicts amicably:

Living in the camp especially living with so many different people, made me learn different cultures and traditions. I’ve learnt how to respect people from different places. I have been enriched with knowledge …. I have learnt that everybody here has come to accept their status as a refugee and are living in harmony together because despite the fact that you were somebody back home now you are a refugee. So this makes us equal at some level. You just have to accept that you are a refugee like me so we can understand each other and peace is made. What I’ve also learnt is that tolerance is very important. In order for peace to be there we need to tolerate one another. Through tolerance we can
resolve things amicably. What brings tensions is that people have egos. I have also learnt that people are made differently, different cultures, and have different ways of doing things. So you have to accept them the way they are, by doing so this can help you live with them with no problem. Generally living in a camp is a multicultural experience.

In contrast, Khotso reflected on lessons gained about his personal growth and development in the following manner:

I don’t regret being here. It is part of the experience that is going to teach me. I think when I go back home or to some other place …. if I am given the opportunity to exercise what I have learnt here, I will be a great man. I believe so.

Moreover, Emirembe has become empowered developing her own self-efficacy and social skills as a result of interacting with other refugees in the camps:

I have learnt a lot, I’ve learnt about myself, that I am able to do things on my own and be independent. I never knew I had this strength to survive on my own. For a long time I was always under someone. I’ve also learnt how to socialise with others and work with different people.

Emem has also become aware of the responsibility that one has to take for one’s life while living in the camp:

As a refugee you take responsibility for your life 100%. When I was home I was under my family. After you arrive this side, it is 100% responsibility for yourself, it is a big thing but it will make you strong.

Similarly, Uxolo feels that the camp’s multicultural context has impacted positively on how she now views life:

I have learnt that I can live with everyone whether poor or rich. I can live with everyone and I can live everywhere. I did not know that I would survive in Dukwi but I saw that I can live. I’ve learnt to look at everything positively, because if you look at things negatively you cannot succeed.

In contrast, Emem told me that he had not gained anything from living in the refugee camp. This is what he had to say on this issue:

Maybe the only thing I gained here are some children. Otherwise while here, I have lost …. I used to read 3 different books everyday back home. Today during the 13 years spent
in the camp, I never read anything. So I did not gain anything, I lost years here for nothing.

In addition to the lessons drawn from their lived experiences in the Dukwi refugee camp, my participants also discussed the lessons drawn from having found refuge in Botswana, a country that they’ve described as a land of peace. Below are the lessons they shared with me of what it has meant living in a peaceful and democratic country.

**Lessons from the land of peace – Botswana.** “For [over] four decades, Botswana has been one of the developing world’s great success stories. Its combined record of economic growth, political vitality, avoidance of corruption, and democratic development is arguably unmatched in the developing world, despite beginnings in 1966 that could only be described as desperate.”  

This analysis of Botswana by Stephen Lewis was evident in my participants’ narratives as they revealed to me the lessons they had learned about democracy, peace and stability, to human rights and personal freedoms while residing in a refugee camp in Botswana. Indeed the country has gained global recognition for being “arguably the most successful democracy in continental Africa.”

Guided by four nation building principles of democracy, development, unity and self-reliance, Botswana aspires to build “an educated, informed, prosperous, productive, innovative, compassionate, just, caring, safe, secure, open, democratic, accountable, moral, tolerant, united and proud nation.” So far the fruits of this country’s long-term nation building vision, also known as Vision 2016, have “exhibited continuous democratic

---

stability since independence.”⁴⁹¹ As the country’s former President Sir Ketumile Masire observes, “Botswana has achieved a reputation for principled positions and leadership in regional affairs.”⁴⁹²

Commenting on Botswana’s success and the lessons drawn from her citizens, Lumana commented on this issue as follows:

The thing I’ve learnt is that if there is conflict we need to sit and talk with one another, like here in Botswana. Here they believe in dialogue and they respect one another. I’ve also learnt about respecting women. You find that in my country they have too many rapes, abusing ladies. We need to respect the ladies. I can take the Botswana culture to my country of DRC and I can also employ people from Botswana in DRC to help put order. I also found that in Botswana they respect human rights. Everything I have learnt here I can take it to DRC.

Similarly, Malino highlighted how a peaceful Botswana is a positive role model for other African countries to emulate:

I need to thank the country that is hosting us (Botswana). It is a country of peace. I never heard someone being followed just because they spoke negatively about the government. Here there is freedom of speech. It is really exercised in Botswana; nobody is taken to cells when they exercise this freedom. In other African countries, people are being put in cells just for having dissenting voices.

Safia also illuminates how her experience of living in the camp has empowered her as a woman free to be anything that she chooses to be:

I have learnt a lot, to be independent. Before I was stupid, under a man, now I see myself as strong. I can do many things, not for myself only but also for my kids. I can survive with my children, I don’t need a husband, and I want to live free. I see how women are living in Botswana they are independent. Before I was not allowed to drive a car and I see many women here driving. I would like to be like the women here. Before it was like as a woman, I was in prison. But now, I am out of prison. It is better; I don’t want to be under control.

⁴⁹² Ibid, x.
Similarly, Isithangami talks about the peace and tranquility of living in Botswana. This is what she had to say on this issue on the topic:

Living in Botswana there is that kind of peace, there is no conflict like the one we have had at home. Living here you tend to steal from that peace that citizens of Botswana are enjoying also that peace may tend to change your mind. You might be having negative ideas but when you see how people are living here things change.

Moreover, Chibanda considers the safe return of her child from school as living a peaceful life. He reflects with pride on her child’s achievements at school:

I have learnt that when there is peace, life is easy. When you know that your child is going to school and will come back safely that is peace. There is progress in a peaceful country, you can do anything, and you can think and make your life better.

In contrast Musango reflects on the friendliness of Batswana in all spheres of public life that has positively impacted how she sees the world around her:

I have learnt that there is peace and democracy. From the people here in Botswana I learnt the good behaviour of greeting others when you get into a combi [public transport]. You greet everybody even if you don’t know them. All of them say dumelang, dumelang - these people they just greet!

Uxolo is of the opinion that Botswana is a powerful role model for other African countries. This is what she said on the topic:

All countries have to be like Botswana. I have not read about any conflicts in Botswana. This is why during the time of xenophobic attacks in South Africa, we chose to come here. Some people went to Zimbabwe but even in Zimbabwe they were having problems. This is why we chose Botswana – to come to peace.

For Salaamata peace means being free, and not being subjected to direct violence when living in Botswana:

I’ve learnt that peace is the most important thing. When you have peace you have life. If you have peace appreciate it, for you are free. You do not need to be afraid of gun-shots, or be afraid of houses collapsing, even if you don’t have a job; you are free.

---

493 The term Batswana refers to the citizens of Botswana. The singular term is Motswana.
494 Dumelang is a term used for general greeting. In Setswana, which is the local language of Botswana, it means hello.
Similarly, Fereta has learned peaceful living in Botswana because “Botswana is a peaceful and helpful country … and I have learned peace while living here.” Adowa was stunned when she realised that police officers in Botswana weren’t armed. This was a sharp contrast to his experience of living in Uganda where the police patrol streets armed to the teeth:

Coming to Botswana was the first time I had travelled. I was surprised to see police officers without guns, just busy moving around. I thought this is a far better place because back home you don’t move two steps without seeing police officers holding guns … So during the time the Botswana police were questioning me at the Special Branch there was no problem …. I was surprised that at this Special Branch I was not even seeing anybody with weapons. I was just used to the idea that a police officer needed to have a gun and then seeing them not have any, I thought it was cool …. I was cool with that, actually cool and surprised – surprised by the peacefulness.

Others reflected on the challenging lessons they’ve learned while living in Botswana. For example, Dembe had this to say on the issue:

I’ve learnt it is not good to be a refugee, to be a foreigner with no rights in a foreign land …. it is not a good thing …. When you are a refugee something is missing …. because you don’t have peace; your country is at war. Even if you become a Botswana today and you are a citizen, you will still miss the people back home.

Moreover, Luam was of the opinion that she can’t learn anything while she is enclosed in a camp because, “what have I learnt in Botswana, nothing. How can I learn anything while I am enclosed in a refugee camp? I don’t know anything about Botswana.”

In this chapter, these lessons from the camp and reflections on healing, forgiveness and reconciliation draw attention to the relevance of the participants’ voices and experiences in transitional justice mechanisms of post-violence societies. The discussion section below explores this relevancy further.

**Discussion and Analysis**

Many salient findings emerged from the data. The discussion focuses on healing, forgiveness, truth commissions, reconciliation and peacebuilding.
Reflections on Healing

Most of the participants interviewed revealed that they had not healed or were struggling to heal from the atrocities they were subjected to in their home countries. Many linked the absence of healing to the frustrating disruption caused to their lives and the socioeconomic struggles they now faced as refugees. They were also coping with the ongoing pain of dealing with the loss of loved ones. Their responses revealed that concrete measures need to be adopted by local and international parties involved in transitional justice work when assisting transitional societies. First, assistance needs to go beyond reconciliatory and cathartic language. Measures such as reparations for survivors and trauma counselling need to be implemented on the ground. For example, the provision of trauma counselling would allow for the psychological health needs of survivors to be met. This was clearly illustrated by some of the participants’ responses that revealed that “the experience of trauma is one that remains ‘unfinished’ for many people.” This was the situation with one participant who, after seven years of coping with his traumatic violent experience, still bore the pain of his past. During his interview he tearfully expressed that he could never heal his from past traumas.

Second, the participants’ responses revealed the need to ensure that national healing programs do not overshadow personal healing journeys. As one of my participants noted, healing is a personal process and cannot be forced through state-driven interdicts. Therefore, safe social environments need to be created to allow for personal healing journeys to unfold naturally.

Third, some Muslim and Christian study participants who had in fact healed from past traumas revealed the vital role that spiritual faith played in this process. Their reflections suggest

that spiritual ideologies and practices of different faiths have contributions to make in transitional peace and justice efforts. This spiritual dimension was evident, for example, during the South African truth commission whose discourse of apology, forgiveness, and truth as a way to healing drew upon Christian values. As David Chidester suggests, the commission’s head, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, influenced the commission to be “essentially a Christian story of contrition, confession and forgiveness.”

Drawing from the South African commission and the participants’ responses, there seems to be ample room for future research to examine the role of spiritual faith in the healing process of survivors of gross human rights abuses.

Fourth, some of the participants revealed the cathartic experience that comes from storytelling. Some interviewees expressed that by sharing their stories they were able to “break the silence,” with me and some of their friends in the camp, of their traumatic past. Similar cathartic experiences were observed during some of the storytelling proceedings [public hearings] of the truth commissions. For example, Brandon Hamber, a psychologist who worked with the South African truth commission noted that the provision of space for survivors to tell their stories is a helpful process. Moreover, he asserts that it is indisputable that many survivors and relatives of victims found the public hearing process psychologically beneficial.

This idea is also reiterated by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela who submits that “testimonial narratives or ‘witnessing’ about trauma provide moments that illuminate the victim’s traumatic experiences in a way that not only helps the victim to integrate the trauma into their lives, but it invites others to

---

bear witness to another’s pain and suffering.” The power of storytelling in healing is also noted by Jessica Senehi, who, when discussing peacebuilding and community building, proposes that storytelling can be used to retain dignity and comfort for oppressed persons. Moreover, Sandra Young argues that transcripts from the South African commission also confirmed that “giving testimony was profoundly significant, even healing, for many activists whose anti-apartheid activities had been criminalised and whose experiences of torture were deeply scarring.” These claims suggest that the inclusion of such public narrative interventions that allow survivors to tell their stories in non-threatening environments can assist them in realising cathartic benefits in post-violence environments. In this regard, they also suggest that refugee communities could stand to benefit from being included in the storytelling / truth-telling processes of truth commissions.

Reflections on Forgiveness

There were a number of pertinent points revealed by the participants’ stories about forgiveness. First, a number of them illustrated that they were unable to forgive their persecutors so their continued internal struggle with forgiveness was connected to the violent experiences they were subjected to. This struggle with forgiveness was also connected to the loss of loved ones and the challenge of ongoing human rights abuses in their home countries. The struggle that survivors face with forgiving perpetrators is also reflected by Hannah Arendt when she discusses

---


‘unforgivable’ acts. Well-known for influencing the literature on forgiveness, Arendt contends that there are inhumane acts that purely reflect “radical evil” and, therefore, cannot be forgiven. This view suggests that when commissions promote forgiveness in transitional societies it is important to factor in that it may be impossible for some survivors to forgive what they consider to be heinous acts perpetuated against them.

Second, the participants’ responses also revealed that the act of forgiveness should be allowed to evolve as a personal journey. Some of my interviewees commented that post-violence national forgiveness initiatives should not pressure survivors to forgive perpetrators. As one participant remarked “forgiveness should be a journey that each individual chooses to embark upon. It should not be … a forced [collective journey].” This idea of personal journeys towards forgiveness highlights the importance of not allowing national forgiveness agendas to take precedence over or to dwarf individual journeys of inter-personal forgiveness.

Third, similar to their experiences with healing, some of my study participants also addressed the role of spiritual faith in the act of forgiveness. Some revealed the instrumental role that their faith played in influencing them to forgive their persecutors. Their beliefs allowed them to see forgiveness as a vehicle for “peace” and not for “revenge.” Forgiving also meant that they were choosing to move on with their lives and to “think about their future.” This theme of forgiveness as a transitional and transformative process is supported by Andrew Rigby who writes on forgiveness and reconciliation. He states that forgiveness is a “creative act that leaves people in a position to move forward” that allows for former antagonists to “let go of the past …

---

to forego the quest for revenge.” Charles Hauss also suggests that without forgiveness people “remain locked in the value systems that produced the conflict.”

Fourth, there were those participants who indicated the importance of knowing whom to forgive. Their responses suggested the need to bring survivor and perpetrator together in order to initiate the journey of forgiveness. This point was raised by Amstutz and Daye who submit that the process of forgiveness requires survivors and perpetrators to come together and seeking healing, restoration and reconciliation. The interaction and the relationship create the opportunity for perpetrators to offer an apology for inflicting suffering on survivors and to repent from the wrong caused. In this case, the survivor understands why and who is being forgiven. This idea of the role of forgiveness in societies transitioning out of violence highlights the benefits that could be found in the restorative work of truth commissions as they engage perpetrator and survivor in a dialogue towards truth, understanding, healing and forgiveness.

**Truth Commissions: Instruments of Peace, Justice, Reconciliation?**

Some points readily stood out with respect to the participants’ perspectives on truth commissions. First, some believed truth commissions could play a role in rebuilding post-violence transitional societies. They defined this rebuilding process as including education opportunities on peace and human rights issues, and the promotion of peace and communal

---


coexistence. Other participants questioned if truth commissions could ever have the opportunity to act as an instrument that facilitates post-violence peace and restorative justice. These participants underscored that the work of truth commissions in their countries would be undermined by a political climate that is characterised by authoritarian leadership, tribal politics and social injustices. Their perspectives mirrored concerns of limitations facing truth commissions which Andrew Woolford has raised in his reviews of truth commissions and restorative justice. Reflecting for example on the SATRC, Woolford writes, “the outcomes of the SATRC have been, in many ways, less restorative, but it is likely asking too much of any restorative justice process to achieve reconciliation so soon after a history of intense societal violence.”

Second, the respondents underscored the importance of having truth commissions provide reparations to redress the socio-economic challenges linked to forced displacement, unemployment and poverty. This perspective on socioeconomic issues reflects concerns that Ismael Muvingi and Lisa Laplante have expressed on transitional justice and socioeconomic injustices. For example, Muvingi believes that transitional justice programs are yet to have a more comprehensive outlook that incorporates socioeconomic factors. Muvingi argues that “social and economic factors have taken second or no place at all [in transitional justice initiatives].” Similarly Laplante contends that the expansion of truth commissions’ mandates to include socioeconomic issues allows for the redress of socioeconomic causes of conflict and

---

508 Ibid.
responses to infringements on social, cultural and economic rights.\textsuperscript{509} Unfortunately this socioeconomic oversight remains the status quo of most truth commissions. For example, this was the case when the South African commission redressed civil and political injustices of the apartheid regime but failed to redress socio-economic grievances for survivors of the violence. As a result many survivors of the apartheid violence continue to live in the squalor of poverty and socioeconomic inequalities created by the structural violence of the apartheid era. Lamenting on the socioeconomic destitution of post-apartheid South African reality, Desmond Tutu reflects:

\begin{quote}
In South Africa the whole process of reconciliation has been placed in .... jeopardy by the enormous disparities between the rich, mainly whites, and the poor, mainly blacks. The huge gap between the haves and the have-nots, which was largely created and maintained by racism and apartheid, poses the greatest threat to reconciliation and stability in our country. \textsuperscript{510}
\end{quote}

Unfortunately this means that survivors of human rights abuse are denied the liberty of “enjoying freedom from fear and want … whereby everyone may enjoy his [or her] economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his [or her] civil and political rights.”\textsuperscript{511}

Third, some study participants also communicated to me the importance of including refugees in transitional justice and peacebuilding processes. They expressed the fact that refugees stood to benefit in the truth-telling or public hearings sessions for survivors of human rights violations. They noted that the truth of the injustices needed to be acknowledged and documented. In this regard, redress for these wrongs needed to be realised as well as durable solutions put into place to address the needs of the displaced. They saw the participation of


\textsuperscript{510} Desmond Tutu, \textit{No Future Without Forgiveness} (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 273-274

\textsuperscript{511} International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. \url{www2.ohchr.org/English/law/cescr} (Accessed December 10, 2009).
refugees as a way of providing “personal freedom” through storytelling and the opportunity to start living in “peace absent of fear,” and as an “avenue for releasing pain.” Their responses indicate that future research could closely examine refugees’ participation in transitional justice and peace processes in their countries of origin. Steps could be taken to explore how commissions’ mandates could be more inclusive of survivor groups affected by human rights atrocities.

Fourth the participants also highlighted the importance of justice in transitional justice and peacebuilding work. Their stories indicated that some form of justice needs to be attained for those displaced by human rights atrocities. As one participant commented, “justice is something everybody needs …. Without justice …. there is no reconciliation.” From the testimonies that the participants shared and as evidenced in the human rights literature, it is clear that forced migration is a visible component of human rights abuses and violent conflict. Consequently, it would benefit displaced persons if their voices and experiences are included in transitional justice initiatives because there is a real need for what I call refugee justice or forced migration justice. If governments of the countries where refugees come from provided refugee justice then redress for gross abuses that lead to forced displacement could be realised. These steps would support efforts to protect the rights of refugees as well as to create opportunities for them to be active participants in peacebuilding and transitional justice processes.

Refugee Justice – I introduce this concept and define it as a redress process that responds to human rights violations that were perpetrated against asylum seekers and refugees resulting in their forced displacement. Under the broader transitional justice umbrella, refugee justice provides refugee-centered provisions that ensure that refugees have access to justice and reparations programs and participate with other human rights abuse survivors in truth commissions’ proceedings.
Reflections on Reconciliation

My study participants linked reconciliation to forgiveness, national unity, mutual acceptance and social reconstruction. They saw reconciliation as vital to both forging a sustainable peace and nation building. They perceived reconciliation as a process that could empower their countries to break the cycle of conflict and human rights abuses so that reconciliation symbolises “new beginnings.” There was also concern expressed by some of the interviewees about the challenges that reconciliatory efforts could face in the post-violence situation in sub-Saharan African countries. They noted that tribalism poses a major obstacle to peacebuilding as it continues to breed tribal animosity and violence. In addition, they suggest that the success of national reconciliation efforts requires tribal reconciliation because tribal divides need to be bridged.  

If the divisions between tribes or ethnic groups are not bridged then tensions will continue to exist. As historical narratives and some current sociopolitical events indicate, tribal violence has an adverse impact on promoting and protecting human rights. For example, Wolff, Byrne and Carter, and Carter, Irani and Volkan discuss disturbing continuing post-Cold War ethnic conflicts in various regions of the world. Ethnic and sectarian cleavages continue to displace civilians from their countries and cause the loss of hundreds of thousands of

---

513 Tribal reconciliation – I introduce and define this concept as a process set to address past and present hurts, promote amicable intra-tribal relations through social acceptance, respect for human dignity and life, and educate on peaceful co-existence.


lives. Wolff observes that ethnic conflicts “irrationally kill people and force them from their homelands just because they belong to a different ethnic group.” In this context, Wolff asserts that in Africa, ethnic conflicts have contributed to the creation of one-third of the world’s refugee population. Carter, Irani and Volkan also reiterate this tragic reality of ethnic violence, stating that ethnopolitical conflicts are a leading cause of violence, suffering and instability around the world. They also discuss the impact that the multi-dimensional aspects of ethnic conflict have had on framing social identities and perceived ethnic differences, intra-group resource inequalities and disparities and inter-communal competing interests and needs. My study participants were also concerned about the role the political elite as well as colonialism have had in shaping the narrative of ethnic groups and in encouraging the realities of competing intra-ethnic interactions. For example, Donald Horowitz suggests that colonial techniques of reinforcing group identities have provided the roots for present-day ethnic conflicts in Africa by creating pronounced post-colonial ethnic divisions. Moreover, he states that, “colonial policy was used to sharpen group juxtapositions and clarify the field in which comparisons were made … ethnic contrasts that might otherwise have been perceived only dimly were perceived all too clearly after the colonialists cleared the field of comparison.” Thus alongside national reconciliation, tribal reconciliation also needs to be pursued by post-violence societies seeking to realise national reconciliation. For a holistic national identity, and a sense of national unity to emerge, the divisive tribal identities need to be reconciled.

---

518 Ibid; 4-17.
Through the use of indigenous instruments opportunities are rife to promote tribal reconciliation. For example, the United Nations has already recommended the use of indigenous processes in conflict societies and post-conflict societies as “due regard must be given to indigenous and informal traditions for administering justice or settling disputes, to help them continue their often vital role and to do so in conformity with both international standards and local tradition.”\textsuperscript{521} Some strides have been taken to use indigenous conflict resolution and peacemaking approaches in post-violence situations. For example, a well-known example was the use of ‘ubuntu’ in South Africa as a vehicle for promoting national reconciliation. The ubuntu philosophy deems that conflicts can be resolved by having disputing parties work together to find a common solution. In this context, the management of a conflict becomes open and inclusive as differences are resolved by means of dialogue under the guidance of a community leader.\textsuperscript{522} The TRC called for the use of the ubuntu process so that the South African nation could transcend the divides and violence of the past through reconciliation and harmonisation.\textsuperscript{523} The ubuntu indigenous philosophy helped set a reconciliatory tone for the South African TRC proceedings. Thus, indigenous systems provide possibilities for responding to tribal conflicts through traditional and culturally-sensitive mechanisms that are locally practiced. As Hamdesa Tuso asserts, indigenous conflict resolution and peacemaking cannot

\textsuperscript{522} Nomonde Masina, “Xhosa Practices of Ubuntu for South Africa,” In Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts – African Conflict Medicine, 170-172, ed. William Zartman (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000).
\textsuperscript{523} Ibid, 177.
continue to be neglected for it also has a vital role to play in providing understanding to the historical roots of conflicts.\textsuperscript{524}

**Reflections on Peacebuilding**

*Peace like many theoretical terms is difficult to define. But also like happiness, harmony, love, justice and freedom, we often recognise it by its absence.* \textsuperscript{525}

A plethora of views defining peace were also provided by my study respondents including freedom, security and personal contentment. Their perspectives evoked the definition of peace submitted by Johan Galtung, who makes a distinction between positive peace [social justice] and negative peace [the absence of war]. According to Galtung, negative peace is the absence of direct violence such as war: “It is a condition where no active, organised military violence is taking place” \textsuperscript{526} … Positive peace is what we have when creative conflict transformation takes place non-violently.” \textsuperscript{527} Positive peace involves the absence of cultural and structural violence that is apparent in sociopolitical and economic systems around the world that include colonialism, as well as apartheid, poverty, hunger, and social alienation in democratic countries. \textsuperscript{528} Roger Mac Ginty also discusses peace through the lenses of hybridity and hybridisation, which he argues provide “more nuanced understandings of conflict and peace

interventions.” He asserts that “concepts of hybridity and hybridisation allow us to interrogate categories such as ‘local’, ‘indigenous’, and ‘international’ to easily recognise the agency and diversity of actors in peace and conflict situations.” Consequently, peace is “a place in which social processes [responding to peacemaking] come together to form fusions and composites.” While the participants had a range of views about what peace means to them, the notion of positive peace was a dominant theme because they associated peace with the absence of poverty and socioeconomic perils as well as direct violence. They also viewed peace as a state of personal development and a transformative social climate that cultivates values of human dignity, love, acceptance and respect. Their reflections are an acute reminder that a cessation of violent conflict or human rights abuse in a state does not necessarily translate into peace. As transitional approaches such as truth commissions are established in post-violence phases, the structural and cultural violence that limits the realisation of positive peace need to also be addressed to restore survivors’ human dignity, self-sufficiency and self-efficacy to realise their human security.

In addition, a key observation drawn from respondents’ stories highlights the need to initiate conflict prevention strategies to mitigate and deter some of the violent conflict-induced human rights abuses they have experienced. One key approach they advocated for was the promotion of peaceful coexistence in communal settings. For example, the scholarship on conflict prevention reiterates the benefits of prevention policies. Thus, Michael Lund asserts that the benefits of preventing social hatred and fears spiralling into armed conflict results in the

---

530 Ibid, 3.
531 Ibid, 10.
532 Ibid, 4.
prevention of violent-driven tragedies of human suffering and grave situations such as the genocide of thousands of people.\(^{533}\) In this regard, the participants made a vital point about the use of conflict prevention particularly as it relates to the PACS field. Although transitional justice processes are pertinent to building peace in post-violence transitional societies, they often occur in the aftermath of violence. There is a need to keep promoting the practice of conflict prevention. The widespread and active employment of this preventive practice can help deter violent conflict and gross human rights abuses from occurring.

**Refugees as Co-partners for Peace**

This study’s participants’ stories on refugees’ contributions to peace work suggests that their inclusion in peacebuilding and transitional justice processes warrants close consideration by sub-Saharan African governments that are redressing human rights wrongs and promoting post-violence durable peace processes. This inclusion would empower forcibly displaced persons who represent a large group of human rights survivors, provide spaces for them to voice their experiences, provide opportunities for their personal healing, create public acknowledgement of their traumatic past, and ensure their access to reparations.

In addition, the participants outlined peace-related lessons that they learned while living in exile in a refugee camp in a peaceful country. They indicated that these lessons are transferrable to other societies coming out of violence and could also be beneficially implemented in their home countries. Their submissions underscore the need for inclusivity and multi-track approaches to peacebuilding and transitional justice. They also highlight the value of cultivating grassroots responses and inputs as steps are taken to redress human rights wrongs in

---

order to create a durable and sustainable peace. Further, they underscore that lasting changes must happen from the bottom-up. This call for engaging grassroots peacemaking when redressing and preventing rights abuse is reiterated by Byrne and Senehi, who call for grassroots participation in the prevention of hate crimes. For example, in their study on violence intervention and prevention, Byrne and Senehi suggest that communities can rally together “to mobilise tolerance and to support survivors of … violence.” They assert that “it is the responsibility of all citizens to work to promote human rights, non-violence, conflict transformation, tolerance, democracy, and peace education within a multicultural context.”

The respondents also raised important points about the lessons they have learnt as refugees living in Botswana. They noted that these lessons included realising the value of peace and the security found from living in a peaceful and democratic country. As one participant noted, “living in Botswana there is … peace … we have a home… [When] living here you tend to steal from the peace that Batswana are enjoying.” Their stories also included lessons about human rights. For example, some participants expressed that they appreciated the respect given to women and the recognition of women’s rights as human rights. For example, one participant shared with me that, “you find that in my country they have too many rapes, abusing ladies …. I can take the Botswana [human rights] culture to my country of DR Congo.”

These wide-ranging lessons on peace, human rights and democratic governance further illustrate that from their experiences and exposure to a peaceful environment, the refugees acquire knowledge that could prove useful to their communities back home seeking to reconcile, and engage in post-violence nation-building and peacebuilding. Their stories and experiences

---

535 Ibid, 118.
need to be highlighted by local and international organisations involved in post-violence peacemaking in order to draw attention to the contributions that refugees can make as co-workers in post-violence peace work. They also demonstrate that stable, peaceful and democratic countries, such as Botswana, that host refugees and asylum seekers could possibly have a role to play in supporting transitional societies transition towards a peaceful future. For example as mentioned in chapter two of this study, during the Liberian Commission’s proceedings, the US-based non-governmental organisation, The Advocates for Human Rights, partnered with the Commission to support its diaspora public hearings held 9-14 June 2008 in St Paul, Minnesota. The Advocates successfully served as an implementing partner of the TRC’s diaspora initiative. This involvement by a human rights organisation based in a peaceful country that is home to thousands of Liberian refugees is an example of how external parties equipped with sufficient human and financial resources can successfully support the transitional justice and peacebuilding efforts of transitional societies. This type of initiative also allows for the blending of local and international peace efforts that Roger Mac Ginty describes as “the hybridisation of peacemaking.”  

This hybridity can help further the work of post-violence peacemaking by creating social conditions and public safe spaces for all sectors of a transitional society to be involved in peace work.  

---

537 Minds of Peace (MOP), Mission Statement, http://mindsofpeace.org/index.php/mop-mission.html (Accessed November 10, 2012) MOP was established in 2009 by Dr. Sapir Handelman. The organisation brings together Israeli and Palestinian civil society members, including those in diaspora to participate in public negotiating assemblies, called The Minds of Peace Experiment. These assemblies allow participants to engage in dialogue aimed at resolving disputes in “bilateral divided communities.”
Conclusion

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have gained prominence in post-violence Sub-Saharan African countries to a point where today these bodies seem to be the preferred post-violence peacebuilding and transitional justice approach to resolve deep rooted conflict. From South Africa to Liberia, through restorative justice practices, these bodies have played a vital role in providing a public space for survivors of human rights to give voice to their testimonies of persecution and suffering. The participants’ reflections about various aspects of truth commissions that included healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and peacebuilding clearly demonstrate that they believe that truth commissions can assist refugee communities to reclaim their human dignity, have their human rights respected and protected as well as have the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

TRCs should incorporate refugee human rights experiences in their work since refugees represent a community of survivors of past abuses and traumas. My interviewees’ stories highlighted the pertinent need to redress socioeconomic injustices, bridge tribal divisions through tribal indigenous process of reconciliation, and to create opportunities that empower refugees to be co-partners in post-violence peace work.
Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

*A lasting solution, the possibility to begin a new life, is the only dignified solution for (a) refugee.*

In this exploratory qualitative case study, 33 African refugees residing in Botswana’s Dukwi refugee camp were asked to narrate their human rights stories about the persecutions they were subjected to. They were asked to share stories about their plight of living as refugees in a refugee camp and their fears, hopes and dreams for their future. The participants were also invited to share their perspectives on the work of truth commissions and the processes of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and peacebuilding in a post-violence climate. They looked at how these processes connected with their stories of human rights journeys of struggle, resiliency and survival.

This chapter is comprised of two sections. First, the study’s key findings are presented. Second, the chapter addresses some viable interventions and future research implications of this study.

Key Findings

Presented below are eight key findings that emerged from this study. They range from identifying the relevance of refugees human rights experiences to the work of truth commissions, to outlining the need for effective democratic leadership in post-conflict African states to help promote a culture of peace and human rights.

---

Key Finding One: Refugees’ Human Rights Experiences are Relevant to the Work of Their Countries’ Truth Commissions

*Often directly affected by the crimes that these commissions seek to expose, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have a major stake in the success of transitional justice processes, which can shape the stability of post-conflict communities.*

The first important conclusion to emanate from this study is the link that exists between refugees and the work of truth commissions. This study’s participants’ human rights stories of persecution and struggle for rights demonstrate that refugees constitute a group of vulnerable persons affected by gross abuses. Like other human rights survivors, they ought to be given a space to participate in the activities of their countries’ truth commissions.

Current trends illustrate that sub-Saharan African countries emerging from violent periods or authoritarian rule are increasingly using truth commissions to redress this violent past. These commissions provide a space for many survivors of human rights violations to explain what happened to them. Despite this trend, refugees in the region, as well as globally, remain on the periphery of the operations of commissions. As Megan Bradley observes, “in many cases displaced persons have not been recognised as critical stakeholders in truth-telling processes, and truth commissions have often failed to substantively address forced migration as a human rights violation.” Like other survivors, refugees have the right to tell the truth about the abuses they have faced and know the truth about their loved ones who as a result of abuse lost their lives or disappeared. A number of this study’s participants expressed the point that refugees’ human rights experiences need to be documented by truth commissions.

---

540 Ibid.
In this regard, my interviewees’ human rights stories link them to truth commissions. It is these types of narratives that commissions address as they respond to human rights wrongs “and in so doing bring the voices and stories of [survivors] often hidden from public view to the public at large.”\textsuperscript{541} The United Nations (UN) underscores this notion of the right to truth and acknowledgement of gross human rights violations for survivors. In 2010, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that proclaimed 24 March as the\textit{International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and the Dignity of Victims.} The creation of a day for truth and acknowledgement recognises the “importance of promoting the memory of [survivors] of gross and systematic human rights violations and the importance of the right to truth and justice.”\textsuperscript{542} Initiatives such as this UN day seem to be gradually influencing the mandates of emerging commissions to be more inclusive. For example, the Kenyan commission made a concerted effort to record the stories of refugees to include in its report.\textsuperscript{543} The plight of refugees is “very much a human rights related problem.”\textsuperscript{544} Much still remains to be done by sub-Saharan countries to include refugees and forced displacement in the work of truth commissions.


Key Finding Two: There is an Integral Link Between Tribal Reconciliation and National Reconciliation


\textit{We have to overcome our dreadful tribalism.} \footnote{Ben Okri, Nigerian Novelist quoted by Dyer Gwynne, “Africans Confront Tribalism in New Light,” \textit{Business and Economics, Edmonton Journal}, December 18, 1994, C8.}

The second finding that emerged from the study is that tribal divides are a threat to national reconciliation and transitional peace. Therefore, it is pertinent that tribal reconciliation is part and parcel of post-violence and post-authoritarian regime national reconciliation efforts. As evidenced in the previous chapter, there was a widespread belief amongst the study’s participants that tribalism is at the epicentre of social divides in sub-Saharan African countries. This ism continues to pose a threat to peace, stability and security as tribal politics remain active on the political stage. One of my participants who is also a survivor of protracted ethnic conflict captured it best when she said that “tribal politics is not a good thing, if you start it, you start war … there could be peace if we could stop thinking that one tribe is higher than the other, and if we could have in our country a President that was for all.”\footnote{Statement made by Selam, (Participant).}

Most of the participants believe that national reconciliation and durable peace could not be attained in the absence of concerted efforts that promote tribal coexistence, acceptance and education on tribal discrimination. For example, former President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, once said, “Tribalism is the curse of Africa,” and there are plenty of examples to support his theory.\footnote{Der Spiegel, “Tribalism: The Curse of Africa,” \textit{Edmonton Journal}, October 28, 1990, E1.} The Rwandan genocide is just
one example of Africa’s protracted inter-tribal warfare. Thus, the late Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Wangari Maathai stated that:

   Ethnicity is one of the major strategies that politicians have used to divide the African populace .... In 1994, the world witnessed the horrendous genocide in Rwanda that killed nearly a million people, and currently the inter-ethnic violence of Sudan’s Darfur region has witnessed the displacement and killing of thousands of innocent people. I do not believe that people who have lived as neighbors for hundreds of years can just begin attacking each other and killing one another without giving them reasons to blame their own predicaments on people from other ethnic groups. This terrible tragedy has cost Africa many lives and many years that could have been used to promote development. And when ethnicity is linked to the land, the result is often combustible.

   A number of sub-Saharan African countries have “constructed [their] truth commissions around the notion of advancing reconciliation.” With tribal animosity singled out by my study’s participants as a hindrance to nation building, future commissions in the region, particularly those redressing a country’s past of ethnic violence, will need to redress the deep-seated roots of tribalism that would work against the process of achieving national unity. As history and current events in the region illustrate, there have been grave consequences to life and property as a result of ethnic conflict from Somalia, Sudan, and Burundi to DR Congo. According to the African Development Bank’s Fragile State Unit, these countries are still categorised as fragile states in a post-violence recovery phase. For example in Somalia “the

549 Ibid.
last 20 years … have shown the dangers of ethnic competition and underscore the importance of building nations around ideas rather than clan identities.” 553 In Southern Sudan, civilians remain affected by tribal animosity - as one Southern Sudanese civilian questioned:

If South Sudanese cannot live peacefully with one another, how can we expect to reconcile with North Sudanese Arabs? 554 As he laments further, “with many years of political economic and social exploitation of the South Sudanese at the hands of the Arab ruling government in the north, millions of marginalised South Sudanese perish with no justice, no healing, and with no reparations to the victims’ families. However, there is also injustice and harm occurring among the south tribes themselves. With the southern regional government recovering from the 21-year civil war, inter-tribal conflicts are rampant. 555

This is the reality of tribal violence and its impact on civilians, peace, stability, development and security. Indigenous tribal peacemaking and reconciliation processes, which in the post-colonial era seems to have fallen by the wayside, are needed if post-violence sub-Saharan African countries are to successfully emerge from violent pasts. Opportunities are rife for overcoming tribalism and advancing unity amongst Africans. African societies have conflict management and reconciliatory traditional systems, which in the pre-colonial era and even in the post-independence climate were used to resolve tribal spats. For example, in her research on indigenous institutions and peacebuilding in Southern Africa, Bertha Osei-Hwedie cites


555 Ibid.
Botswana as a model example of a country that has used “indigenous norms and institutions” such as those of chieftaincy and Kgotla [village assembly] to nurture national peace, unity and stability. She asserts that African traditional peacemaking processes have played a vital part in governance and conflict resolution matters such as using reconciliation to resolve inter-communal conflicts. “Therefore, the positive elements of African cultures should be encouraged such as dialogue and the institutions of chiefs and village assemblies” to facilitate the bridging of tribal divides in post-violence eras.\footnote{Bertha Osei-Hwedie, Botswana: Indigenous Institutions, Civil Society and Government in Peacebuilding in Southern Africa, \textit{Journal of International Development and Cooperation}, Vol. 16, No.2, (2010):115-127 http://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/metadb/up/kiyo/AN10482914/JIDC_16-2_115.pdf (Accessed September 3, 2012).}

Moreover, she believes that “although Botswana has never experienced violent [armed] conflicts, it may provide useful lessons for other Southern African countries to emulate in their endeavour for conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding.”\footnote{Ibid.} In this light, she proffers that Botswana’s peacebuilding culture has allowed her to sustain durable peace and lasting democracy as a middle-income state. This peace is cultivated through a traditional culture of dialogue and traditional institutions that “form the backbone for building and sustaining peace.”\footnote{Ibid.} Osei-Hwedie sums it up best arguing that, Botswana’s culture is peaceful and even its proverbs exude a respect for peaceful coexistence. For example, one of the common sayings is “ntwagkolo ke ya molomo,” meaning that it is more effective to dialogue than to engage in violence. In Botswana “culture is the cornerstone of peacebuilding.”\footnote{Ibid.}
Botswana is not an exception to the rule of indigenous peacemaking in Africa. African societies have indigenous practices that can facilitate indigenous conflict resolution that allows for tribal reconciliation. There are a wide range of cultural practices in African societies that are anchored in the value of peace. These traditions have empowered African societies to build a unifying peace that transcends tribal affiliations. For example, in the post Rwandan genocide stage, Rwandans used their traditional gacaca system to promote national justice, peace and reconciliation. In South Africa, the practice of ubuntu contributed towards national reconciliation efforts in the country’s post-apartheid era. The concept of ubuntu as summarised by the Chairperson of South Africa’s truth commission – Archbishop Desmond Tutu encapsulates the notion that, “I am human because you are human.” As Tutu further explains, ubuntu is characteristic of compassion, kindness, social harmony, and respect for others. Ubuntu is an African philosophy; a way of being that recognises that human beings are interdependent. As he states, “in the spirit of ubuntu, the central concern is the healing of breaches ... the restoration of broken relationships, [and the search] to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator.” In essence a culture of peace and reconciliation is promoted through the spirit of ubuntu. The 1995 promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act that mandated the SATRC to “promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past” placed the ideology and practice of ubuntu at the heart of the work of the SATRC. Its use made sense as this was a social value that was “entrenched in South African

---

562 Ibid, 54.
public awareness.” It illustrated how existing traditional cultural peacemaking practices can promote shared values of peace and reconciliation that bring and hold societies together.

The practice of ubuntu unfolded to give access to a new identity for South Africans of a reconciled nation, across racial and tribal lines. For example, transitional justice scholar, Timothy Murithi, draws out five peacemaking aspects that he suggests are found in the practice of ubuntu. He submits that these components comprise an acknowledgement of guilt, a demonstration of remorse and repentance, asking for and giving forgiveness, and paying compensation or reparations as a prelude to reconciliation. He notes that the notion of ubuntu further sheds light on the benefits of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between peoples. He saw ubuntu as providing a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness. By further exploring the indigenous use of ubuntu in traditional societies, Murithi illustrates how ubuntu principles were articulated and translated into practical peacemaking processes. These principles included the high value of communal life, positive relations within a society, and the ownership of dispute resolution by a whole community. Murithi concludes that the traditional practice serves to provide lessons about conflict resolution and reconciliation.

For South Africa, ubuntu defied social injustice, promoted the sharing of peace, and the building

---

of interdependent communities where there are opportunities for reconciliation that transcends ethnic affiliation.\textsuperscript{566}

Similarly, in Botswana, the cultural practice of “botho” has played a fundamental role in unifying Batswana across tribal lines. The practice of botho has contributed to Botswana’s relative peace and stability since her day of independence from Britain in 1966. This national value is even enshrined in the country’s current national governance and development roadmap – Vision 2016. The vision was birthed in 1996 and the notion of botho was encapsulated as one of its key tenets. The concept is commonly expressed in the phrase “Motho ke motho ka batho” meaning “I am because you are.” As a concept, botho embodies mutual respect, communal responsibility and accountability, social justice, and social harmony. In botho a community finds a sense of humanness, interdependency, and the valuing of the other person’s dignity. This national value and way of life has allowed the nation of Botswana to have sustained peace across tribal lines.

Consequently, whether it is ubuntu in South Africa or botho in Botswana, sub-Saharan Africa’s local cultural practices offer key ingredients that can help post-peace accord societies build a foundation for national reconciliation that transcends tribal affiliation. The building of such a foundation obviously takes time to cultivate the philosophies and practices, to create a sense of ownership among citizens, and ensure that the practices ultimately benefit the nation at large. It is also important to note that historically there are examples of some sub-Saharan African leaders that took strides in the post-colonial era to promote national unity and reconciliation across tribal lines using traditional peacebuilding philosophies and practices.

\textsuperscript{566} Michael, Battle, \textit{Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu}, (Cleveland OH: Pilgrim Press, 1997).
Examples include Kenya’s first President Jomo Kenyatta (1964-78) and his *harambee* philosophy which found its roots in African values of unity, togetherness in nation building. Meaning “let us pull together,”\(^{567}\) “let all the tribes of Kenya unite together to build a strong nation,”\(^{568}\) *harambee* was proposed as a vehicle for nurturing cultural and tribal cohesiveness in Kenya. Similarly, Julius Nyerere, Tanzania’s first President’s (1962-85) philosophy of *ujamma* partly drew from traditional African values that emphasise the notion of a cohesive nation that enjoys freedom, unity and equality. Meaning “familyhood,”\(^{569}\) Nyerere encouraged Tanzanians to live as a united nation where tribal unity was projected as opposed to tribal disunity. Under the right kind of leadership, it is possible for post-peace accord African societies to tap into their unifying cultural and traditional values and practices to promote tribal and national reconciliation.

Although this study suggests that African societies explore ways of redressing protracted tribalism concerns through indigenous peacemaking systems, it is important to note that it does not romanticise about indigenous peacemaking processes. It recognises that the dynamics surrounding indigenous peacemaking in a contemporary era where traditional practices are often


competing with modern practices.\textsuperscript{570} It also recognises that traditional peacemaking processes work “under certain circumstances and depend on factors such as local power dynamics … the perceived legitimacy of the traditional [peacemaking system].\textsuperscript{571} African societies will need to determine which local peacemaking systems can effectively work within their respective countries and communal environments.

**Key Finding Three: Refugees are Co-builders of Peace and Educators of Peaceful Coexistence**

*To all survivors out there, I want them but it isn’t. We must work hard to become to know that we are stronger and more resilient than we ever knew. We survived, that should be enough whole again. To fill our soul with love and inspiration, to live the life that was intended for us before it was disrupted by war and horrors, and help rebuild a world that is better than the one we had just left.\textsuperscript{572}*

A third significant finding of this study involves the role of refugees as key players in post-violence peacebuilding activities. A majority of this study’s interviewees believed that refugees should be afforded the opportunity to engage and contribute towards peace efforts. The general consensus amongst the participants was that as survivors of persecution and as persons living in exile, refugees know the price of violent conflict and understand the priceless value of forging a climate of peace. They fled their homes and countries in order to seek protection. They felt that their human rights stories highlighted the need for societies to cultivate peace, respect human rights and promote justice. They represent a civil society group that is advocating for lasting peace and stability in their countries. It is as Albrecht Schnabel said: “refugees and

\textsuperscript{570} William Zartman, Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts – African Conflict Medicine, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).


internally displaced persons … are prime indicators for social, political and economic instability, for human atrocities and human suffering. They signal our failure to promote human security for all.”

Key to this finding is the way in which the participants demonstrated that they should be considered as co-partners in building peace. They demonstrated this through the perspectives they shared with me about peacebuilding in transitional societies in sub-Saharan countries. They believed that one of the key ingredients of peacebuilding should be the promotion of peaceful coexistence. This suggestion was influenced by their lived experiences of residing in a refugee camp that is made up of a multicultural community that coexists peaceably and there is a sense of the acceptance of the other, and an openness to dialogue and intra-group understanding. For a community affected by past violence, creating peaceful coexistence allows for transformative peace. Coexistence “is a state in which two or more groups are living together while respecting their differences and resolving their conflicts non-violently.”

Initially used during the Cold War period, the idea of peaceful coexistence has evolved to be synonymous with values of mutual respect, tolerance, the ability to live peaceably despite existing differences. This proposal for peaceful coexistence made by Khaminwa appears to carry weight because there are other refugee camps in sub-Saharan Africa that have been cited as examples where refugees from different countries live in peaceful coexistence. For example, in her reflections on her visit to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, Anna Chudolinska of the

---


575 Ibid.
European Union’s Humanitarian Office (ECHO) pointed out that the Kakuma camp, which is home to almost 100,000 refugees that represent 13 nationalities from Somalia to South Sudan, is a cogent example of peaceful coexistence. As she states, “The camp’s most important achievement is the peaceful coexistence of 13 nationalities that live within 12 square kilometres. In Kakuma, the refugees have found a way to live together in peace even if in their home country they might fight against each other.”576 Given this kind of exposure to peace it is apparent that “opportunities to tap the potential contribution of refugees as key stakeholders in peace processes” are rife for transitional societies in sub-Saharan Africa.577 This study’s participants suggested that along with other post-violence peacebuilding initiatives, coexistence can help create a climate of peace, especially in situations where communities struggle with reconciliation and forgiveness. Michael Ignatieff offers an interesting perspective on this issue of coexistence. He states:

    You can have coexistence without any heart-to-heart reconciliation .... Political enemies, historical antagonists, do not have to be reconciled before they can sit in the same room .... cold peace of many kinds does not require reconciliation of a personal kind.578

In essence, coexistence can help to support peace efforts as members of a transitional society embark on the difficult road towards healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

In sum, the perspectives that my participants provided on peaceful coexistence, and its value to community building, underscore the importance of integrating refugees into the different stages of peacebuilding. Their lived experiences speak of the integral role they can play in building sustainable peace. Peacebuilding requires a shared responsibility by all citizens of a post-violent country. In this regard, refugee narratives can help to shape peacebuilding activities. In addition, the peacemaking skills garnered by refugees living in exile can also help to contribute to peacebuilding efforts. This notion of the need to tap into the skills of refugees was raised by the anti-apartheid activist veteran, Mamphela Ramphele, who when addressing the skills of refugees in South Africa stated:

South Africa is host to millions of refugees who are prevented from being value-adders and instead have to eke out an existence in ways that often put a strain on our public services and create conflict with the poorest citizens who become resentful of foreigners. South Africa is a magnet for desperate Africans fleeing poverty and despotic governments. We have to accept this and turn it into an opportunity to source valuable skills and to establish links with those who might later return to their countries and promote trade with us.  

As underscored by Ramphele, refugees have resourceful skills that should be acknowledged. In the context of this study, governments of transitional societies should be encouraged to accommodate these skills as steps are taken towards peacebuilding and national development. Furthermore, the peacebuilding and migration policies of these countries should consider ways of positioning refugees as co-partners in peace and social justice work. This type of policy consideration would prove to be beneficial for “civic-oriented activities” such as those of community building and development.

Furthermore, central to this finding is the explicit lesson refugee communities can teach on peaceful coexistence. As the narratives of this study participants revealed, life in a refugee camp environment taught them to embrace “everyday coexistence.” They mentioned that despite differences in their tribal and cultural backgrounds, they were able to peacefully coexist as members of one community. To attain this state of peaceful coexistence the participants mentioned that among other aspects, they accepted one another as neighbors and humanized each other as they became aware of their shared experiences. Therefore, as copartners in post-violence peace work, refugee communities such as the Dukwi community, could share about some of the lessons they have learned coexisting peacefully. There are already refugee coexistence projects around the world that UNHCR established with the aim of promoting inter-communal coexistence. For example projects were established in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda and these demonstrated that co-partnership with refugee communities on peaceful coexistence work is feasible.

**Key Finding Four: Conflict Prevention Can Help Deter Human Rights Violations**

My research participants underscored the importance of promoting the use of conflict prevention to deter gross human rights abuses like armed conflicts. They suggested that conflict prevention should be given a more prominent role in peace work. As they observed, it is the prevention of conflict that will help avert violent acts that force individuals and communities to be forcibly displaced from their homes and countries. Based on these reflections offered by the

---


participants, future TRCs of sub-Saharan African transitional societies stand to benefit from ensuring that the recommendations they propose have a conflict prevention lens. If these countries are to realise durable peace, they will need to have effective conflict prevention measures in place.

Globally as well as continentally, there are systems in place that support the practice of conflict prevention. These systems include institutions that attempt to deter crimes against humanity such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). In Africa, there is the continent’s Early Warning System (EWS), which is housed at the African Union headquarters. This system serves as one of the main pillars of the continent’s “peace and security architecture.”582 Established by the African Union’s Peace and Security Protocol (PSC),583 the EWS consists of a “Situation Room” that serves as an observation and monitoring centre that is responsible for the collection and analysis of early warning indicators. In addition, established regional systems such as the Southern African Development Community’s Early Warning System are directly linked to the continental Situation Room for information sharing. The goal of these early warning systems is to provide information that can “recommend the best course of action” to prevent potential conflicts and threats.584

Although these global, continental and regional preventive strategies are in place, the challenge lies in ensuring they function effectively and realise their intended purposes. According to Lisa Laplante, “just months before 9/11, [Kofi] Annan posed what in retrospect appears an ominous question: why is conflict prevention still so seldom practiced, and why do

583 Ibid.
584 Ibid, Article 12.
we so often fail when there is a clear potential for a preventive strategy to succeed?" This question is relevant to the African region where violent conflicts and rights abuses continue such as in Mali, South Sudan, DR Congo and Somalia. The gaps that persist in Africa’s conflict prevention architecture [particularly at national levels] warrant relevant research that will redress these gaps and provide recommendations for more robust and well-funded conflict prevention programs that respond to the evolving nature of conflicts in the region. This type of research would benefit from consulting refugee communities. As the participants of this study have repeatedly stated, having survived armed conflicts they understand firsthand what it means to live in times of peace and war. Additionally, scholarship on diaspora communities has documented the wide-spread contributions that various diaspora groups have made in peacebuilding and post-violence reconstruction in their countries of origin. For example, Abdullah Mohamoud shares that “diasporas frequently contribute to the peace process in their homelands through political, civil-societal, and developmental means [as was the case of the] Somali diaspora during the Nairobi peace talks held in 2003-2004 between political factions.” Therefore, the aforementioned consultative process could be undertaken with the assistance of organisations like UNHCR which are already working to safeguard the rights and welfare of refugees.


Key Finding Five: Democratic Leadership in Post-conflict African States is Necessary for the Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Human Rights

There is need for responsible democratic political leadership in transitional African countries. This need was widely expressed by my study’s participants, who believe that the success of peacebuilding and national reconciliation activities requires leaders to realise that democratic governance is essential to build durable peace, to champion human rights, to ensure the respect for the rule of law, and to provide access for refugees to justice. This study’s participants believe that it is this kind of leadership that will guide their countries towards peace, stability and national unity. For example, Salaamata, one of my study’s participants, mentioned that sub-Saharan African countries need to “start having [authentic] democratic governments that observe human rights [as opposed to the current quasi-democratic governments].” In addition quite a few of my interviewees also praised Botswana’s governing style and her consistent post-colonial state of peace. They commented that other African countries needed to take note of Botswana’s successful journey of consolidating democracy. For example, Amani from DR Congo voiced that he usually says to Batswana [the people], “you have a government. As for us, we don’t have a government, when you see what is happening in Congo, there is no government.” My participants’ reflections underscored the need for leadership in their countries that is representative of all citizens and steers away from “ethnic … manipulation [where] citizens are invited to believe that a particular tribe or religious group is against the progress and development of the whole nation or a threat to its security.”

Thus, based on some of the participants’ perspectives outlined above, it is evident that in order to promote a culture of peace and human rights in sub-Saharan Africa’s transitional

---

societies there is a need for leadership that ensures that democratic values and principles are central to their style of governance. For example, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation states that, “without good governance, Africa will go nowhere.”

This observation was reiterated by the former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who asserted that “good governance and democracy are central to Africa’s development. Without them it will be hard if not impossible for any African country to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.”

In this regard, my study’s participants’ call for constructive democratic leadership is in essence a call for just social systems, peace, and freedom from abuse and human suffering. Given the human rights abuses they have experienced, this study’s participants are also calling for an end to gender-related violence such as the rape of females in the heart of Eastern DR Congo’s villages. It is a call for an end to the crisis of post-electoral violence that continues to force many civilians from their homes and countries. It is a call to end “man’s inhumanity to man.”

My participants

---

589 Vision of the Foundation quoted by the World Bank, Governance and Development http://blogs.worldbank.org/governance/comment/reply/800. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation works to support good governance and African leadership. The Foundation first gained international attention for its Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership, which is awarded to a former Head of State whose demonstrated excellence in leadership. The Awardee is awarded USD5 million over 10 years and USD200, 000 annually thereafter for life. Previous laureates include former Presidents Chissano of Mozambique (2007) and Mogae of Botswana (2008). (Accessed September 7, 2012).


represent faces of humanity that deserve the “riches of freedom and the security of justice.”\textsuperscript{593}  

They have the right to call for democratic governance, which according to the UN includes the following:

The rights to freedom of opinion and expression, of thought, conscience and religion, and of peaceful association and assembly; … the rule of law, including legal protection of citizens’ rights, interests and personal security, and fairness in the administration of justice and independence of the judiciary; … the right of political participation, … transparent and accountable government institutions; the right of citizens to choose their governmental system through constitutional and democratic means; and the right to equal access to public service in one’s own country.\textsuperscript{594}

The political leadership of post-violence societies in sub-Saharan Africa has a long way to go to make the above-outlined UN elements real for their citizens. A governance system that nurtures these properties can provide opportunities for lasting peace, human security, human development, and participation in nation building. This type of governance system that the UN depicts is not a foreign concept on the African continent. There already exists a plethora of continental legal and political instruments that recognise the benefits of the principles of democratic leadership and governance and their influence in safeguarding civil liberties and human rights. For example, these include the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (2007), the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000), the New Partnership for

\textsuperscript{593} Excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream,” speech delivered August 28, 1963, Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C., \textit{The King Center}, http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/i-have-dream-3 (Accessed September 8, 2012).

Africa’s Development (2001), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), and other frameworks that promote the adherence by state parties to principles of democracy and respect for human rights. These systems need to be put to use to help transitional governments and their communities redress past woes of civil unrest, and other socio-political and economic problems.

These systems should also be used to combat impunity. At the continental, regional and national levels steps should be taken to strengthen institutions that can deprive perpetrators impunity. For example, as the African Union (AU) takes steps to develop its Transitional Justice Policy Framework, the AU should encourage Africa’s Regional Communities (RECs) to also establish transitional justice frameworks and encourage their member states to enhance their criminal justice systems to be in a position to redress atrocious crimes committed in violation of international law and victims of human rights.

Botswana as a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, has taken a firm stance that favours holding Africans who commit crimes against humanity accountable for their crimes so that they can be arraigned before the International Criminal Court (ICC). Therefore given her stance, countries like Botswana can take leadership within their respective RECs in promoting the respect for rule of law and the protection of human rights. This three tier approach of continental, regional and national

596 Ibid.
responses is crucial for stripping impunity from the perpetrators of human rights abuses. This approach may also help to address the contentious relationship between the ICC and AU member states who believe that in its work, the ICC unfairly targets African states. If the AU and regional RECs develop strong transitional justice frameworks, and if nationally, African states strengthen their judicial, peace and security institutions and place them in line with international law, they will have the capacity to fight impunity and advance peace and justice.\textsuperscript{598} Such an approach will have the enhanced state’s capacity to provide African solutions to African problems. This type of approach will require responsible leadership – that is, democratic leaders that have the political will to birth constructive change, be people-centred, embrace inclusive policies, and encourage citizenship participation in post-conflict political processes.

\textbf{Key Finding Six: Gender Justice is Key to Safeguarding Women’s Human Rights}

Gender justice needs to feature prominently in the transitional justice and post-conflict peacebuilding processes. As stated in chapter 5 of this study, armed conflicts have increasingly become gendered with sexual and gender-based violence becoming a common crime. For example, this was the case during the Rwandan and Sierra Leonean civil conflicts. Similarly, sexual crimes have also been widely reported in DR Congo’s protracted armed conflict, particularly in the eastern part of the country. As the UNHCR states in its 2013 Country Profile on DR Congo, “sexual and gender-based violence continues to be a major problem for UNHCR. Such violence prevents women and girls ... from leading healthy lives. Refugees and IDPs are particularly at risk of rape and sexual abuse at home, in public places and at school, while

perpetrators are rarely prosecuted and punished." \(^{599}\) Current UN statistics reveal that since 1998 there have been over 200,000 rape victims in DR Congo. Rape continues to be a weapon of war in this country. \(^{600}\)

Unfortunately as some of my female participants narrated ‘peace’ or refuge in a refugee camp does not equate to safety from SGBV. These participants mentioned that domestic violence was a problem in the refugee camp. The concern of domestic violence in refugee camps is acknowledged by Romi Sigsworth and Nahla Valji who confirm that “for many women ‘peace’ does not usher in security or justice, but simply the continuation of violence in new disguises.” \(^{601}\)

It is also acknowledged by Human Rights Watch which states:

> Women who flee their homes in search of sanctuary from violence too often find that there is no meaningful refuge, they have simply escaped violence in conflict to face a different type of violence in the refugee camps …. Women face particular protection and security risks in refugee camps, as well as challenges of heading households while suffering from their disadvantaged status as women…. Levels of domestic violence are also high in many refugee communities …. Pressures regarding housing, food, security, and other resources often strain domestic situations and erupt in violence. \(^{602}\)

---


These realities of violence and rights abuse, further affect the participation of women in society as well as their access to their rights. As Sally Engle Merry argues, “establishing women’s rights as human rights is still an uphill struggle.”

As a way of responding and intervening in gender injustice situations, established gender justice programs in urban and rural settings of transitional societies could serve as one of the ways of redressing the gender-based human rights challenges that women and girls face. Nationally, particularly in situations where there have been widespread sexual and gender based crimes such as in DR Congo, it would help if governments of sub-Saharan African transitional societies considered establishing ad-hoc commissions that specifically redress gender-based crimes. This type of focus on gender-based crimes could also help redress the under-reporting of these abuses. For example, Donna Pankhurst notes that; “abuses to women are both the most under-reported to truth commissions and the least prosecuted.” Therefore, having a “gender-aware truth process” such as ad-hoc commissions would help provide a more comprehensive documentation of gender-based human rights violations.

Furthermore, ad-hoc commissions focusing on sexual and gender-based crimes could help reinforce and complement existing international legal frameworks that encourage states to safeguard women rights such as the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, as well as guidelines that address protection issues of women in

603 Ibid.
606 Ibid.
refugee camps such as the 1991 UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women. They could also help promote calls of the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, which “reaffirm the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding.” For example, this call is captured in UN Resolution 1325 that was adopted in 2000 by the UNSC. This resolution called for the mainstreaming of a gender-perspective in peacemaking processes and post-violence reconstruction work. In sum, concerted efforts aimed at promoting a gender justice agenda would enable transitional societies in sub-Saharan Africa to redress gender-based human rights violations and provide women, such as those in Dukwi refugee camp, the opportunity to be active participants in the nurturing of a climate of durable peace and rights for all in their home countries. Additionally, as revealed in the body of narratives that discuss some of the females gendered violent experiences in the refugee camp, it is evident that there is also a need for strengthened protection, safety and engendered justice measures in refugee camps. These measures are necessary to curtail the continuum of gender-based violence that some refugee women have experienced in their home countries as well as in refugee camps.

Key Finding Seven: Addressing Socioeconomic Wrongs is Key to Building Durable Peace

My participants’ human rights stories revealed the socio-economic injustices they faced in their home countries. Their narratives also revealed the socioeconomic challenges they experienced living in a refugee camp. These challenges include joblessness and poverty. Their


narratives on socioeconomic wrongs begged the question of why truth commissions do not seem to give equal attention to redressing structural violence and socioeconomic wrongs. Similar to sociopolitical wrongs, socioeconomic wrongs also affect one’s basic human rights. When women, men and children are forced to flee their homes in search of security and refuge, not only are they fleeing the threat of persecution, their livelihood is also attacked as they are forced to leave behind their properties and jobs.

Although, transitional justice discourse is now drawing attention to the need to redress socioeconomic wrongs, more advocacy is needed to draw awareness to this notion. This is a point that is articulated by Zinaida Miller who asserts that there is a need to factor economic justice in the transitional justice field. Miller argues that the inclusion of economic wrongs and structural violence concerns in transitional justice will help redress some of the root causes that trigger violent abuses such as armed conflicts. This call for the inclusion to redress socioeconomic wrongs was also reiterated by some of this study’s participants. The inclusion will also allow social justice to be part-and-parcel of transitional justice and peace processes. It will provide for a more holistic recovery process for transitional societies and allow survivors of socioeconomic wrongs to be compensated for their loss through reparations initiatives.

Globally momentum is building on the need for reparations for survivors of human rights abuses. For example, reparations intervention guidelines are provided for in the 2005 United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law. Among other issues, these basic principles and guidelines address victims’ rights to remedies and the types of reparations that should be rewarded to those who have suffered
harm. In addition, in 2002 the International Criminal Court (ICC) established the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) to promote justice and help support the reparations program of the ICC.

However, complementary national reparations initiatives are also required. In this regard, future truth commissions in sub-Saharan Africa should ensure that their recommendations make room for holistic reparations program. Survivors of human rights abuses including socioeconomic wrongs have the right to reparations in order to help them recover from both political and socioeconomic wrongs, and to help them rebuild their lives and reclaim their dignity.

**Key Finding Eight: Spiritual Faith / Religious Discourse Has a Role to Play in Peace Work**

One of the key aspects evident in some of my participants’ narratives was the role that spiritual faith played in helping them to heal, forgive, and consider reconciling with their perpetrators. This connection between the tenets of spiritual faith and lived human rights experiences demonstrates that religious discourse can play a role in helping transitional societies sort through or make sense of matters of post-conflict personal and communal recovery and renewal. In many ways this is what some of my Muslim and Christian study participants expressed in their stories. They forgave because they believe in what the Koran or the Bible teaches them about mercy and forgiveness. Their faith defined how they moved from a place of pain and hurt to a place of healing and new-found hope.

---

In this regard, religious convictions act as a compass of peace and inter and intrapersonal healing. They inspire and encourage those grounded in their faith to leave behind the horrors of inhumanity and look ahead towards the promise of new beginnings. Moreover, this role of spiritual faith draws out the commonalities between different religions – such as those of love, forgiveness, justice and reconciliation. I believe that, these commonalities present opportunities for exploring ways in which spiritual faith can be used to help sub-Saharan African transitional societies heal from a past of gross human rights abuses. In essence, how can constructive religious discourse contribute towards the rebuilding of transitional societies? As answers are sought to these types of questions, I believe that, more and more, a place can be carved out for spiritual faith to play a role in peace and social justice work in post-accord environments. This opinion is echoed by Nathan Funk and Christina Woolner who suggest that “by creating space for religious leaders and institutions to become involved in peacebuilding work, as well as encouraging religious communities to engage one another and work together for peace, a ‘religious peacebuilding track’ has the potential to go a long way in transforming conflict.”

The findings outlined above present a compelling case for the inclusion of sub-Saharan Africa’s refugees’ human rights stories and perspectives on matters of transitional justice and post-violence peacebuilding. As survivors of rights abuses refugees have a vital role to play in the building of peace and nation building processes in their countries of origin. More importantly, they are survivors who have been denied their dignity and basic rights and these processes provide the opportunity for them to reclaim their rights.

---

Implications of the Study

The section that follows below looks at the implications of this study for public policy and future research as it relates to the nexus between refugees, truth commissions and peacebuilding in sub-Saharan Africa’s post-violence countries.

Implications for policy

This must be a world of democracy and respect for human rights, a world freed from the horrors of poverty, hunger, deprivation and ignorance, relieved of the threat and the scourge of civil wars and external aggression and unburdened of the great tragedy of millions forced to become refugees. 611

In countries where people have to flee their homes because of persecution and violence, political solutions must be found, peace and tolerance restored, so that refugees can return home. In my experience, going home is the deepest wish of most refugees. 612

Displaced societies are of value. Their issues are our issues. 613

I am not interested in picking up crumbs of compassion thrown from the table of someone who considers himself my master. I want the full menu of human rights. 614

Every human being should have access to the “full menu” of human rights. Unfortunately for the persecuted this is not the reality. Given the complex human rights situation of refugees it is quite a challenge to propose practical policy recommendations. It is one thing to make recommendations on paper and it is another thing when it comes to their implementation. I think it is particularly challenging with the situation of refugees and similar vulnerable groups whose reality often borders on life and death. They require transformative policies and not political rhetoric; they require change to their struggles of poverty, infringed civil liberties, and limited

access to resources. They require policies that can support their resilient spirit that dares to dream and hope in the midst of an often challenging refugee camp life.

Therefore, when addressing the policy-related implications of this study I depend on the voices of my interviewees – on what they’ve indicated is important to them as survivors of human rights abuses. First, there is a need for post-violence governments to make provisions for their truth commissions’ mandates to factor refugees into truth commissions and ensure that they have accessibility to these bodies. This idea is well articulated by Roger Duthie who stresses that transitional justice truth-telling processes should incorporate displaced communities. This means that participatory consultative processes that include the views of refugees will need to take place. As stated throughout this study, refugees are key stakeholders in post-violence peace activities and their narratives and experiences can help inform future policies on human rights and peace. For example, the human rights experiences of apartheid South Africa played a key role in shaping the post-apartheid Human Rights Commission that was established by the country’s 1996 Constitution as it set out to promote a culture of rights and steer away from past abuses. Similarly, the Liberian truth commission provides a clear exemplary path in the sub-Saharan African region of ways in which refugees can be incorporated into post-violence transitional processes.

---

Second, in addition to creating a platform for human rights storytelling during truth commission proceedings, there is a need for broader mandates that redress economic and social injustices as well as gender justice concerns. As illustrated in some of my respondents’ narratives shared with me in the previous chapters, not only did some survivors lose their loved ones; they were also robbed of their livelihood as agricultural land was taken away from them and property restitution was never realised. Chapter 5 of this study demonstrated that these types of losses were detrimental to the spirit of human dignity and self-worth. With regards to promoting national reconciliation, as already outlined earlier in this chapter and in chapter 6, Sub-Saharan African governments of transitional societies need to make provisions for truth commissions to respond to legacies of intra-tribal violence and human rights abuses. Tribal reconciliation efforts are long overdue.

Third, as evidenced by the perspectives the participants shared with me about peace, human rights and justice issues, peace and human rights education should play a central role in transitional efforts within post-violence societies. The work of truth commissions must not end with shelved commission final reports. Lessons from these bodies should be utilised to inform the architecture of a peace and human rights education policy. Against this backdrop of policy recommendations, much research needs to be done to help guide country-specific transitional justice and peacebuilding policy frameworks. Moreover, this research should also investigate ways in which refugee justice can be part and parcel of post-violence peace and social justice activities. In essence, Sub-Saharan Africa’s policymakers cannot be satisfied with the current silencing or marginalisation of refugees’ narratives in the post-violence pursuits of making real the human rights language, building peaceful nations and in consolidating democracy. Refugees’ human rights narratives are inextricably bound to the broader human rights narratives of their
countries. Their access and full participation in transitional justice and peacebuilding processes should not be delayed nor denied. To borrow from Dr. Martin Luther King Junior’s call for justice:

Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy [for sub-Saharan African refugees]. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of [human abuse] to the sunlit of [social] justice. Now is the time for [sub-Saharan African post-violence societies] to lift [themselves] from the quick-sands of …. injustice to the solid rock of [nationhood]. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children.\(^{617}\)

As the study’s participants expressed in their visioning for their futures, they too have hopes and dreams. They have dreams for peace for their country, they dream of being reunited with their families, they dream of realising their lives’ vocations and making a difference in lives. They dream of freedom, they dream of living out their inherent human dignity.

**Implications for the Peace and Conflict Studies Field**

So often the world sits idly by, watching ethnic conflicts flare up, as if these were mere entertainment rather than human beings whose lives are being destroyed. Shouldn’t the existence of even one single refugee be a cause for alarm throughout the world?\(^{618}\)

Refugee problems may often seem intractable but they are not insoluble. In our experience there are two basic prerequisites for solution: the political will of leaders to tackle the causes and to settle for peace, and international determination to push for peace and then to consolidate it. Consolidating peace means helping societies emerging from war to reintegrate refugees in safety and dignity, to rebuild their institutions – including in the field of justice and human rights – and to resume their economic development.\(^{619}\)

---


The human rights narratives and lived experiences that preoccupy this study gave voice to the indignities that refugees face. As long as these indignities remain there is ample room to research the root causes of violence and their resolution. The PACS field is well positioned for this type of research. The field addresses a broad range of issues that include among others: environmental concerns, causes of social conflict, peace movements, and cultural and gender issues. As Burton notes, PACS “embrace(s) all social studies, including economics and others that focus on institutions and structures.” Today, it is a field that is responding to the trend of growing peace strategies, which include post-violence peacebuilding, conflict transformation and conflict prevention. The PACS field is guided by “core concepts, which include negative peace, direct and structural violence, conflict resolution, conflict transformation and justice,” as well as by key leading questions on causes of violence, the promotion of good governance and the resolution of violent conflicts. The field is also guided by political and social goals and is value oriented. Broadly, PACS creates opportunities for cooperation and seeks to eliminate all forms of violence such as the “destructive state-sanctioned violence.”

Indeed, research in this field can help explore ways of including vulnerable groups in transitional peace efforts. As this study has demonstrated, further research is required to uncover and understand the linkages between refugees, human rights, truth commissions and peacebuilding to better inform policy as answers are sought for the plight of the forcibly

622 Ibid.
displaced. In situations where refugees have been included in transitional justice and peacebuilding processes such as in Liberia, research should be undertaken to inquire as to what worked and what did not work and, what lessons can be drawn from experiences like Liberia’s for future transitional bodies seeking to include refugees in their processes. The area of transitional justice and refugee communities is still novel and the literature remains scant. The PACS field provides fertile ground for spearheading innovative research and practice that can address the human rights plight of refugees. As Thomas Matyok notes, PACS is a “transformative leadership field [that is] poised to provide a range of nonviolent actions to address complex social issues faced by current and future generations. Tools in the field such as that of storytelling have already proven to be effective instruments for capturing the human dimension of conflicts, human rights atrocities, and the vicissitudes of social injustice for survivors of these forms of violence. The storytelling approach clearly demonstrates that stories are access point to peace practice and the sharing of knowledge. In respect to this study, Roger Duthie has pointed out that there is a “knowledge gap” regarding transitional justice and displacement. Through research in the PACS field, storytelling research methods can be used to contribute towards narrowing this knowledge gap.

Conclusion

People in places many of us have never heard of, whose names we can’t pronounce or even spell, are speaking up for themselves. They speak in languages we once classified as “exotic” but ... what they say is very much the same the world over. They want a decent standard of living. They want human dignity and a voice in their own futures. They want their children to grow up strong and healthy and free.628

In 2001 the United States Congress introduced an education legislation known as the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB) and in 2002 it was signed into law by former President George W. Bush.629 My goal is not to delve into the Act itself but rather to borrow its language - this notion of not leaving another life behind as steps are taken to improve livelihoods and further human development. I appreciate this philosophy and it was also recently reiterated during President Obama’s acceptance speech at the 2012 Democratic National Convention. In his concluding remarks he expressed; “Yes, our path is harder, but it leads to a better place. Yes, our road is longer, but we travel it together. We don’t turn back. We leave no one behind. We pull each other up.”630 The philosophy behind these messages transcends a national context. It speaks to humanity, and therefore, can be applicable to other global contexts. It serves as a reminder of the need to create opportunities for inclusiveness in building community, advancing human development and nation building. It serves as a reminder to governments of transitional societies that all “… citizens represent a vital building block for democracy … and [they] deserve to live the post- [accord] nonviolent story that allows for both national and human development.”631

Thus, in light of the challenging journey facing transitional societies in their work to rebuild their countries, it is pertinent that no group is left behind in the recovery, reconstruction, and reconciliation efforts. Given the interdependency of humanity, processes such as building peace and nurturing communal environments that advance social justice and champion human rights, ought to be inclusive. Sub-Saharan African truth commissions ought to strive to be inclusive in their response to all survivors of human rights abuses. The prevailing status quo of leaving thousands of refugees in the region on the outskirts of transitional justice and peacebuilding activities means that refugees are being left behind and are not being pulled up to be co-participants in the transitional peace work. As Martin Luther King Junior says, “we can never be satisfied as long as [fellows human beings remain] stripped …. of their dignity…. we [can never] be satisfied until justice rolls [for all].” The inclusion of refugees in transitional justice and peacebuilding approaches, equals a reaffirmation of their worth and dignity that they were robbed of by human rights violations. In particular their inclusion in the activities of truth and reconciliation commissions would signal a commitment and genuineness to post-violence nation building and democratic governance that is citizen-focussed and goes beyond the political rhetoric.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

General questions

Date: _________________________________

Number: _________________________________

Pseudonym: _________________________________

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. Date of Birth:
4. Place of Birth:
5. Country of Origin:
6. Number of children:
7. Number of family members living with you in the camp (Exclude husband or wife and children):
8. Marital status:
9. Level of education:
10. Occupation before refugee / asylum status:
11. Current occupation:
12. Date of arrival in Dukwi Refugee Camp:
13. Are you familiar with the concept of human rights: yes __ no __
14. Are you familiar with the concept of transitional justice: yes __ no __
15. Are you familiar with the work of truth and reconciliation commissions: yes ___ no __
16. Are you familiar with the concept of peacebuilding: yes __ no __
16. Reason for fleeing your country: (i) armed conflict: yes __ no __ ; or (ii) other reasons – please specify:____________________________________________________________
Specific questions: Part 1

Pre-forced displacement questions
1. How was life like for you and your family before you left your country?
   Probes:
   - How did you grow up as a child, how was your life as an adult?
   - What do you miss about home?

Human rights mistreatment questions
2. Tell me about the human rights mistreatment you and your family experienced before your arrival at this camp.
   Probes:
   - When did you start to notice changes in your environment?
   - What problems did you and your family face that made you leave?
   - How did you feel when all of this happened?

Camp life and resiliency questions
3. How did you manage to heal from the mistreatment you faced in your country? How is life like today for you and your family living in this camp?
   Probes:
   - Describe your everyday life in the camp
   - How is life like for women and girls in the camp?
   - What does it mean to you to live as a refugee?
   - Do you think about the past while in the camp, how do you feel about it?
   - Do you feel you have made peace with your past?
   - Have you healed from the mistreatment you faced and what helped you to heal?
   - What are your fears in life? What are your hopes and dreams?

Refugee and transitional justice questions
4. In what ways can the human rights stories that refugees tell about past ill-treatment they faced in their home countries be part of the work of truth and reconciliation commissions in their countries?
   Probes:
   - What do you think about the work of truth commissions – in particular the truth-telling process?
   - How do you feel about telling me your story?
   - Have you forgiven those who caused you to flee your country?

Storytelling for human rights and peace questions
5. What do you think we can learn from stories like yours?
   Probes:
   - Do you find it helpful to share your story?
   - What do peace, justice and reconciliation mean to you?
Peacebuilding questions
6. What do you think can be done to bring peace in your home country, to help people to feel safe and be able to work and take care for their families? How can people in your country live in peace with one another?
Probes:
- What have you learned about making peace in the camp?
- What have you learned about living in peace with other people in the camp?
- How do you resolve conflict in your community?

Co-partners in peace and justice work - role of refugee communities
7. How can refugee communities contribute towards peace, national reconciliation and fair treatment of all people in their home countries?

Focus group discussion questions: Part 2
Date: __________

1. In what ways can the human rights stories that refugees tell about past ill-treatment they faced in their home countries be part of the work of truth and reconciliation commissions in their countries?

2. What do you think we can learn from stories like yours?

3. What do you think can be done to bring peace in your home country, to help people to feel safe and be able to work and take care for their families? How can people in your country live in peace with one another?

4. How can refugee communities contribute towards peace, national reconciliation and fair treatment of all people in their home countries?

5. What are your fears and hopes for yourself and family as members of a refugee camp community (transitional community)?

6. What helps you get through difficult times in life?

7. What keeps you encouraged each day?
Appendix 2

Participant’s Informed Consent Form

Research Project Title
Exploring ways of including human rights narratives of refugees in transitional justice and peacebuilding processes through storytelling

Researcher
Mavis Matenge, PhD Candidate
Arthur V. Mauro Centre for Peace and Justice at St. Paul’s College
252-70 Dysart Road
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2M6
Canada

This is to invite you to participate in research conducted by myself, Mavis Matenge. I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada.

This consent form should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, or have any concerns please feel free to ask.

Purpose of Research
The purpose of this study is to explore ways in which refugee communities in Africa can be included in transitional justice and post-conflict peacebuilding processes in their countries. In particular, I will examine how their past human rights stories can be included in the storytelling / truth-telling processes of truth and reconciliation commissions established in their countries. The study will also explore their perspectives towards transitional justice and peacebuilding processes.

Nature of Participation
By agreeing to participate in this study you are firstly agreeing to meet with me for a one to two-hour long face-to-face interview where you will share your personal story about your life before you left your home country, the human rights mistreatment you faced that led you and family to flee your country, your experience fleeing to a different country, your experience of living in the
refugee camp and your perspectives on work of truth and reconciliation commissions and post-conflict peacebuilding processes.

Secondly, you are agreeing to meet together with other research participants in focus group sessions where I will facilitate discussions that will provide you with the opportunity to continue to share your thoughts on post-conflict peacebuilding and transitional justice. The discussions will also allow you to further share how you think refugee communities should be involved in transitional justice and peacebuilding processes in their home countries and contribute towards peace, respect and protection of human rights, and the rebuilding of their countries.

Please note that all the interviews and the group discussions will be audiotaped. I will transcribe all the interviews, and the group discussions will be summarised in writing. Once I have transcribed the sessions I will kindly ask you to review the written records to ensure that there is an accurate recording of what you shared. All the data will be stored in a lockable file drawer to which I will be the only person who will have access to it. Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary, with no cost to you and no payments will be awarded.

**Risk to Participants**
Participation in this study is not intended to cause any distress. However, the interview and group discussions may involve minimal risks such as emotional stress or discomfort in sharing your personal story. Should this be the case, please note that you are free to pause or discontinue participation at any time. In addition, I have also provided contact details for counselling and support services that are provided in camp by the Botswana Red Cross Society and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Office. These offices will be able to help in addressing any stress that you may experience during the interview or focus group session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Botswana Red Cross Society (BRCs) Dukwi</th>
<th>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Office (UNHCR) Dukwi Field Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Camp Office</strong></td>
<td><strong>Office</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Officer: Social Worker/ Psychologist</td>
<td>Contact Officers: Community Service Worker or Protection Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone Number: 2977333</td>
<td>Telephone Number: 2977201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Confidentiality**
All the information you share will be kept in the strict confidence. Files with notes, personal contact information, interview responses and transcripts will be kept in a lockable file drawer at all times. This research will be used toward my Doctoral Thesis and may be published. I may also use the findings at conferences or public lectures. If you wish to remain anonymous in this research, please note that you can use a pseudonym. Please indicate this in the space noted below:

I wish for my participation to remain anonymous. Please refer to me in your research by means of a pseudonym.

__________________________
Signature

__________________________
Date
**Results**
Three copies of the research will mailed and kept at the camp offices of the Office of the President, UNHCR and BRCS where participants can access them when they wish to do so.

**Researcher**
I understand that in signing this form I agree to respect and keep confident and private all the information shared with me by participants in this study.

__________________________
Researcher’s Signature Date

**Participant**
Your signature on this form indicates that you have carefully read and understood to your satisfaction all the information regarding your participation in this research project and that you agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

__________________________
Participant’s Signature Date

__________________________
Researcher’s Signature Date
References


Sunjic Melta, “Botswana Camp Captures History of Southern Africa.” *UNHCR Regional Office in South Africa*, UNHCR.


