

# **'Walking the Line': Southern Sudanese Narratives and Responding to Trauma**

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## **Abstract**

This study reports an ethnographic engagement with a relatively small group of Southern Sudanese men and their communities living in Adelaide, South Australia. It develops a grounded substantive theory about how Southern Sudanese men both conceptualise and respond to trauma in forced migration and Australian resettlement contexts.

Using a constructivist grounded theory design allowed the study to be informed by two sets of experiences. Data were gathered from seventy in-depth interviews with twenty-four Southern Sudanese male participants, all of whom speak English and are often leaders within the Adelaide Sudanese community. The study is also informed through the researcher's broader engagement with this community in the form of attending celebrations, mourning ceremonies and special events. These interactions provide important understandings for deconstructing powerful discourses on trauma, resettlement and healing.

A key argument behind the study is that through media-based representations, political commentary and a significant part of the academic literature, the dominant understanding of the Sudanese community is often generated through a trauma focused lens. The associated stories of the 'refugee experience' and isolated accounts of violence in resettlement contexts can construct the community as traumatised and their actions as the outcomes of war trauma. Whilst there is little argument that refugees often experience very difficult and traumatic events, it does not necessarily follow that they are indelibly damaged people. Critical engagement with participants' stories and the broader Sudanese community provides a justification for using a framework that not only documents the impact of trauma in people's lives but also how they respond to such experiences.

The word 'trauma' is highly familiar to the study participants. It is something they identify as having helped them to gain entry into refugee camps, acquire refugee status and access services in Australia. In many respects, trauma represents a powerful currency that helps refugees lay their claims for recognition as just that - refugees. However, this recognition, while granting some benefits and resources, also limits opportunities to participate as peers in civil society due to 'othering' dynamics.

The extended engagement with these Sudanese men highlights that they have many tools and knowledges with which to respond to profound difficulties and locate appropriate social, spiritual and agential pathways to healing. It is argued, however, that the exclusionary experiences of poverty, unemployment and racism can limit their ability to access such resources. The frequently used participant expression of ‘walking the line’ provides a metaphor for theorising how Sudanese participants negotiate a workable synthesis between their past and present in resettlement contexts where they must adapt to a new social reality. ‘Walking the line’ highlights the complexity of navigating between two different social worlds and the associated challenges of transnational movement and social transformation.

This study concludes that practitioners, researchers and policy makers also need to ‘walk the line’ through rethinking familiar perspectives on refugees, resettlement and trauma. The value of trauma focused inquiry is not questioned, but its primacy must be engaged critically and reflectively. This means validating and dignifying the impact of trauma in people’s lives while considering their pathways to healing and agency. Such a focus requires considering both past and present realities, and thinking about the associated role of social work from interpersonal to broader systemic levels. This study reinforces how professionals working with resettling communities need to conceptualise practice beyond dichotomous perspectives and embrace complexity at the ‘pointy’ end of ‘the line’.

## **Glossary of Acronyms**

ABC - Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics  
AMEP- Adult Migration English Program  
CALD - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse  
CPA - Comprehensive Peace Agreement (Sudan)  
DIAC - Department of Immigration and Citizenship (Australia)  
DSM IV - Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders  
GTM - Grounded Theory Methodology  
ICC - International Crimes Court (currently under The Hague)  
IHSS - Integrated Humanitarian Services Strategy  
IDP - Internally Displaced Person  
NGO - Non Governmental Agency  
NHMRC - National Health and Medical Research Council (Australia)  
NIF - National Islamic Front  
OAU - Organisation of African Unity  
PTSD - Post-traumatic Stress Disorder  
SAIL - Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning program incorporated  
SBS - Special Broadcasting Service (Australia)  
SGP - Settlement Grants Program  
SORA - Sudanese Online Research Association  
SPLA/M - Sudanese Peoples Liberation Army/ Movement  
STSA - Sudanese Tertiary Student's Association  
TFPE - Trauma Focused Psychiatric Epidemiology  
UN - United Nations  
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
USCR - United States Committee for Refugees

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.<sup>1</sup>

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Jay Marlowe

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Date

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<sup>1</sup> There have been four peer reviewed publications arising directly from this study (Marlowe, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2010). These publications are not explicitly referenced in the main text; three are attached at the end of this study and the 2010 publication is still in press.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am forever grateful to many people who have contributed to this study in multiple ways. I must first thank the Sudanese community, a number of its elders and most notably the participants. Their graciousness, support and willingness to engage with this research will always be greatly appreciated. I will carry these relationships and conversations in my heart and mind for the rest of my life. This work, I hope and believe, is a shared achievement with your community.

I would also like to thank my primary supervisor Dr Lorna Hallahan who provided direction when it was needed, a sustained critical engagement and the distance to wrestle with tough questions that necessitated time and deeper consideration. One of your greatest strengths is the ability to bring out the best in people, and I hope that this thesis reflects your time and commitment to my work. Thanks also to my secondary supervisor Associate Professor Carol Irizarry who has now provided more than five years of mentorship. You have modelled the importance of building castles in the sky and then ensuring that solid foundations are placed under them.

To my family – Dad, Mom, Britt and Michelle, I wish to thank you for your consistent support throughout my entire education. You have provided the role modelling to make this work what it is in many respects.

I would like to thank the staff at the Refugee Studies Centre and Professor Roger Zetter as my academic supervisor for accepting me as a visiting study fellow and engaging with the final analysis and writing of this study. This opportunity has provided a deeper engagement with my thinking on many levels.

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To the many others that I have not explicitly named, I am grateful. This study has been constructed on the shoulders of many amazing friends, colleagues and family.

## Reading Guide

This research was initially intended to focus on forced migration, but continually and without exception the community interactions and participant interviews shifted the focus onto resettlement issues. This shift represents the reason why the Sudanese men chose to participate, as their interests and concerns, often at a community-based level, relate to present- and future-based sentiments. Therefore, most participant quotes are prefaced and written in the present tense. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 in particular, which discuss participants' comments, are written predominantly in the present tense. The past tense is used in sections outlining Sudanese history, to explicate the process of conducting the research and in discussion. This writing approach, fluctuating between present and past tenses to emphasise the importance of present-based inquiry and reflection, locates the multiple contextual timeframes situated within the study.

Due to the study's constructivist orientation and the researcher's ethnographic engagement with the Sudanese community in Adelaide, several sections are written in the first person. This decision reflects the need to make myself, as the researcher, more visible, and to further illustrate the interpersonal relationships built with the community over several years.

Throughout the thesis, the term 'the Sudanese community' refers to the Southern Sudanese community in Adelaide that participated in the study. It is not used to designate the Sudanese community in general as this study cannot, nor does it endeavour to, make representative claims about the Southern Sudanese people as a whole. Similarly, where I refer to 'the men', this designates the Southern Sudanese men who participated in the study. Participant comments are indented and formatted in *italics* to make them identifiable from my writing and that of other authors. Numbers are used to designate participants' commentary (e.g. *Participant 13*) to make it more apparent that this study draws on multiple interviewee comments rather than on one particularly profound interview. Almost all participants stated that their real names could be used. I have declined to do so due to obligations related to ethics approval for conducting the research. This decision also relates to what Bourdieu (1999: 1) writes about documenting people's stories of social suffering:

How can we not feel anxious about making *private* worlds *public*, revealing

confidential statements made in the context of a relationship based on a trust that can only be established between two individuals? True, everyone we talked to agreed to let us use their statements as we saw fit. But no contract carries as many unspoken conditions as one based on trust. (original emphasis)

Recognising the relationships developed over the period of several years and the unknown ramifications of research, participants are de-identified. It is with respect that I endeavour to elevate their voices where possible while remaining mindful of research's unanticipated impacts and the need to de-identify their narratives.

# Chapter 1

## On Becoming Involved: Sudanese Nationals Resettling in Australia

A prerequisite for the regeneration of war-affected societies is rejection of their pathologization. (Pupavac, 2002: 507)

### Introduction

Since independence in 1956, Sudan has experienced more times of war than relative peace. The two civil wars historically recognised between North and South Sudan account for more than four decades of protracted conflict and displacement. The people's associated stories and experiences speak of atrocities and living conditions almost beyond imagination; accounts of forced marches, dislocation, death and despair. In relation to these events, the academic literature places a strong emphasis on trauma and its associated sequelae and trajectory in refugee lives. There is inherent value in knowing about such events and experiences, as illuminating the stories of oppression can elevate such concerns to the eyes of the world. A less explored path, however, has been that of understanding how those with refugee status respond to traumatic events. What might be their own sources of strength, hope and survival that establish forms of healing and resistance distinct from the trauma story itself?

This study, informed through my social work practice experience, focuses upon how Sudanese men respond to traumatic experiences that arise from forced migration and resettlement contexts. A major catalyst was a statement by a Sudanese person I was working with. As he spoke about his experiences of receiving refugee status, securing a humanitarian visa and accessing services in Australia, he stated, *I had to prove that I was damaged goods*. My interactions as a social worker with the Sudanese community in Adelaide suggested that they were doing relatively well in many respects, and that the media had presented a rather one-sided and trauma focused understanding of them. Although many people from this emerging community had experienced difficulties and trauma associated with forced migration, 'damaged goods' does not seem an apt or just descriptor of them.

This study was conducted during a pivotal time in Australian and world history. The global economic crisis, environmental degradation and ongoing military conflicts were bringing, and continue to bring increasing numbers of asylum seekers, or those more commonly referred as ‘boat people’, to Australia’s shores. This has generated an increased awareness of, and heated debate about, Australia’s policy towards refugees and those seeking asylum. In this volatile climate, the Sudanese community resettling in Australia has experienced intense media-driven and political scrutiny over the last several years.

Sudanese resettlement and successful integration within Australia remains a controversial and topical issue within current political and social debates. During October 2007, the then Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews argued that Sudanese people were failing to integrate into Australian society. He stated his concern that some groups of refugees “don’t seem to be settling and adjusting into the Australian way of life as quickly as we would hope” (Hart and Maiden, 2007). These comments angered and frustrated the Sudanese community and many support organisations working to assist them. One of the participants interviewed in this study gives the following analogy to note the limited voice the Sudanese community has to respond to Mr Andrews’ comments:

*Kevin Andrews’s comments relate to a Sudanese saying that says, “While you are a crocodile in your country, when you go to another people’s country, you will be a lizard.” Can you see the difference between a lizard and a crocodile?*

*JM: Yes, there is a big difference.*

*That was what Kevin Andrews was doing. He said those things because it is his country.*

Whilst there is a growing body of knowledge about Sudanese refugees resettling in Australia (Khawaja et al., 2008; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Schweitzer, Melville et al., 2006; Westoby, 2008), little is known about their experiences, hopes and aspirations in resettlement contexts. Those who have experienced forced migration have often lived through dangerous and traumatic situations in which distrusting other people can be seen as a functionally adaptive survival strategy (see Kohli, 2006). Given this background and acknowledging the power disparity between ‘crocodiles’ and ‘lizards’,

it is perhaps not too surprising that accessing reliable information from resettling communities can be fraught with challenges.

This study endeavours to broaden the scope within which the emerging Sudanese community in Adelaide, South Australia, can be understood. It critically examines the pathways of garnering people's lived experience in relation to forced migration and resettlement by not only documenting the effects of trauma, but importantly ascertaining how people respond to traumatic events. The study aspires to elevate Sudanese voices as much as possible by taking an emic-focused approach (while recognising my etic positionality as an outsider) that attempts to identify participant realities constructed in the specific contexts of Southern Sudanese people living in diaspora. As such, the study adopts a constructivist orientation as its methodology and thereby maintains that the resulting analysis and theory generation are interpretative portrayals of the Southern Sudanese rather than an exact or objective picture of them. Central to this approach are the relational contexts between me, as the researcher, the participants and the Sudanese community as a whole. From this perspective, Sudanese men speak about their skills in, and diverse knowledge of, healing. They suggest pathways that professionals outside their community can follow to better work alongside this rapidly growing community in Australia, and emphasise a desire to contribute to Australian society as a critical approach to healing.

The ongoing relationship with the community, data collection process and the reasons that Sudanese men agreed to participate reflect the contested social and political resettlement landscapes this community must navigate. Democratic theorist Seyla Benhabib (2002) argues that group identities are highly dynamic and need to be considered in relation to the politics of identity/difference. She states that the focus "should be less on what the group is but more on what the political leaders of such groups *demand* in the public sphere" (Benhabib, 2002: 16, original emphasis). The term 'political' for the purposes of this study speaks to far more than politics occurring within governmental installations. As Edkins (1999: 2) acknowledges, "The political has to do with the establishment of that very social order which sets out a particular, historically specific account of what counts as politics and defines other areas of social life as not politics." Sudanese participant comments are also political in so much as their statements reflect what they demand in the public sphere. And from their narratives,

sophisticated insights about healing and responding to trauma emerge in both expected and surprising ways.

This study does not endeavour to make generalised claims about what Sudanese culture or healing *is*, not only because these two domains can change dynamically, but also because it reports upon an engagement with twenty-four English speaking Sudanese men who are often leaders within their communities (a small but important component of a larger contextual grouping). Rather, the study documents and differentiates Sudanese men's *responses to trauma* as *distinct from the effects of trauma*. It is hoped this study will not only create a better understanding of these particular Sudanese men living in diaspora, but will also inform a critical perspective of engaging other refugee populations - a perspective that recognises the importance of the cultural, social and historical backgrounds from which people originate.

## **Contextualising the Study**

According to the most current statistics available from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are now more than 25 million refugees and internally displaced persons under its care worldwide (UNHCR, 2008, 2009a). The UNHCR (2006) identifies three durable solutions for refugees:

- (1) Voluntary repatriation;
- (2) Local integration in the country of first asylum; or
- (3) Integration in a third country of resettlement

Of these durable solutions, this study focuses exclusively on the reports of those who have followed the least common path: resettlement. The UNCHR (2006: 142) report on the state of the world's refugees defines resettlement as the "transfer of refugees from a state in which they have initially sought protection to a third state that has agreed to admit them with permanent-residence status." Less than one percent of the world's refugees traverse this resettlement path (UNHCR, 2008). Whilst representing a minority of refugee lives, the UNHCR acknowledges the potential positive resettlement outcomes for those taking this journey, highlighting the necessity to better understand what participants in this study frequently refer to as travelling between the two different worlds of Africa and Australia.

Australia grants 12,000 to 13,000 humanitarian entrants protection to its shores annually (DIAC, 2007a). According to the most recent UNHCR reports (2006, 2007, 2008), Australia has been the second highest country of refugee resettlement behind the United States of America during 2005 and 2006, and third highest in 2007.<sup>2,3</sup> There are now more than 24,000 Sudanese refugees who have immigrated to Australia via the humanitarian programme visa scheme since 1996 (DIAC, 2007b). Of the 13,000 refugees who gained permanent residency in 2005-2006, almost 30 percent were Sudanese (DIAC, 2007a). Although the number of African entrants declined in 2007-2008, nearly 10 percent of the total allocated humanitarian visas still went to Sudanese born individuals (DIAC, 2008). The Australian Census 2006 shows that the Sudanese population has grown more than 287 percent since the 2001 count and identifies this group as the country's fastest growing ethnic community (DIAC, 2009b). Most of these recent Australian arrivals have come from Southern Sudan as a direct consequence of a twenty-two-year civil war between rebel groups in the South and the Khartoum associated government forces based in the North (see Duffield, 2003; Jok 2001; Ruiz, 1998). With few exceptions, Southern Sudanese refugees have survived traumatic and dangerous experiences associated with forced migration, including displacement, torture, rape and other forms of injustice (Beswick, 2001; Bolea et al., 2003; Jeppsson and Hjern, 2005; Schweitzer, Melville et al., 2006). Many Southern Sudanese people spent several years in refugee camps before being accepted under humanitarian auspices in countries such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom.

The UNHCR (2002) maintains that refugees can be at a higher risk of developing mental health problems as a result of past experiences of trauma associated with forced migration. Thus, programs that support emotional and personal recovery are critical.

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<sup>2</sup> These statistics report on quota refugees, which are people already recognised by UNHCR standards for refugee classification and host states recognise this status before their arrival. These people are sometimes referred to as UN refugees and are distinct from asylum seekers. Importantly, asylum seekers are not represented in these data as Australia's policies towards this group have not been as favourable. During the years under the Former Prime Minister John Howard, the Australian government was accused of gross human rights violations, particularly with its policies regarding mandatory detention and temporary protection visas. For more information about asylum seekers in Australia and associated policies, see Briskman et al. (2008); Gale (2004); Mann (2003); Marfleet (2006); Odhiambo-Abuya (2004); Sheikh et al. (2008); and Sparrow (2005).

<sup>3</sup> Examining the UNHCR (2009b) data on the total number of people lodging asylum claims in the first six months of 2009 – only 2,600 applications were lodged in Australia/New Zealand compared to the worldwide total of 186,550. The current concerns of Australia being inundated with asylum seekers need to be critically reconsidered within this broader context.

Much of the academic literature also acknowledges that trauma associated with forced migration can be a significant risk factor for developing adverse mental health outcomes (Beiser et al., 1993; Fazel et al., 2005; Procter, 2005a; Silove, 1999). The UNHCR (2002: 231) report on resettlement states:

It is important that integration programs are provided in ways that support emotional and personal rebuilding. As well as promoting the optimal well-being required to deal with the stresses and adjustments involved in resettlement, this approach can help to prevent the development of more serious mental health difficulties.

This statement acknowledges that while past traumatic experiences may place people at risk, resettlement is an equally salient concern. Procter (2006: 42) recognises this significance, stating, “Also important will be actions that build resilience intrinsically over time, such as the asylum seekers’ values, sustained supportive interpersonal relationships and therapeutic care plans.” This study attempts to document the Sudanese participants’ values and supportive structures in both past and present situations. The participating men speak in depth about what helps in resettlement contexts and how professionals such as social workers, psychologists and service providers can provide greater assistance to their community. The study does not include assessments of Sudanese people’s mental health using Western diagnostic categories, nor does it document their mental health history. Rather, the emphasis has been on allowing participants to express their concerns associated with forced migration and resettlement, and then to identify sources of meaning, survival and recovery that are distinct from the trauma story and establish forms of healing. This focus highlights people’s agency, strategies of coping and capacity to heal (Ingleby, 2005; Silove, 2005; Summerfield, 2002). Despite the risk factors to adverse mental health outcomes suggested by numerous studies, many refugees seem to recover well from difficulties associated with forced migration. The emphasis on resilience and strengths relates to Australia’s most recent National Mental Health Policy starting in 2008, which has several overarching aims that focus upon resilience and healing:

- Promote the mental health and well-being of the Australian community and, where possible, prevent the development of mental health problems and mental illness

- Reduce the impact of mental health problems and mental illness, including the effects of stigma on individuals, families and the community
  - Promote recovery from mental health problems and mental illness
  - Assure the rights of people with mental health problems and mental illness, and enable them to participate meaningfully in society.
- (Australian Government, 2009: 9)

To accomplish such goals with resettling populations, it is important to create spaces that provide people the opportunity to voice their story and perspective, recognising that often they are marginalised by a number of factors, including past traumatic experiences and difficulties adapting to a new life in Australia. The need to understand both the effects of trauma and people's responses to it remains highly salient within the contemporary contexts of transnational movement and social transformation.

### **A brief historical overview – Sudan 1956 to present**

Sudan is the largest country in Africa with an estimated population of over 35 million people (see map, Appendix 1). It is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country comprising more than one hundred ethnic groupings in Southern Sudan alone (Deng, 1972). From 1899-1956, Sudan was under British colonial rule. During this time the British governed the country primarily as two states and imposed law between what is often characterised as a predominantly Islamic North and a Christian/animist South (Johnson, 2003; Jok, 2001; Sharkey, 2004).<sup>4</sup> After England withdrew in 1956 and Sudan gained independence, a supposed system of power sharing was established. In many respects it was a mute exercise, enabling the North to exert control over the South (Deng, 1995). With government and military power centralised in the North, the region of Southern Sudan has had a long history of oppression and conflict caused by both colonisation and lack of political representation.

There have now been two major civil wars between North and South Sudan since independence.<sup>5</sup> Ruiz (1998) notes that by the mid 1990s, these two wars had killed more than 1.5 million people and are largely responsible for creating one of the largest

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<sup>4</sup> The South was exposed to Christianity primarily through missionaries (Johnson, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> The conflict in Darfur is not represented here. The research for this study has focused solely on Southern Sudanese people. For a detailed and historical account of the conflict in Darfur, see De Waal (1988); Flint and De Waal (2005); Patrick (2005). See also Appendix 1 for a map of the various regions.

populations of internally displaced people in the world (see also Deng, 1995). Whilst many understand these wars as a conflict between Islamic Arabs based in the North and southern black Christians (Deng, 1995; Morrison and De Waal, 2005; Ruiz, 1998), Rogier (2005) acknowledges that Sudan is one of the most heterogeneous countries in Africa and maintains that the civil wars cannot be simply viewed as conflicts between ethnic or religious identities. He draws attention to exclusionary government policies and vested interests in land-based resources – most notably oil (see also Johnson, 2003). The first civil war occurred between 1955 and 1972, and ended with the Addis Ababa agreement, which granted the South regional autonomy. According to Ruiz (1998), this first conflict resulted in the internal displacement of 500,000 people and created 180,000 refugees from the total estimated five million residents living in the South.

The time period between 1973 and 1982 was one of general peace until the Khartoum government began making plans for implementing Shari'a Law in the South. In response to this policy and an increasing polarisation between the North and South, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was formed under the leadership of John Garang, who began to resist the efforts of the Northern-based government. Garang was originally a government soldier and formed this rebel faction in response to the government's policies and actions in the South. This defection and new rebel movement proved a significant catalyst to ignite the second civil war in 1983, with the resulting displacement of tens of thousands of people (Ruiz, 1998). The war intensified noticeably after the *coup d'etat* of the fundamentalist National Islamic Front (NIF) in the late 1980s headed by Omar Bashir (who, in 2009, was charged by The Hague under the International Crimes Court for war crimes against humanity). By 2001, it was estimated that two million people had been killed by war-related violence and famine, with an additional four million displaced (Morrison and De Waal, 2005; see also USCR, 2001). Estimates of the total number of deaths and displaced people vary widely. It would not be contentious to claim that hundreds of thousands died and millions were displaced by the 'official' end of this conflict in 2005.

The signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) marked the end of the civil war in 2005, but there are still accounts of skirmishes and tensions between rival groups. Rogier (2005: 11) notes that the signing of the CPA was a positive outcome but emphasises that it does not represent a final roadmap to peace; it "merely opens a highly

fluid transition period with a greatly uncertain outcome.” Many people still fear returning home due to worries about their safety. This tenuous ceasefire is under threat as Sudan itself is nearing the crossroads of important elections in 2010 and a referendum for the South to secede from the North in 2011. Reports of escalating violence near the contested borderlands of the North/South have become increasingly commonplace over the last several months. These developments may further destabilise an already tense relationship between these two regions, with warnings that Sudan’s southern region of Kordofan could become the next ‘Darfur’, further aggravating what is already a dire humanitarian crisis in many localities.

### **The ‘Lost Boys’**

Before turning to Southern Sudanese resettlement in Australia, it is worth introducing the history of a group of Sudanese youths who have become known as the ‘Lost Boys’.<sup>6</sup> Several authors have recently published autobiographical and fictionalised accounts that document the experiences of civil war in Southern Sudan (see Bixler, 2005; Deng et al., 2005; Dul Dau, 2007; Eggers, 2006; Hecht, 2005; Walzer, 2009). Many of the associated stories are about young males who were labelled as the ‘Lost Boys’, referring back to JM Barrie’s fictional tale in *Peter Pan*. It is estimated during the mid 1980s that tens of thousands of predominantly young boys were separated from their parents, families and communities by the ensuing chaos of the second civil war (Jeppsson and Hjern, 2005). Displaced by conflict, these Sudanese boys acquired this name by walking incredible distances and surviving vast deserts, hunger, sickness and conflict settings to find relative ‘safe’ haven in Ethiopia from 1987-1991, and then arriving at Kenya’s Kakuma refugee camp in 1992. Mark Bixler (2005: 59) documents the story of one boy, Daniel, who made this journey:

In those days, I saw many dead people for the first time in my life... I also witness too many people died because of the famine and drought. There was no water and foods for people to drink and eat for three and a half days... If we were not drunk our own urine and eat soft mud and strange foods, therefore, automatically, we would have died like the rest of colleagues who were been dying...

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that a number of Sudanese people who were part of the ‘Lost Boys’ grouping take offence to this term. Others seem to embrace it at least on a superficial level. Whilst this term is unfortunate in a number of ways, it has generated a widespread interest in the boys who grew up without their parents. Chapter 8 will look to political theories of recognition to evaluate what might be at stake through such labels and dominant descriptors within civil society.

This journey was characterised as one of constant danger in which exposure to the elements, wild animals, violence and aerial bombardments were part of an almost daily existence. When the ‘Lost Boys’ arrived in Ethiopia between 1986 and 1987 they were placed in camps such as Pinyindo and Itang in the Gambella region.<sup>7,8</sup> Jeppsson and Hjern (2005) note that during this time there were about 15,000 boys aged 5-15 years who were accompanied by only a few hundred adults. Jeppsson and Hjern (2005) cite estimates that around 30 percent of the boys died en route. Those who made the journey to Ethiopia endured scarce resources and overcrowded living conditions. There are reports that the SPLA used Ethiopia as a safe haven and recruiting ground for their armed resistance against Khartoum (Johnson, 2003: 87-89). All told, it was a hard situation in which to live one’s childhood.

Most of the refugees remained in the Ethiopian camps until 1991 when the Mengistu government was overthrown. At this time, the Mengistu government was supportive of the SPLA and was supplanted by one friendly to Sudan’s Khartoum government (Johnson, 2003; Ruiz, 1998). This shift of power had disastrous consequences for those who had sought refuge within the Ethiopian camps. They had to make a hurried escape from the Ethiopian border back into Sudan as the Ethiopian militia began firing upon them indiscriminately. This escape is often cited as being incredibly traumatic because the return into Sudan meant crossing the crocodile-infested, swollen Gilo River. Many of the refugees did not know how to swim and had to make a choice between being shot or throwing themselves into the fast moving current. John Dul Dau (2007: 94) writes about his personal experience crossing the Gilo as one of the ‘Lost Boys’:

Not being a good swimmer, I frantically looked for a place where the edge dipped gently to meet the river. While I searched, tall, coal black Sudanese boys made leaps of faith around me, jumping at full speed without looking to see where they would land. I froze. Why was I looking for an easy way to enter the water, when soldiers were trying to shoot me from a few hundred yards away?

Other autobiographical writings provide graphic accounts of this experience (Deng et al., 2005; Eggers, 2006). It is estimated that hundreds, if not thousands, died there.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1 for a map of Sudan and the surrounding refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, marked by dotted circles, that a number of the participants travelled to (often by foot).

<sup>8</sup> There are multiple different spellings of Ethiopia’s camps. This study uses the spellings designated by Jeppsson and Hjern (2005).

From Pochala near the Sudanese and Ethiopian border, the 'Lost Boys' made another difficult journey across the desert towards Kenya where a new refugee camp called Kakuma was being created, auspiced under the UNHCR. For many, this camp would be home for more than a decade. As those coming to these camps received refugee recognition, countries such as the United States of America, Canada and Australia started offering humanitarian entry and permanent residency as places of resettlement. Although the UNHCR and the Red Cross operated the refugee camps, numerous documents note the squalid conditions, hardships, danger and lack of resources that characterise these camps (Beswick, 2001; Hoeing, 2004; Jeppsson and Hjern, 2005; Khalili, 2007; Paardekooper et al., 1999; Stepakoff et al., 2006). For many, this camp would become home for a number of years.

Not all participants in this study had the direct experience of those who were part of the group known as the 'Lost Boys'. This narrative, however, speaks of the inherent dangers, constant unknowns, difficult situations and suffering associated with the millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees who have sought relative safe asylum from Sudan's protracted conflicts. Several participants state that although the Southern Sudanese took many pathways on their arduous journey to Australia, their suffering is something they share in common. Participants have primarily come to Australia via either Kenya or Egypt – each place characterised with its own difficulties. Their journeys to these places and the time in transit while waiting to be resettled were difficult, but as will be discussed, challenges also awaited upon arrival in Australia.

### **Resettlement – coming to Australia**

Of great importance is the recognition that the difficulties associated with the 'refugee experience' do not end with resettlement. Despite refugee camp myths of Australia providing jobs and vast resources for everyone to enjoy, this utopian construct is not the reality. Some studies even suggest that the resettlement experience can be as traumatising as the experience of forced migration (Beiser et al., 1993; Miller and Rasco, 2004; Silove et al., 1997), as the following comment from a Sudanese person highlights:

There is no difference between Australia and Sudan! We try to forget the hunger we lived, but life in Australia keeps remind me of what went through before. We keep hoping for a better life in Australia... (Arfish and Oliff, 2008: 105)

This comment provides an important backdrop to understanding the contested landscape that resettling refugees find within Australia. The narratives and interactions arising from this study provide a foundation to theorise about how Sudanese participants respond to trauma and how this information can be important for resettlement contexts.

## **Conceptualising the Study: Refugees and Trauma**

### **Refugee status and well-founded fears**

The refugee label is essentially a legal designation (Malkki, 1995; Zetter, 1999, 2007) that has adopted a number of different contextual understandings and meanings. This term has been used contemporarily to describe those forcibly exiled from country; environmental refugees from climate change and natural disasters; economic refugees in the contexts of the 2008 global economic crisis; and most recently in the media to describe people affected directly by the 2009 Black Saturday Australian bushfires. Recognising the polysemic nature of ‘refugee’, this study employs the term defined under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and made more universal under the 1967 Protocol (UNHCR, 2008), which states that a refugee is:

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

This definition is used in this study as all participants have been humanitarian entrants from Sudan and thus are legally classified as refugees under UNHCR auspices. A person looking to obtain refugee status must satisfy this definition, and the UNHCR (1979/1992) handbook on procedures and criteria for determining this status provides detailed information about this complex process. In particular, it is important to emphasise the notion of a ‘well-founded fear’ in the refugee definition. The UNHCR (1979/1992: 9) handbook acknowledges that this fear contains subjective and objective elements. It states, “The assessment of credibility is indispensable where the case is not sufficiently clear from the facts of the record.” People seeking refugee status often lack documents attesting to who they are, and they may have difficulty proving their lived experiences. Although not explicitly stated in the handbook, experiences of trauma can provide compelling ‘objective’ evidence to establish well-founded fears when applying

for refugee status.<sup>9</sup> It is important to emphasise that experiences of trauma are not a direct measure or official criteria for refugee status recognition,<sup>10</sup> even though the Sudanese man quoted earlier in this chapter said he had to prove he was ‘damaged goods’. Well-founded fears are more easily evidenced by attacking militias, forced dislocation, multiple forms of experienced/witnessed violence and wounds sustained to the body or psyche. This study elaborates how the focus on individualised accounts of trauma can medicalise refugee lives and potentially obscure their political, social and historical realities (see Malkki, 1995; Pupavac, 2008).

### **Locating the ‘refugee experience’**

The ‘refugee experience’ is cited as being particularly difficult where one is exposed to a number of highly distressing and life threatening situations, including: flight from country; experiencing/witnessing violence; sickness; torture; threats; forced marches; and death. Turton (2003) and Ager (1999) acknowledge that there is not one ‘refugee experience’ or journey which encompasses the multitude of experiences and pathways that people traverse when forcibly displaced. Whilst caution must be used when considering the applicability of the ‘refugee experience’ to individuals and communities, there are some important distinctions between a migrant and a refugee. It must be recognised first that the terms ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants’ are highly generalised, and potentially unhelpful or even misleading. Despite this criticism, it is worth noting some of the differences between the two terms. Refugees often have had to leave home by the fastest route possible, which might include: leaving behind loved ones; taking dangerous escape paths; not knowing where they are going; taking very few (if any) material possessions; lacking documentation that attests who they are; and not knowing when or if they can return home. Migrants, on the other hand, frequently know where they are going, have time to pack their bags and generally can return home if life abroad does not work well. Such generalisations can be unhelpful and there are ‘grey’ areas where some refugees might see themselves more as migrants and vice versa. Thus,

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<sup>9</sup> Nyers (2006) provides an in depth analysis of ‘well-founded fears’ and how the UN 1951 Convention is applied to determine refugee status.

<sup>10</sup> There is currently a Migration Amendment (Complementary Protection) Bill being tabled in the Australian Parliament. If passed, this Bill would qualify people who are likely to experience torture and cruel treatment for an Australian Protection Visa. This legislation would then broaden the context of the refugee definition (well-founded fears due to a particular membership or identity) and make the likelihood of trauma an even more salient consideration in people’s request for protection under Australia’s humanitarian auspices.

while every participant in this study has refugee status, the focus is upon the particularities of their experiences related to forced migration and resettlement rather than drawing upon generalised understandings of ‘the refugee journey’.

Whilst having refugee status affords access to critical support and resources from countries signatory to the UN convention, this study will illustrate how the refugee label can have contemporary pathologising inclinations and become a person’s master status. To counter this tendency, efforts are made not to encompass participants within this label. The terms ‘participants’, ‘men’, ‘women’, and ‘community members’ are often used to prevent the potentially overpowering associations of the refugee label, except where it presents as a helpful construct to recognise (and potentially validate or dignify) their past, present and future situations.

A number of Sudanese participants express that the word ‘refugee’ is a painful but important term. They hold onto it as a reminder of their important history because to deny that they are refugees would be dishonouring those living and those who have died back home. Associated with this challenge, Eastmond (2007) writes about her work with Chilean refugees and the associated struggle they experience between the moral imperative not to forget and the pain of remembering. It is therefore not the intention to diminish the seriousness and importance of a person’s experiences of forced migration in any way. This study will endeavour to recognise and validate the status of being a refugee as well as looking beyond it.

## **Recognising trauma and sensitising concepts**

Trauma is a term situated in both medical and psychiatric domains. Its etymology goes back to the Greek word for ‘wound’, although it has accrued a polysemic definition over the course of more than 300 years. Kirmayer (2007a) and Young (1995) provide helpful genealogies of trauma from its historical to contemporary (and contested) understandings. A popular definition that differentiates medical and psychiatric definitions is outlined below:

Medically, “trauma” refers to a serious or critical bodily injury, wound, or shock... In psychiatry, “trauma” has assumed a different meaning and refers to an experience that is emotionally painful, distressful, or shocking, which often results in lasting mental and physical effects. (MedicineNet, 2009)

What is important to acknowledge is that something emotionally painful or distressing does not have to be directly experienced; thus, perceived threats and well-founded fears (a criteria for refugee recognition) can be seen as potentially traumatising. Often a well-founded fear is accompanied by experiences of trauma. A significant portion of the refugee-related literature explores the resulting implications and consequences. Aroche and Coello (2004: 56) state:

Trauma is not a disembodied construct, as suggested by DSM-IV; it is a cultural and historical reality that must be entered into by the clinician... In the case of refugees, trauma is almost always sustained as part of a political and historical process of conflict, often perceived to be associated with ethnocultural and religious issues that transcends the individual and his or her lifespan.

Blumer (1969) introduces the idea of *sensitising concepts*, which gives the researcher the beginning ideas to pursue for a particular topic or research question. The sensitising concepts for this project came from my experiences as a social worker with those living through experiences of loss and trauma, and through coordinating a summer program for refugee children. These experiences provided sensitisation to ask particular questions such as:

- How do Sudanese men conceptualise trauma in their lives?
- What are the pathways to recovery?
- How do Sudanese people hold on to their hopes and dreams despite what they have been through?
- Who and what has informed Sudanese responses to trauma?
- How do people challenge, incorporate and respond to the effects of trauma?
- How can social workers and other allied professionals better work with the Sudanese community and think about best practice with regard to trauma?

These questions *sensitised* a critical engagement with dominant discourses regarding perspectives on culture with a capital 'C', discursive understandings of trauma and the common moniker of the refugee experience. It was initially thought that this study would need a concise definition of trauma for the participants' reference but it was highly familiar to them. It is a word they learned in refugee camps; a word that would

help them obtain refugee status, as it could help establish credible claims for well-founded fears. This study therefore situates trauma within a polysemic designation. It is argued that allowing participants to express trauma on their own terms provides opportunities to better understand how they respond to difficult experiences and what they see as the most salient concerns in resettlement and forced migration contexts. Regardless of one's definition of trauma, it would be a contentious claim to argue that the participants' narratives did not embody elements of trauma, as will be evident in the later chapters. However, this study will consistently maintain that *experiences of trauma* and being *a traumatised person* can be very different things.

### **Differentiating ordinary and extra-ordinary stories**

The journey of many Sudanese forced migrants such as the 'Lost Boys' is characterised by hardship and suffering, strength and hope. There is clearly value in knowing about their hardships as it illuminates the lived experiences of oppression and injustice. It is often the refugee journey and the sensationalised descriptor of 'Lost Boys' that captivates the attention of the reader and places their story largely within the sympathies and compassions of other people's hearts and minds. Written between the lines of this extreme adversity and trauma are also the boys' stories and responses of supporting one another, remembering and living by their parent's teachings, maintaining hope and survival. For this study, these responses are often grounded within what is termed the *ordinary* understandings of one's history, spirituality, culture, background and folklore as distinct from the *extra-ordinary* events usually underpinned by trauma. This differentiation is inspired by Bourdieu's (1988: xii) discussion of rendering familiar perspectives newly strange through 'exoticising the domestic' by asking how it is that preconceived concepts and ideas can be engaged outside what is routinely thought and imagined:

The sociologist who chooses to study his own world in its nearest and most familiar aspects should not ... *domesticate the exotic*, but, if I may venture the expression, *exoticize the domestic*, through a break with his initial relation of intimacy with modes of life and thought which remain opaque to him because they are too familiar. In fact the movement towards the ordinary, and the ordinary, world should be the culmination of a movement towards alien and extraordinary worlds. (Bourdieu, 1988: xii, italics added)

Bourdieu uses this term to address the concern of researchers taking the 'exotic' or most

sensational and engaging aspects about a group of people and rendering these observations as ‘domestic’ or everyday understandings of them. To counteract this tendency, he suggests making the ‘domestic’ elements of people’s lives ‘exotic’. This shifted focus transforms the familiar as strange and makes it possible to critically engage taken-for-granted assumptions. This perspective can be understood more easily within forced migration discourses as trying to place greater emphasis upon understanding the ordinary stories of a person’s life beyond the ascribed status of being a refugee and the associated traumatic experiences that are often situated within the *extra-ordinary*. Recognising the contested meanings of the terms ‘exotic’/‘domestic’, this study uses *extra-ordinary* and *ordinary* to delineate different aspects of the refugee and trauma-related story. This distinction is also partly informed by Kohli (2007), who similarly writes about differentiating the ordinary and extraordinary lives of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Other authors criticise refugee studies for focusing exclusively on trauma focused understandings of refugees at the expense of more everyday understandings of people’s lives, or what is unfortunately labelled ‘the mundane’ (see Kirmayer, 2007b; Malkki, 1995; Miller and Rasco; 2004, Turton, 2004).

When elevated from pejorative understandings, *ordinary* stories can provide information about a person outside the refugee label. Whilst recognising the importance of the trauma story, this study will also address the significance of elevating the *ordinary*. This dual focus recognises the impact of trauma and ascertains the participants’ initiatives, actions, hopes and values that inform how they respond to difficult situations.<sup>11</sup> The process of incorporating both stories is introduced below.

### **Using a narrative informed approach**

Documenting the participants’ responses to trauma makes it possible to iteratively explore how they respond to adverse situations despite the consequences of forced migration and conflict. This form of inquiry has the potential to open another discussion that goes beyond the level of trauma, hurt and anguish a person has sustained as a refugee to what they want and aspire to in their lives. White and Epston (1990) introduce the concept of a dominating narrative where other valid and existing stories succumb to a more powerful one. It is the trauma story that often dominates and receives primary billing in the media and much of the academic literature (see Miller et

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<sup>11</sup> The italicised terminologies of *ordinary* and *extra-ordinary* will be used in the chapters that follow.

al., 2006). Whilst clearly having value, an exclusive focus on the associated effects of trauma can obscure alternative stories that are also valid.

To capture the *ordinary* from the *extra-ordinary* stories that Sudanese participants told, an approach called double listening (Denborough, 2006; White, 1995, 2004) was used to differentiate their responses to trauma as distinct from its effects. White (2006c) notes that the skill of double listening or double-storied accounts can help traverse beyond the thin description of trauma's effects to other important considerations of a person's life, which include their responses to trauma. From a narrative perspective, people are never completely passive in the face of trauma. They may find a number of ways to respond to such an adverse situation through trying to modify, endure or counteract its negative effects (White, 2004). These responses can often be relegated to what Foucault (1980, 2003) terms 'subjugated knowledges', which are rendered hierarchically inferior, hidden or even disqualified within the purviews of more dominant discourses. When subjugated, refugee responses to trauma are rarely questioned or privileged in the face of significantly distressing and tragic events. As a result, trauma focused histories can be given greatest value by other people and support agencies. The story of a person's experience(s) of trauma and forced migration, and how it negatively influences his/her life can easily overpower another story that might emphasise something different about what a person values (White, 2005). The preferred story that an individual might have about their life suddenly becomes subordinate to the one about trauma, which can focus on deficits and pathologies. From this exclusive understanding of a person's experiences of trauma, a 'thin description' (Geertz, 1973) of the individual is created, whereas other important considerations of identity can easily be lost and obscured.

A narrative perspective assumes that a person's life can be viewed as multi-storied. Expressed more simply, there are many stories a person can tell about one's life. The idea behind double listening is that it opens spaces for telling of both the trauma story and the response to it. This form of inquiry does not necessarily privilege the negative effects of trauma; rather, it approaches a person's story and history as an opportunity to explore multiple paths. From this perspective, it is possible to further trace within a person's responses their associated transformative initiatives; special skills; and values and beliefs that have strengthened their forms of resilience and resistance to the experiences of trauma. These responses inform what White (2006a) refers as the 'other

half of the story'. From this exploration, it is possible to trace the history of a person's response, how it was learnt, those who inform it and how these actions might connect a person to important events or people in their lives. Of course, the trauma story can also be told in this context as if the participant deems it appropriate. This approach offers space to validate and dignify the trauma experience but also opens opportunities to uncover and illuminate the strengths embedded within individuals and their associated community.

## **Outline of Chapters**

This study is composed of nine main chapters. Overall, it attempts to address how Sudanese male participants respond to trauma as distinct from an exclusive inquiry into the trauma story. Through an engaged interaction with the Southern Sudanese community and participants in Adelaide, South Australia, it is possible to interface critically with discourses on trauma and how Southern Sudanese men define, and subsequently respond to it. Participant voices will serve as an archive throughout to establish an empirical base that provides a grounded foundation to theorise increasingly about their responses to trauma. All participants have given consent to anonymous use of their narratives. Their names appear under pseudonyms. In some cases, other identifying or personal information has been changed or omitted to ensure anonymity (see Appendix 2). This study remains consistent with the ethics clearance provided to conduct the research. The outline of chapters is provided below.

**Chapter 2: Research Design and Accessing the Community** introduces the research design and the engaged process of establishing rapport with the Sudanese community. It is divided into three parts. The first situates the constructivist form of grounded theory that informs the methodology and how the interview and ethnographic field data were collected. Within this theoretical terrain, the Sudanese men's narratives are not seen as objective portrayals of reality but rather as an interpretation of it. Inherent within a constructivist approach is that the researcher is part of the data generation process, so, where necessary, researcher assumptions and biases are made explicit. The second and third parts outline the intensive engagement of gaining access to the Sudanese community and conducting the interviews.

**Chapter 3: Data Analysis and Locating the Research** details the analytic processes associated with interpreting participant interviews and the ethnographic field data.

Central to a grounded theory analysis is the concept that theory generation is emergent and ‘grounded’ within the data. From this perspective, the coding, sampling and analytical processes are elaborated to demarcate the emergent nature of this research. Justifications are also provided for using computer-assisted software to sort the data in the latter analytical phases. Participant demographics are introduced and limitations of the study are addressed.

**Chapter 4: The ‘Refugee Experience’ and Understandings of Trauma** provides a review of the academic literature regarding the contested discourses on refugees and trauma. It thereby presents the intellectual crux and rationale between distinguishing the effects of trauma and people’s responses to associated events. This review illustrates the debates related to mental health, trauma and wellbeing, and provides a historical account of trauma within forced migration studies. Much of the associated literature consistently argues that trauma can be a significant risk factor for adverse mental health outcomes, and conversely, others find that most refugees manage their lives well despite difficult experiences. This chapter critiques the biomedical perspective on trauma and discusses alternative approaches.

The next two chapters are inter-related and report the study’s findings. These chapters provide an archive of the Southern Sudanese men’s narratives and ethnographic fieldwork that encompasses both resettlement and forced migration contexts, presenting how these men conceptualise and respond to trauma. As such, emphasis is placed on presenting their voices through participant endorsed transcripts in order to ground the theoretical analysis in the later chapters.

**Chapter 5: Conceptualising Trauma** is divided into three parts. The first outlines how participants primarily define expressions of trauma. This focus helps to interpret how the impacts of trauma are primarily situated within: (1) social purviews of family and community separation; and (2) the situational domains of unemployment, limited opportunities for education and, more generally, lacking an overall sense of agency. The second part examines what the participants report in relation to their experiences associated with their journey of leaving Sudan, living in refugee camps or waiting in transit (sometimes over many years). Part three interprets the expressions of trauma in Australian resettlement contexts.

**Chapter 6: Responding to Trauma** discusses how participants respond to trauma in forced migration and resettlement contexts. The chapter is divided into two parts. Part one presents the many trauma-associated social, cultural, spiritual and historic responses that helped the men overcome related challenges and dangers. Of particular note is that many of the men's responses to trauma in forced migration contexts are often employed to help them respond to difficulties associated with resettlement. Thus, trauma as past experienced is thrust into understandings of these Sudanese people living in diaspora – present and future. Part two situates these responses alongside Western psychological approaches and discourses on healing, something participants were keen to discuss further. This chapter concludes with what participants find helpful in resettlement contexts and how professionals can work alongside their community in realising greater pathways to recovery and agency.

**Chapter 7: Walking the Line, Negotiating a Workable Synthesis Between One's Past and Present** draws upon the participant narratives to theorise how they negotiate life in resettlement contexts within a transnational gaze. The participants often spoke about their experiences of forced migration and adaptation in resettlement contexts through the metaphor of 'walking the line'. The dilemmas of walking this line with respect to the importance of maintaining a coherent sense of one's past with the present is discussed within social and historic notions of raising children, living according to one's culture and heritage, following parent teachings and incorporating these values within resettlement contexts. The coalescence of the issues raised illustrates how the global is linked to the local as the simultaneity of life in resettlement co-exists with what is happening in Africa. Following Bhabha's (1994) critical theory on hybridity and the 'in-between' spaces of culture, this discussion acknowledges that the incorporation of Sudanese lives past-present is not just a nostalgic exercise but part of the necessity of living. This chapter considers masculinity within Sudanese resettlement and again notes the 'line' that these men must walk to maintain their connections between their past and current values, and what is considered normative within Australian society.

**Chapter 8: Walking the Line, Understandings of Professional and Refugee Lives** theorises the 'walking the line' metaphor in broader contexts for allied health professionals, practitioners, service providers, researchers and policy makers. The chapter begins by employing political and social theories of recognition and

redistribution to examine what is at stake with trauma focused perspectives. This analysis is buttressed by a return to, and critique of, trauma discourse in the study of forced migration. The second part of the chapter considers social justice in resettlement contexts by examining social work practice within interpersonal and broader realms. This chapter extends the ‘walking the line’ metaphor to show that practitioners, researchers and policy makers must also navigate this line by challenging false dichotomies. These perspectives are juxtaposed and the conclusion provides recommendations of what this analysis represents for professional social work practice, effective community engagement and developing just social policies.

**Chapter 9: Conclusion and the Mosaic of Social Work Practice** provides final commentary on the lives of people with refugee status, resettlement, trauma and healing. It offers concluding remarks on this study’s relevance to social work practice (and other associated fields) by bringing the threads of the previous chapters together. Final remarks are made about the importance of distinguishing people’s responses to trauma from its effects, and about ‘walking the line’ in professional practice.

## **Summary**

This chapter has *contextualised* the study by providing a brief background of refugee-related issues, key terms and contemporary debates surrounding Sudanese nationals residing in Australia. My experience as a social worker stimulated a number of sensitising concepts that led to considering the Sudanese participants’ understandings of trauma and their responses to it. This introductory engagement with trauma and discourses on refugees *conceptualised* this study’s focus and situates it within a constructivist orientation. By differentiating *ordinary* and *extra-ordinary* stories of lived experience, this chapter provides an intellectual rationale for distinguishing people’s responses to trauma from its effects. This distinction is driven partly by the contention that even though refugees may experience traumatic events, it does not necessarily follow that they are traumatised individuals. The following chapters further illuminate these statements to theorise what it might mean to acknowledge both the trauma story and a person’s response to it.

# Chapter 2

## Research Design and Accessing the Community

Many times we felt like our research was going around in a circle, but more often, we found that the research was on a spiral, still going around in circles, but progressing for the better (Guerin and Guerin, 2007: 150).

### Introduction

This chapter introduces the research design. It is divided into three main parts. Part one places a primary focus on constructivist grounded theory as the research approach and introduces the participant interviews and ethnographic fieldwork. Central to this section are concerns around the discursive nature of knowledge and meaning construction between the researcher and the Sudanese participants. This orientation reinforces the choice for a constructivist form of grounded theory. Each section of Part one begins by introducing the associated conceptual and methodological traditions that include several brief personal notes/reflections (often as footnotes) to preserve the researcher's presence and consciousness in the study's design.

Part two discusses the research journey with respect to forming the initial research question and accessing the Sudanese community. Central to this process is the enduring relationship between the researcher, participants and their community over several years. Part three introduces how the interviews were conducted.

### PART ONE: Research Design

This section outlines four major underpinnings of a research design (Crotty 1998): epistemology; theoretical perspective; methodology; and method.<sup>12</sup> Within this section, the strongest emphasis is placed upon constructivist grounded theory as the methodology. In particular, the constructivist orientation maintains that the resulting

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<sup>12</sup> I have chosen to use Crotty's four underpinnings of a research design for coherence. Within the academic literature, grounded theory is referred to as a method, methodology and a method/methodology package. Because it is not possible to reconcile these different designations, this framework provides a way to navigate (though not perfectly) these inconsistencies of terminology.

analysis and theory generation are interpretative portrayals of the Southern Sudanese participants, not an exact or objective picture of them. The constructivist research practice is embedded in the ethnographic process of participating in community events as well as conducting the interviews. It is explicated further in Chapter 3 – ‘Conducting the Analytical Process’.

### **Epistemological perspective**

This study builds on a constructionist epistemological stance, which maintains that meaning is neither objectively known nor subjectively interpreted. Rather, meaning is *constructed* as individuals (both the participants and researcher) encounter their world through the interpreted and discursive perspectives of culture, family, friends, society and history. Thus, meaning making and understandings of our social world are not solitary endeavours (Berger and Luckman, 1966, Mead, 1938; Schwandt, 2003, Snow, 2001). Burr (2003: 2-6) maintains that there are certain features of social constructionism that require consideration of the following:

1. A critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge;
2. Historical and cultural specificities (the relatively stable and dynamic);
3. A view that knowledge is sustained through ongoing social processes.

These constructions change over time, vary across localities and are (re)constructed through social processes. This perspective becomes salient with Southern Sudanese people living in diaspora as they emphasise the different understandings between Sudan and Australia. The socially constructed resettlement realities around social norms, legal ramifications and multiple discourses upon refugee lives define a highly contested and politicised landscape that the participants must traverse. A critical engagement with these considerations (and constructions) provides a foundation for theorising not only how this group of Southern Sudanese men copes with difficult experiences but also towards how host countries, practitioners and those involved in policy respond to humanitarian entrants. The constructionist stance further highlights the need to elevate Sudanese voices where possible to capture their perspectives instead of imposed discourses about them.

Finally, the social processes of understanding the Southern Sudanese community living

in diaspora highlight the important relationship between the researcher and participants in the production of 'knowledge'. This premise calls for reflexivity, in which the researcher must also work towards recognising their personal constructed meanings, interpretive processes and areas of potential bias. Thus, it was critical to be open, and, as much as possible, to remain aware of how *my* reality is constructed. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

### **Theoretical perspective – symbolic interactionism**

Noting the commonly aligned relationship with grounded theory, the theoretical perspective draws upon symbolic interactionism. This approach was coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937 (Strauss, 1993), although many of its core principles are accredited to the work of George Mead who was Blumer's mentor at the University of Chicago during the 1940s (Mead, 1938). In particular, Mead's focus on perspective (where partiality and situatedness are assumed), temporality and the complex flexibility around an act highlights the important interplay between actors and settings (Clarke, 2005; Strauss, 1993). For symbolic interactionists, a focus on meaning is critical towards understanding human behaviour, social processes and interactions expressed through the mediums of language, symbols and gestures. People are able to cooperate and assume mutually recognised roles (Blumer, 1969) because at some level there is agreement about the meaning of these symbols (whether between individuals, groups, communities, cultures or society). In order to understand the associated meanings, the researcher must 'grasp' the participant's particular meaning within a specific context (Charmaz, 2006). This emphasis places the locus of inquiry within the present, as Blumer (1997: 4) summarises:

The symbolic interactionist approach rests upon the premise that human action takes place always in a situation that confronts the actor and that the actor acts on the basis of *defining this situation* that confronts him. (original emphasis)

Recognising the meaning of such symbols clearly presents an additional challenge when juxtaposed between the different cultural, historical and social backgrounds of a researcher trained in 'Western' social work contexts and the Sudanese community. This challenge is highlighted by a Sudanese colleague who states that migration is a journey between two worlds, fraught with difficulties in accurately interpreting and conveying the realities of both. Engaging with the Sudanese participants individually and at

community events over an extended period of several years as both a social worker and researcher opened rich opportunities for me to understand many of the associated meanings of their words and actions.

Symbolic interactionists highlight the interactive nature of data collection. As Mottier (2005) maintains, the research process for symbolic interactionism is not a passive endeavour but a mutual construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants. The research reality is directly affected by the ‘viewer’ and the standpoint of multiple actors (Clarke, 2005). Thus, the previous discussion of the constructionist epistemology links into the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. The study’s foci regarding participants’ responses to trauma and their meaning making processes provided direction towards understanding their pathways of healing, adaptation and recovery. However, these pathways were simply points of departure as the research question and analysis were shaped through the primarily inductive processes associated with constructivist grounded theory.

### **Methodology – constructivist grounded theory**

Like a camera with many lenses, first you view a broad sweep of the landscape. Subsequently, you change your lens several times to bring scenes closer and closer into view. (Charmaz, 2006: 16)

With a history now spanning five decades, grounded theory has seen numerous modifications and perspectives from its original form developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In their seminal book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, these authors responded to the gap they saw between theory generation and empirical data. They were critical of quantitative methods that often relied on deductive methods, which limited the parameters of what could be observed in the data and often placed too much emphasis on overarching theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; see also Blumer, 1940).

Grounded theory is ultimately about developing theory that is grounded in the data. This process is performed iteratively through the constant comparative method of moving back and forth through progressively focused data, and subsequently increasing the abstract categorisations of the data to elevate rich description towards generating substantive and possibly formalised theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). As the analytical process becomes

increasingly abstracted (yet still grounded to the data), it develops from raw data to codes, then towards creating categories and eventually transforming these inductive processes into theoretical concepts. Placed together, the codes, categories and concept(s) are the building blocks that generate grounded, or emergent, theory. The power and potential of grounded theory, as Charmaz (2006) asserts, is its primarily inductive analytic processes that lead to theorising how meanings, actions and social structures are constructed. Central to a grounded theory analysis is the belief that preconceived ideas cannot be forced upon the data. Extant theory can only 'earn' its way into the analysis after much of the inductive analytical work is done.

Grounded theory also allows for development of increasingly sophisticated questions as the research process continues. Working with a community from a divergent background means that salient issues and concerns can be obscured from the researcher's awareness. This study originally intended to focus solely on Sudanese men's responses to trauma from forced migration, yet it quickly became apparent that participants wanted to speak more about their lives in the contexts of resettlement than exclusively discussing the past. Employing a grounded theory approach made it possible to follow the data and modify the research question accordingly. Thus, rather than a rigid questionnaire or interview schedule applied universally from start to finish, as the research progressed an increasingly grounded research question developed.

Since the writing of the *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, the approach of this predominantly qualitative inquiry has diversified from its original predecessors. Indeed, the process of generating theory differs depending on which grounded theory camp one is in. After introducing grounded theory in the late 1960s, Glaser and Strauss eventually split with respect to how this methodology should be applied.<sup>13</sup> Glaser is often associated with staying close to grounded theory in its original form whereas Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) began emphasising verification and axial coding to elevate concepts to theories. Following this diversification, Denzin (2007) notes that there are now at least seven different forms of grounded theory that have emerged: positivist; post-positivist; constructivist; objectivist; post-modern; situational; and computer assisted approaches. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) further distil this list to three distinct

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<sup>13</sup> For an example, see Glaser (1992) who responds to Strauss and Corbin (1990). Bryant and Charmaz (2007), Clarke (2005) and Mills et al. (2006) provide helpful historical overviews of this approach and its associated modifications.

traditions of Glaserian, Straussian and constructivist orientations. Whilst all three approaches embody the core tenets of grounded theory, each perspective is also distinctly different.<sup>14</sup> It would be difficult for an author to use grounded theory as a chosen methodology without specifying which of these three derivatives they employ.

This study uses a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2003, 2006). Charmaz is acknowledged as the author of this approach and was a doctoral student under Glaser and Strauss. She became critical of the ‘discovery’ aspects of the founders’ grounded theory (as is evident in the original text’s title), and maintains that neither theory nor data are *discovered* but are *constructed* (Charmaz, 2006: 10). From her standpoint, the objectivity of research and the neutral or unbiased ideals of the researcher must be called into question.

A constructivist approach does not deny that the researcher has inherent subjectivities, pre-conceived ideas and biases. It is more about being explicit about what these are and how the researcher has either incorporated or avoided them in the emergent process of analysis and theory generation. As Charmaz (2006: 180) asserts, “We stand *within* the research process rather than above, before or outside it” (original emphasis). Tuhiwai Smith (1999: 5) supports this perspective, stating, “Research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions.” Rock (2001) emphasises the importance of trying to understand the situations that confront the researcher, and of locating the researcher as an additional actor who influences this social and political setting.<sup>15,16</sup> Charmaz (2006: 15) maintains that “we are not scientific observers who can dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming scientific neutrality and authority.” She argues that the representation of data is always on problematic, relativistic, situational and partial some levels (Charmaz, 2008: 138).

These perspectives and acknowledgements were a relief when conducting research with

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<sup>14</sup> Some would rigorously challenge this assertion, particularly those claiming to follow ‘classic’ grounded theory (see Glaser, 2005; Morse, 2007). These authors argue that alternative approaches employ Qualitative Data Analysis rather than grounded theory.

<sup>15</sup> Harrell-Bond and Voutira (2007) acknowledge that power disparities and undisclosed associated politics can render participants’ voices invisible in numerous research contexts. Likewise, Chimni (1998) importantly illustrates how the UNHCR plays a key role in the production and dissemination of knowledge, which is far from a neutral exercise.

<sup>16</sup> Rock (2001) also provides a coherent connection between symbolic interactionism and ethnography.

the Sudanese community because they allowed for an explicit exploration of discursive notions of power, context and meaning. The political and social implications of this research were often highly evident. Media portrayals, high ranking politicians' statements, contestations about Australia's immigration policies and public sentiments on Sudanese people required a stance beyond impartiality, neutrality and objectivity. The ability to conduct participant interviews, often of a highly personal nature, and to receive a welcome invitation to community events have necessitated an interpersonal and engaged relationship with the Sudanese community.<sup>17</sup>

Grounded theory is often an associated methodology with symbolic interactionism as its theoretical perspective (Charmaz, 2006, 2008; Clarke, 2005). It is worth noting Glaser's (2005) rebuttal of this association (which he primarily attributes to the influence of Strauss and his background at the University of Chicago) because of what he views as an automatic and hence uncritical marriage of the two. In fact, he argues that grounded theory should not engage in the 'rhetorical wrestle' of ontology, epistemology or theoretical perspectives because for him, all is data and often goes beyond the limitations of a particular perspective, paradigm or approach (Glaser, 2005: 160). However, for the purposes of this study, symbolic interactionism offered the best theoretical perspective to explore the multitude of associated symbols, meanings and experiences of the resettling Sudanese community. The particularities of how constructivist grounded theory structures the analysis are presented in Chapter 3.

### **Method – ethnographic fieldwork and conducting interviews**

The primary methods of data collection combined an ethnographic engagement with the community and individual interviews with Sudanese men (often involving several meetings). These additional meetings provided the opportunity to confirm, correct and further inquire into participant narratives. They also helped the researcher build a deeper engagement with the participants' forced migration and resettlement experiences. This information was augmented and informed through attending Sudanese community events, by invitation, as a form of ethnographic fieldwork. This involvement necessitated an ongoing relationship whereby a number of activities with the community did not initially have a clear link with the 'official' research project. Many

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<sup>17</sup> A. Schmidt (2007) comments on the 'heightened reflexivity' in forced migration studies where the process of conducting research and the associated findings are strongly influenced by the researcher due to the contested terrain associated with their work.

times, however, these interactions provided a greater context in which to understand what was happening in the data. The particularities of both the ethnographic component of participating in these events and conducting the individual interviews are elaborated after further outlining the process of engaging the community (see Part two).

## **PART TWO: Accessing the Community and Fieldwork**

The second part of this chapter details the ethnographic process of engaging the Sudanese community and participants.<sup>18</sup> Of particular importance was the need to develop a relationship with the community rather than being a distant outside observer; an interactive process that necessitated an active engagement in which stances of neutrality were not possible.

Charmaz (2006: 22) describes grounded theory ethnography as requiring emphasis on the studied phenomenon or process rather than the setting.<sup>19</sup> This approach helped me focus upon actions and processes in the community settings and informal meetings. By concentrating on social processes, it was possible to capture perspectives on, and responses to, trauma (whether occurring past or present) in different community-based events, which provided richness to the textual base arising from the recorded participant interviews discussed in Part three of this chapter. Gaining access to these interactions, however, necessitated locating the relational contexts between the researcher, community and important gatekeepers.

More than twenty-five community events were attended. Some of these lasted more than ten hours; others were much shorter. There were times when I was a relatively passive observer and often had an assigned community member sit next to me to translate the Dinka or Arabic if English was not spoken. At others, community leaders often asked me to deliver a public speech about the research or in response to a person's loss. After the formality of the event, informal socialising included sitting together and eating traditional foods. These gatherings with other individuals and groups provided rich, invaluable opportunities to further refine understandings of what participants

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<sup>18</sup> Much of this section is informed from Marlowe (2009a).

<sup>19</sup> Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) suggest ways that grounded theory can help guide an ethnographic analysis from low level description to a much higher and abstracted theoretical rendition of the data.

expressed in the individual interviews.

### **Gaining entry to the community – accessing ‘authentic’ knowledge**

Consultation with several Sudanese community leaders and elders to better develop the research question revealed a concern with what they called ‘authentic knowledge’. They noted that their stories of living in Kenya’s Kakuma refugee camp had been used to benefit or elevate the status of researchers, often with little or no benefit to the teller. They also spoke critically of how they never heard from these persons again after disclosing their experiences. These accounts are further buttressed in refugee-related examples where an outsider’s analysis and resulting dissemination was incorrect, unfounded, or worse led to negative outcomes for the participants (see Mackenzie et al., 2007; Wessells, 2008). Employing Irving Goffman’s (1959) concept of ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ responses, Miller (2004) notes that initial information from refugees can often be of a front stage nature. This information may be highly rehearsed and of limited accuracy, but serves to protect the community from outsiders. Miller then discusses the importance of trying to ascertain back stage information, which is more difficult to obtain but more likely to have a higher degree of authenticity.

Whilst the following example from one interviewee is not a justification for the study’s research design or approach, it illustrates the power of people’s stories and speaks of his experience sharing his narrative in Kenyan and Ethiopian refugee camps:

*JM: And have you shared your story many times? Have you had a chance to share your story?*

*No. You see, I haven’t had the time to share my story with some people. During the time I was in the refugee camp, sometimes people go and ask me from agencies like UNHCR. Sometimes they meet you and they ask you what happened and you tell them. This is not a very long story. They ask what you are facing now – they ask you about the food, have you got anything, if you are tired of living, where you are getting water, clothes, shelter, and what you are doing. That is part of the history that we share. But we have not gone deeply [talking about their experiences]. (Participant 1)*

‘Going deeply’ and accessing more authentic accounts is easier said than done. As a researcher and often a stranger entering into the lived experiences of refugee lives, it is important to recognise that refugees may have learned a level of functional distrust that may assist them in what might possibly be a hostile encounter with the unknown (Kohli,

2006).<sup>20</sup>

## Sharing stories

How stories are told, by whom, to whom, under what circumstances, and for what specific purpose – vary according to sociocultural prescriptions. (Carter-Black, 2007: 32)

Story telling is a universally shared human experience. However, the ‘type’ of story that is told may vary depending upon the audience, socio-cultural norms, time, place and notions of power. The inherent fluidity of story and expression brings forth controversial and contested notions of what ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ might actually represent. There is now widespread recognition that developing an emic or insider’s view, which considers important elements in a person’s life such as culture, language and spirituality, is essential for understanding how refugees make sense of their lives after experiences of forced migration (Blackburn, 2005; Goodkind, 2006; Miller et al., 2006; Ryan et al., 2008; UNHCR, 2002; Yu-Wen et al., 1997). These accounts provide pathways to delve into the ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973) of people’s lives. However, these rich understandings do not happen magically. They can evolve and change significantly over time (Guerin & Guerin, 2007), and thus, issues of gaining entry into the Sudanese community and accessing reliable knowledge come to the fore.

There is evidence that my relationship with the community and the participants’ willingness to share their narratives were established from the recommendation of other Sudanese people that they trust. A Sudanese man’s commentary on why he had agreed to participate in this study is indicative of the ‘word of mouth’ that runs through the community and the importance of networks in developing legitimacy:

*I met you today but I know what you have done. I heard of you before. So I trust you. So all of these things are coming out of the confidence.*  
(Participant 21)

This statement provides a salient and common pathway of having to go through various gatekeepers and checkpoints before members of the Sudanese community agreed to

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<sup>20</sup> My previous role as social worker included counselling refugees and also organising an annual summer program for refugee children. These interactions meant that I already had a nascent reputation within the Sudanese community. These past experiences provided foundational groundwork in establishing rapport, credibility and trust as an ‘outside’ researcher.

participate. Consultations with community leaders, elders and respected clergy within Adelaide also informed methods that were more likely to be resonant with the Sudanese people. These gatekeepers emphasised active engagement with the community and offered the opportunity to make public announcements at church and other community events. The gatekeepers were viewed as cultural consultants who had expert knowledge about the Sudanese community that went beyond text book and academic understandings.

Without exception, all Sudanese consultants emphasised the importance of visibility within the community. This included recommendations to attend church on Sundays and make public announcements about the research *and* my personal background. They spoke of the importance of not only talking about, and inquiring into, the past, but also to ascertain these people's experiences of resettlement and current vision. Remaining a passive bystander was not a viable option as the community demanded a two-way interaction. Numerous participants and elders asked my opinion about the former Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews' comments regarding the Sudanese community 'failing' to integrate and my perspective on the two civil wars between Northern and Southern Sudan. This study has incorporated reciprocity through helping members of the community find housing, engaging with support agencies to help their children in school, assisting with job applications and various other roles (discussed later in this chapter). With respect to the ethnographic fieldwork, the community events were attended by invitation. Gaining one participant interview necessitated an average of 15-20 hours of engaged and interpersonal fieldwork.

## **Participant recruitment**

Participant recruitment was consistent with the ethical clearance provided to conduct this research. Previously established contacts as a social worker were used to meet with several key elders and leaders who, in turn, provided opportunities to make announcements about the research at community events and church services. Thus, snowball and convenience sampling procedures were used initially. Growing familiarisation within the different sub-communities made purposive sampling to locate specifically targeted participants possible.<sup>21</sup> This process facilitated a more directed

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<sup>21</sup> Several participants contacted me by phone requesting to participate in the research as they heard about the study via other Sudanese community members.

inquiry to add theoretical depth and insight to the analysis – an important process in grounded theory.

These non-probability sampling techniques are helpful when the research is of a potentially sensitive nature and the participants are relatively hard to locate and engage. The use of third party recruitment was needed occasionally because accessing the Sudanese community was difficult without having the explicit endorsement of trusted elders and community leaders. Whilst these third party people recommended certain people to approach to participate in the study, they were never privy to knowing if a suggested person had participated.

My presence and role in the community settings was established where the person who had invited me to the event would introduce me and note that I was conducting research. It was at this point that I would introduce myself and speak about the research (often with an interpreter who would translate in Dinka, Arabic or another local language) and offer printed information about the study to anyone who was interested. The community members whom I spoke with and observed are not identified throughout this study and only participant endorsed quotes are used to inform the later chapters. The community interactions, however, provided a critical grounding to the participant comments as it helped to link the Sudanese men's narratives to actions directly observable within their community.

### **Setting the scene and establishing rapport**

Some of the men interviewed for this study did not agree to participate until we had known each other for more than eighteen months. To ensure that this study was not exploitative, throughout the research process participants were not rushed into interviews. With few exceptions, a formal interview was not conducted on the first meeting with a potential participant. Rather, this time was used to introduce myself and the research project, and to ascertain the Sudanese person's interest in participation. After a participant provided informed consent, they were given several days to think about the study so they could confirm that they still wanted to be interviewed.

Almost every participant asked to conduct the interview in their home.<sup>22</sup> A few stated

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<sup>22</sup> This section provides preliminary information about the interview process. Part three will provide an in depth discussion with respect to how the interviews were conducted.

that they wanted to meet in the city or at the university in a quiet location, but most expressed the importance of not feeling rushed and home seemed the best place to talk. Nearly all these interviews were conducted in the living room. Other people usually left this area during the interview, although a few times another person was present at the participant's discretion. Almost all interviews began informally for an hour or more, during which time discussions about the study and other general aspects about both the participant and researcher's lives were addressed. Again, this unrushed process allowed for the documentation of processes and actions rather than just focusing on spoken words in formal interviews. After drinking tea, the formal audio-recorded interview began. This usually lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. When interviewing participants, I found that using maps of Sudan appeared to help them articulate their thoughts in a less confronting manner. By focusing on a map, it was possible to talk to the map, which at times seemed to be a less direct form of communication.

Whilst participants shared their profound narratives within the 'official' audio-recorded interview, it often eventuated that the most useful information was obtained later. It was common afterwards to eat a meal with the participants' families. This could involve spending more than six hours together and experiencing the generosity and welcoming nature of the Sudanese community. The process of forming relationships, not rushing into the research process, ensuring participants understood the purpose of the study and consulting various elders helped further establish safety in the interview process – a critical consideration, as discussed below.

### **Establishing safety and implications of going deeply**

*Some of the things I am telling you, they are not out of nowhere. They are out of experience. The issues that have happened... I could tell you more but I don't want to. I don't want to go into that. (Participant 3)*

Those displaced through forced migration have often been exposed to harrowing experiences of psychological, physical and/or emotional forms of trauma. It is thus imperative to understand these people's backgrounds and to remain aware of the potential dangers to which a person might expose him or herself by telling their story. For example, Goodman's (2004: 1184) study of Sudanese youths resettling in the United States of America found that suppression and distraction was a major coping strategy, noting a young man's comment, *thinking a lot can give you trouble*. In this

research, trying to ascertain the responses to trauma was something that had to be done carefully and patiently. It necessitated prioritising the comfort and safety of the story teller well beyond the needs of the research question or any intellectual curiosities. An interviewee relates his experience of fleeing Sudan:

*I came to Egypt. I ran to Egypt. [He looks at the map of Sudan] Difficulties... Very, very bad. Sometimes if I recall what happened, sometimes it is hard. Sometimes tears come out.*

*JM: You said that tears come out?*

*Yeah, sometimes it is tough – like if you talk to me, I can listen to what you are talking but here [touches his head] there is nothing... Because everything has been blown out... So, I don't go to touch that much because I am afraid. It will disturb our research. (Participant 3)*

Hasty interviews may have led to the front stage responses Miller (2004) writes about. Time was something that needed to be embraced and nurtured. Establishing the men's responses to trauma and what had been helpful to them in the wake of traumatic experiences enabled them to express their stories about sustenance, hope and survival. Part of this process speaks to the necessity to move slowly through sharing such stories and the importance of establishing a safe environment:

*JM: Would you say are there any ongoing effects in your life today from these experiences?*

*Yeah, there are some effects. Because yes, there are some really difficult things and it is really hard to forget it. So, it is still in my mind and it is still in my emotion, so it is still really hard to forget. So I have just to go slowly through it, yeah. (Participant 4)*

The timeframes of this study have in many respects needed to follow a commonly expressed participant concept of 'slowly slowly' in which stories of profound significance and the process of resettlement are addressed cautiously.<sup>23</sup> The grounded theory process fits well with this slowly, slowly orientation. It allowed a more flexible

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<sup>23</sup> A fluent Arabic speaker stated that 'slowly slowly' is a direct Sudanese Arabic translation from 'shuwya shuwya', which has several meanings: take it easy; little bit by little bit; or not so fast. It is relatively easy to see how the concept of 'shuwya shuwya' relates to sharing stories of profound significance and the difficulties around resettling.

approach towards establishing the research questions and opened spaces whereby it was possible to go further than initial front-stage participant responses.

### **Differentiating being and doing – incorporating reciprocity**

A Sudanese elder who has supported this research in the capacity of an ongoing cultural consultant stated:

*The only way to get the community to talk to you is to get to know them. They must see you as a person and one who is committed not only to helping yourself but to helping them.*

This elder's valuable insight introduces a helpful distinction between 'being' and 'doing' that can assist both researchers and practitioners towards accessing deeper levels of authenticity in respectful and collaborative ways.

Collaborative research requires a commitment and sincere engagement with process that may necessitate stepping outside a study's established timelines and scheduled milestones. Acknowledging the unanticipated twists and turns of collaborative processes, the research question becomes further grounded within an ecological perspective that considers a broader focus upon the person in environment and context (see Rappaport, 1977). Such perspectives can help facilitate more sophisticated and reciprocal forms of research and action, and represent a cornerstone of this study. The following two sections provide personal reflections of how the participants and the community more generally became engaged. This discussion is framed by Gorman's (1995) work on the inherent tension between *being* and *doing* as a practitioner and researcher working with marginalised communities.

#### **Being**

During the early stages of the research process, I walked into community events with my satchel, armed with information about the study, a notebook, diary and other items that would help me collect and organise data. It became apparent quite quickly that I was the guy who always attended Sudanese events with a satchel tossed over one shoulder. Whilst aware that my role as researcher needed to be transparent, once I dropped the satchel and allowed myself to participate more fully with the participants, this *being* seemed to break down several barriers – others started to communicate and interact more freely amongst themselves and with me. Indeed, the informal and

everyday interactions proved crucial in getting beyond rehearsed, front stage responses.

A particular challenge in working with the Sudanese community required a different way of conceptualising time. The idea that it was possible to conduct a two-hour interview on a rigidly set schedule was unlikely in reality. More than half the scheduled interviews and consultations were cancelled, rescheduled or started significantly later. After telling a Sudanese colleague about these experiences, he joked about what he called ‘AST’ or African Standard Time.<sup>24</sup> This intended light-hearted acronym demonstrated the different social constructions that have the potential to create difficulties due to Sudanese and mainstream Australian understandings of time. These differing conceptions can present dilemmas for those working as researchers and practitioners, particularly in professional or personal contexts where Western understandings of AST may not exist. Thus, where possible, the concept of *being* is helpful. Opening oneself to embrace AST may leave the listener receptive to new insights and ways of *being* that go beyond a snapshot of a particular issue (see Guerin & Guerin, 2007; Rodgers, 2004). *Being* with the community (without the satchel tossed over one’s shoulder) permits the listener to establish greater trust and rapport in a way that is more highly resonant for the participants. There is inherent value in being able to meet people on their terms in both time and place.

## **Doing**

There are many ways of conducting and disseminating research. It is argued here that the *doing* of refugee-related research in resettlement contexts should endeavour, where possible, to incorporate reciprocity in its design. As Mackenzie et al. (2007) argue, refugee-related research should aspire beyond harm minimisation as a standard for ethical research and try to achieve reciprocal benefits for both the researcher and the researched. Tuhiwai Smith (1999: 15) states:

There are diverse ways of disseminating knowledge and of ensuring that research reaches the people who have helped make it. Two important ways not always addressed by scientific research are to do with ‘reporting back’ to the people and ‘sharing knowledge’. Both ways assume a principle of reciprocity and feedback.

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<sup>24</sup> It is not my intent to essentialise African or Sudanese people as rigidly adhering to ‘African Standard Time’. Many Sudanese people would find this acronym highly offensive. However, as one of many social constructions that people can adopt around time, it does highlight that it is possible to have different conceptions of arguably the same thing.

There were many times the ‘official’ research was put on hold to help someone with their taxes, drive them somewhere, inform a recent arrival about what house inspections entailed or connect a tertiary student to their tutors. One man asked what it meant that he had just ‘won’ \$500,000 from *Reader’s Digest*. Another wanted to know if he was in trouble because he had been selected for jury duty. Because my previous role as a social worker included counselling refugees and organising an annual summer activities program for refugee children (see Hallahan and Irizarry, 2008), a nascent reputation and rapport within this community had already been established. Over the course of this research, I have been involved with the Sudanese Tertiary Students Association (STSA), and have held and organised meetings about supporting students in tertiary settings. I helped another Sudanese man write a book of his life story totalling more than 200 pages, and have worked with numerous Sudanese people (both formal participants and non-participants) to help them with job applications and writing resumes. One of the greatest forms of reciprocity was spending time, and eating, with numerous participants and their families (as opposed to interviewing and leaving). The conclusions of this study were delivered to the Sudanese community in the form of a forty-five minute presentation, followed by two-and-a-half hours of question time. This reciprocity of *doing* over time demonstrated to the Sudanese community the researcher’s commitment beyond a completely self-directed and singular interest in obtaining a PhD – a commitment the community valued.

### **Separations and Closures**

Recognising that much of the research was predicated upon building a relationship with the community, the process of leaving the field was one that was done over a period of time and in consultation with a number of identified community leaders (both participants and non-participants in this study). Part of this process was facilitated by sending out an invite through different sub-community leaders and my own personal contacts that I would be delivering an open presentation to anyone interested from the Sudanese community. This presentation was attended by more than fifty people (mostly men) and was an opportunity to discuss my conclusions and how these matched with the perspectives of the community. This presentation was 45 minutes long and then there was an extended two hour question and comment time. Part of this discussion was the acknowledgment that the study was an opportunity for the community members themselves to think about where they might take the study findings.

Closure was also reinforced through the fact that I have taken employment overseas and had to say goodbye to the Sudanese community in Adelaide. This was done through numerous meetings (individual, group and a few specific sub-communities) before my departure. These meetings were an opportunity to discuss the research process over the time of the study, and the directions that the Sudanese people themselves might take this specific research. There are some participants that I have maintained limited contact by sending through notifications of when articles relating to this study have been published. Other participants send me emails on rare occasions. This contact has not proved problematic, and I believe this correspondence has been acceptable and ethical because my role as a researcher (and my role within their community) was made explicit in both the interviews and ethnographic engagements.

## **PART THREE: Conducting the Interviews**

The last part of this chapter outlines the important process of conducting the interviews with the participants. Returning to the comment in Chapter 1 about Sudanese voices being relegated to lizards while powerful politicians are crocodiles who can construct discursive understandings as they wish about the Sudanese community, the interview process highlights the necessity for elevating participant voices where possible.

### **Conducting the interviews**

Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended but directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet flexible approaches. (Charmaz, 2006: 29)

A combination of semi-structured and in-depth interviews with the participants, alongside an ongoing ethnographic engagement with the community, developed further insights into how the participants respond to trauma in different contexts. This process involved an initial audio-recorded interview and at least one subsequent meeting to confirm transcript accuracy and the beginning analyses. Before the individual interview occurred, information sessions with potential participants, either individually or in groups, established their consent, understanding of the study, and the associated safety and confidentiality protocols. Appendix 2 provides the documents that participants received detailing the study design and their associated role. Participants were invited to meet at a place of their choosing or they could elect to be interviewed in a private

location. All but five interview participants asked to have the initial interview and subsequent interviews conducted in their homes. Other participants chose to meet in private rooms located in libraries.

### **Double storied testimony**

The interviews were conducted with a focus on double listening or double storied testimony, as introduced in the first chapter (White, 2006c, Denborough, 2006). Keeping both the trauma story and a person's response to it in mind was a central focus for the researcher throughout the interviewing process. When documenting the participant's experiences and expressions related to trauma, the interview also sought a person's responses to these situations. These responses could be informed through how participants maintained hope, memories they held onto, cultural or religious teachings, and influential people in their lives. Likewise, when establishing a person's response to trauma, care had to be taken not to diminish the actual individual experience of traumatic events. In other words, the fact that a person has been able to respond to a traumatic event in no way diminishes the magnitude of what happened. A few participants emphasised that some experiences are very hard to recover from. They used *in vivo* concepts such as 'having a hangover from war', which illustrates the suffering and injustices of Sudan's protracted conflicts, life in countries of first asylum and difficulties in resettlement contexts. This commentary reinforces the importance of recognising, validating and dignifying such experiences. Double storied testimony seemed highly appropriate with the participants because it allows for an exploration and flexible framework to document both the trauma story and a person's response to it. Of particular note in this approach is the focus on avoiding re-traumatising people who decide to share such powerful stories. This fits well with the 'slowly slowly' emphasis of which numerous participants spoke.

The interview process was broken into three sections, as discussed by Denborough (2006: 123):

1. Setting the scene: why the participant had chosen to share his story
2. Documenting the effects of trauma in the participant and/or community's life
3. Participant responses to trauma.

It must be noted that the interview format rarely followed this linear form.

Examples of each type of question are discussed separately. They further illustrate the interview and double listening processes. A more complete list of these questions is available in Appendix 3. It is worth noting that not all of these questions were asked in the order in which they are listed, nor were some of them asked of all participants. This flexible interview framework allowed for the development of questions that had a deeper theoretical scope and usefulness as the study progressed, and related to the emerging categories from the analysis (important components of the constant comparative method of grounded theory). Participants could choose to stop the interview process at any time and decline to answer any questions. The interview also included points for reflection on content from the researcher's perspective. This involved participants receiving a verbal summary, based on the three interview format sections described below, to elaborate upon a person's skills, values and knowledge that helped them respond to adverse situations. This summary often served as an impetus for participants to characterise their responses more richly and correct any misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

### **Section one: Setting the scene**

Every audio-recorded interview formally started with the researcher thanking the person for participating and a question about why they had decided to share their story. From this inquiry, it was possible to ascertain what was important to this person and to trace the history of this value. For example, if a participant stated that they were sharing their story due to concerns they had about how their community was portrayed in Adelaide, it was then possible to inquire further about what they value in their community, who had informed this value and why this is important to them. Examples of questions asked included:

- Why have you decided to share your story with me today?
- What does your reason of deciding to tell your story say about what is important to you, about what you care about and value in life?
- Would people be surprised that you have chosen to share your story today?

These questions helped to ease into the interview and demonstrated an interest beyond

detailing a trauma-dominated account of forced migration; something that most participants said they have done before on multiple occasions. Through richly characterising a participant's values, background, history, skills and beliefs, the interview not only documented the experiences of trauma but also highlighted people's agency to respond to it.

## **Section two: Documenting the impact of trauma**

The second part of the interview framework attempted to cautiously document the impacts of trauma in the participant's life, either from forced migration or resettlement. After the initial purposes for participation had been established, general questions regarding trauma were asked with a strong emphasis placed on participant safety. This emphasis was restated in the interview process and made very clear on multiple occasions before participant consent was obtained. Examples of questions asked included:

- Is there anything that you would feel comfortable to tell me about the trauma or difficult experiences from forced migration that you were subject to?
- What were the effects of these forms of trauma on your community?

Whilst this section had a focus on documenting the impact of trauma, the awareness to listen for responses was important. For example, if a person decided to share a particularly difficult experience or situation, it was possible to ask a follow-up question that focused on what sustained them through such experiences; what are the pathways to healing; or how have they reclaimed their life from such difficult situations. Often, participants would offer to speak about experiences relating to trauma after establishing preferred values and understandings of themselves as evidenced through their culture, parent teachings, spirituality and commitment to community. Therefore, while documenting the impact of trauma is a focus of the second section of Denborough's (2006) framework, often it would not be discussed in great detail until the third section, which focused on people's responses to trauma, had been significantly discussed and expanded.

## **Section three: Participant responses to trauma**

The last section endeavoured to document a person's responses to trauma by tracing the

history behind a participant's action, who informed it and what this response represented to the person. This emphasis provided opportunities to situate a person outside the pathologising tendencies associated with a trauma-dominated inquiry. Thus, it was not necessary to obtain detailed reports of trauma, which could have led to pushing participants into what Charmaz (1991: 275) cautions as an 'emotional abyss' when hearing stories of a highly personal or profound nature. Similar to the recommendations of both Charmaz (2006) and Denborough (2006), interview questions were slanted towards positive forms of inquiry rather than giving the deleterious experiences of suffering primary or exclusive focus:

- At the beginning of this interview, you spoke about those things that are important to you in your life. How have you been able to keep in touch with these values and hopes in your life, despite the difficulties you encountered?
- What sustained you through these most awful times?
- Have there been ways in which you have been able to reduce the effects of the traumas in your life? If so, how have you done this?
- If someone else went through similar experiences to you, what suggestions would you offer them that would convey some of the steps you have taken to reclaim your life from the effects of this trauma?

These questions were informed by the person's response to trauma, what had sustained them and the history behind their values, hopes and dreams. Following the advice of a community leader, the last question invited participants to comment upon their vision for the future. Overall, the thrust behind these questions was to illuminate how the Sudanese men respond to difficult situations rather than establishing them as passive victims who have experienced negative effects from forced migration. This emphasis, however, was not imposed on the participants because there were times when they chose to stay primarily in the difficulties associated with forced migration and resettlement. As such, the intent of the interview process was to acknowledge the serious nature of their journey, and hopefully validate and dignify these experiences while also trying to elevate understandings of what has been helpful to recover from them.

Again, the interview process did not follow a rigid set of questions. The interview questions were modified over time, reflecting an increased understanding of the

Southern Sudanese men living in Adelaide. These questions thus provided a grounded study from which to theorise how participants respond to, and conceptualise trauma.

Whilst keeping a focus on double-listening, it is important to emphasise that the intent of this approach is not to privilege a person's responses to trauma over the experiences of trauma. This distinction is important, as there is a danger of invalidating a person's particular experience if there is an exclusive focus on either responses or difficult events. There were times in the interviews where providing space to discuss particularly difficult situations helped to dignify very real and profound experiences of suffering. This narrative approach thereby gives attention and honours both people's *experiences of* and *responses to* trauma, as all stories are potential sites for meaning-making.

The inclusion of both the trauma story and responses is significant. When I first started conducting interviews, I found that there were times that I was very possibly privileging the 'responses' over the experiences of trauma. This emphasis spoke more about my concerns and level of comfort than those of the participants. For example, one participant spoke about the extremely difficult situation of having to walk across a desert without any resources and the threat of bombs being dropped by high-flying planes called antonovs. I asked this man if there was anything that helped him to get through this situation, but it was premature. He looked at me and said, '*No, it was a very difficult situation*'. This comment reinforced the value of acknowledging where the person speaking about their experiences currently is. By going too quickly to responses, there is a danger of minimising or suggesting that the adversity experienced is or was easily resolved. An exclusive focus on responses can further silence the adversities associated with forced migration and resettlement. While recognising the need to validate and dignify these situations, I did not, however, press my questions (or curiosities) to obtain detailed accounts of the participant's difficult experiences. Some men spoke of traumas associated with forced migration and resettlement without being prompted and this highlighted the care, responsibility, and privilege that accompany hearing such stories of profound significance.

## **Transcription**

To obtain a participant-endorsed transcript, the interview process consisted of two parts: (1) receiving and documenting the person's interview; and (2) after transcription, meeting with the individual again to ensure that all information was recorded

accurately, allowing for any changes the participant thought necessary. This process developed in response to the commitment to elevate participant voices in all stages of data generation.

All participants agreed to have their initial interview audio-recorded. This involved two stages of transcription. Interviews were first transcribed and then the transcript was cross-checked a second time to ensure it accurately captured what was said. This transcription process was valuable for several reasons. First, hearing the conversation again almost as a third party observer allowed for critical reflection on the interviewee's comments and the question constructions so that these were not leading for participants, for example looking for a spiritual response as a way of mediating trauma. Second, because some of the participants' English was not perfect and others had very strong accents, listening to the conversations multiple times helped me understand later conversations without having to ask participants to repeat themselves. An example is the word 'parent', which many of these men pronounced as 'faren' and became readily identifiable in my subsequent meetings with others. Finally, and most importantly, the transcription process provided a familiarity with the data not possible otherwise. It reinforced an ability to recall their voices and expressions even when not looking directly at the data.

Initially, participants received their transcripts as close to verbatim as possible. However, most participants did not like to see their written transcript with a multitude of 'ums' and 'uhs' throughout. It would have been very difficult to ascertain the meaning of such utterances because participants' first language was not English. Doing so could have represented trying to translate an idea into English, a reluctance to discuss certain topics, stalling to answer a question or demarcating some sort of significance. The transcript did have brackets at particular points in the interview where there were deemed to be significant [pauses] and places of [emphases] upon certain expressions and comments. The significance of these comments could then be re-examined in subsequent meetings. Whilst many of these utterances were deleted upon the participants' request, the transcripts were not modified into perfect English prose. Most often, confusions with verb tenses, pronoun usage and overall sentence structure were not changed to a great extent.

## **Refining understandings of the initial interview**

Before a participant's interview was analysed fully, each one was transcribed and returned to them to ensure greater accuracy of their comments. Participants could make any additions, corrections and omissions they saw fit. These transcripts were between 15-25 pages of single-spaced text, which would be a fairly tiring editorial exercise even for a native English speaker. Thus, participants also received a concise two to three-page executive summary of the interview from the researcher's perspective. The participant could modify this summary as well. At times, this summary provided a starting point to delve into deeper, more sophisticated understandings that would not have been possible otherwise.

After a period of three weeks, the participants were contacted again to inquire if they would be willing to meet a second time and confirm the accuracy of the transcript/executive summary. This meeting provided the opportunity to ask follow-up questions arising from the first interview. On a few occasions, this subsequent interview was conducted over the phone but usually involved going back to the person's home. It is worth mentioning that very few participants asked to make many changes to the document and many stated that they appreciated having an executive summary as it was not clear how much time they had to read a 15-25 page single-spaced transcript. However, some men did make some changes. These were of a minor nature, such as correcting their English grammar or word choice. In terms of changing content, only two people asked to delete something from their original interview and the associated content was not deemed highly relevant to the research question. Once the participants had endorsed an official transcript, the updated document was sent back to them for their reference. Often participants asked for multiple copies and a DVD of the audio-recording.

Numerous times participants wanted to elaborate or add more information to their transcript. These additional interviews ranged from one to six meetings. The process towards having a formally endorsed and corrected transcript ready for the next level of analysis, known as 'focused coding' (discussed in the next chapter), took one to six months. Going back to participants in this way (sometimes on multiple occasions) allowed for the data to speak to more than just one 'snapshot' of a participant's commentary. In summary, this study involved an ongoing engagement with the

Sudanese community and participants over more than three years.

## Summary

This chapter has introduced the key underpinnings of the research design. Part one has presented the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and method used to inform the study's theoretical orientation. Employing a constructionist epistemological perspective and a symbolic interactionist approach provides an appropriate lens to interpret the Sudanese participants' lives in Australian contexts and locates the researcher in the research process. In addition, the constructivist grounded theory methodology informs the data interpretation gathered from individual interviews and ethnographic fieldwork.

By focusing on the socially constructed understandings and perspectives from symbolic interactionism, it has been possible to place further emphasis on participants' personal and community meaning structures, and elevate their voices where possible. Constructivist grounded theory was chosen for these reasons as well as the fact that it acknowledges the researcher's role in data collection and interpretation. Overall, the research design is situated within a narrative practice perspective, which, through double listening, provides a pathway for distinguishing responses to trauma from its effects.

The second and third parts of this chapter have outlined the intensive process of accessing the Sudanese community, conducting the interviews and engaging with considerations that one elder emphasised as accessing 'authentic' knowledge. In particular, this chapter has maintained the importance of both *being* and *doing* to realise to a greater extent Miller's (2004) front stage responses. It has presented an argument for incorporating reciprocity in one's research, not only as an ethical imperative but also to develop a more sophisticated research question. These sections also contain researcher reflections in order to maintain the researcher's conscious presence in process.

The next chapter elucidates how the rich data gained in conjunction with the Sudanese community was subsequently analysed and interpreted under the purviews of constructivist grounded theory.

# Chapter 3

## Data Analysis and Locating the Research

Like a camera with many lenses, first you view a broad sweep of the landscape. Subsequently, you change your lens several times to bring scenes closer and closer into view. (Charmaz, 2006: 16)

### Introduction

This chapter outlines how a grounded theory approach provides a framework to analyse and interpret the participant narratives and ethnographic fieldwork. It is divided into two parts.<sup>25</sup> Part one outlines the process of concurrent data analysis and collection of the participant interviews and transcripts, as per the constant comparative process of grounded theory. It elaborates how the researcher remained close to the data and abstracted it theoretically to develop a grounded theory. In line with Glaser's (2001, 2002) famous dictum, "All is data," this study incorporates information from individual interviews, community events and numerous informal interactions. However, not all data are treated as being equal. Each set of data needed to relate to the emerging ideas and analysis.

Part two introduces some considerations and limitations of the research design, and the methods employed to reduce its impact. Considerations of researcher reflexivity, bias, representation and participant demographics are further explored within this discussion.

### PART ONE: Analysing the Data

The analytic processes following the first interview with a participant are summarised briefly below and subsequently expanded. Processes included:

1. Initial hand coding of transcript and writing memos about early analytic thoughts needing further clarification.

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<sup>25</sup> Much of this chapter will be presented in the past tense to describe the analytic processes.

2. Organising a second meeting with participants to confirm transcript accuracy and as an opportunity to ask follow-up questions arising from the first interview.
3. Participant gives official endorsement of the interview transcript for subsequent analysis.
4. Finalised copy of transcript is imported into qualitative software package NVivo to conduct focused coding.
5. Writing increasingly theoretical memos and annotations as an impetus for theoretical sampling.
6. Developing categories from the most significant focused codes.
7. Elevating these categories to concepts that build the framework to generate a grounded theory.
8. Constant comparative method and memo writing used in every step of this process.

Although the following analytic processes are presented in a relatively linear form, it must be emphasised that this research was more of a spiralling journey of concurrent data collection, analysis, refinement of the research questions and building of relationships with the community. The constant comparative method compels the researcher to continually revisit each step as the data collection and analytic processes progress.

### **Initial coding process – line by line and capturing actions**

After the first interview was completed and transcribed, each line of text was hand coded line by line, which constitutes the first step of the analytic process known as initial coding (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978, 1992). As Charmaz and Glaser discuss, the initial coding process involved shifting researcher theoretical interpretations aside as much as possible while still recognising the presence of prior ideas. Charmaz (2006: 49) notes several key principles to initial coding: remain open; stay close to the data; keep codes simple and precise; construct short codes; preserve actions; compare data with data; and move quickly through the data. To remain close to the data, I coded each line of transcript as an action using gerunds (Glaser 1978). Coding actions and processes helped to capture what was happening in the interview rather than prematurely imposing an overarching theoretical structure or extant ideas on participant statements.

After completing the line by line coding (usually between 800-1500 codes), the initial codes were compared and examined throughout the interview transcript and between interviews as per the constant comparative process (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This initial coding process was then conducted incident to incident, which worked with larger segments of text. Overall, the initial coding process helped start conceptualisation of ideas from the ensuing rich data. Memos were written from these initial codes, discussing salient, powerful and frequently noted themes that highlighted areas for further inquiry.

### **Writing memos**

Writing memos prompts the analysis of the data and the development of codes throughout the research process, even in its earliest stages. Charmaz (2006: 72) defines memo writing as:

The pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers... [It] constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyse your data and codes early in the research process.

After finishing the initial coding of each interview, memos stimulated the researcher's awareness of different leads, groupings of codes and further avenues of inquiry to pursue in future data collection. This process assisted with identifying any gaps in the emerging analyses. Writing memos became a critical step throughout every interpretive stage. As Charmaz (2006) maintains, the importance of writing memos throughout the research process is an integral step towards critically and analytically examining one's codes to render them from description towards theory conceptualisation. These memos helped track the research process and created an auditable trail of the emerging ideas. As such, they ensured that the analytic renderings were grounded. Writing memos also provided the stimulus to ask important follow-up questions in subsequent meetings to enable increasing abstraction of the data.

### **Computer assisted software and NVivo**

After participants endorsed an official version of the interview transcript, as discussed in Chapter 2, the document was imported into the qualitative software analysis program NVivo 8, developed by QSR International. This software helped facilitate focused coding (discussed in next section) and retrieval of vast amounts of text. It also enabled

the researcher to conduct queries not possible through hand coding.

Debates abound about the use of computer assisted software in qualitative research and within grounded theory (Dohan and Sánchez-Jankowski, 1998; Holton, 2007; Weitzman, 2000). Most of the reticence about using such technology arises from concerns that it can lead the researcher to premature conclusions, distance the researcher from the data or in some way drive the analysis. More recently, others have noted how the use of qualitative software packages can create a more disciplined approach towards the auditing of what is arguably a fairly creative process within grounded theory: developing codes, categories and concepts (Dey, 2007: 186). Remaining mindful of these aforementioned concerns, prior hand coding provided a close familiarity with the data and addressed a number of the cautions outlined above before the transcripts were exported into NVivo for further analysis.

The NVivo 8 software is a powerful research tool. Even though it does not do the analytical work, it can quickly retrieve codes from one interview and compare them with others. As new ideas or processes were illuminated in the twelfth interview, links could be built to previous interviews to examine if there was a fit or if a more accurate code could be used to capture what was emerging from the data. The text from the participant interviews alone (not including memos and field notes from community events and subsequent interviews) totals more than four hundred single spaced pages. The ability to sift through and sort such large quantities of data would have been impossible (or at least undesirable) using hand coding. Recognising emergent ideas and concepts allowed for comparison across multiple participant interviews in efficient and rigorous ways.

Finally and importantly, this qualitative software can make the research process more accountable and easier to track in a chronological fashion. As new focused codes and categories emerged from later analyses, it was possible to trace the temporal creation of each respective code and check to ensure that this analytic process was applied to all relevant data. This temporal awareness made it easier to return to the earlier interviews, memos and field notes. Codes were examined for the points at which they were developed, renamed, fractured or collapsed. Saving weekly copies of the NVivo file provided 'frozen' examples of the analytic process throughout. Thus, it was possible to view what previous data needed to be re-examined within a modified coding paradigm.

This inductive and emergent analysis, assisted by the software, allowed for comparison across interviews and the development of analytic memo writing. Overall, these processes created an auditable trail that allowed for increased accountability within the inductive and interpretive processes of grounded theory.

### **Focused coding**

The constant comparing of data with data, data with codes and codes with memos helped to develop the second major phase of coding known as ‘focused coding’. This process is more directed and conceptual than initial coding and often explains larger segments of data. Charmaz (2006: 57) defines focused coding as:

Using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes to sift through large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely.

The most significant and frequent earlier initial codes were collated by sifting through the interviews to determine the focused codes. Focused codes were developed by taking the most useful and salient initial codes, comparing them with initial memos written about these codes and testing them against extensive amounts of data. As Charmaz (2006: 68) states, “Preconceived theoretical concepts may provide starting points for looking *at* your data but they do not offer automatic codes *for* analysing these data” (original emphasis). Whilst already having several preconceived ‘hunches’ of what a focused code might be before looking at the data (i.e. the importance of maintaining one’s spirituality), all focused codes had to ‘earn’ their way into the developing analysis as informed directly from the data. This process of developing grounded focused codes represented a further step towards theoretical integration. As per the constant comparative process, the statements made by the eleventh participant could make what was previously implicit in other groupings of data more explicit, thereby providing a stimulus to study earlier data afresh (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, new focused codes were developed as additional interviews were conducted. These newly developed codes were then applied to previously conducted interview transcripts to determine if the new codes had relevance to previous data. Again, the memo writing process and using NVivo helped to make the ensuing focused coding structure more accountable and auditable.

Whilst I endeavoured to create codes that captured the essence of the data, I

acknowledge that I was ultimately the analytical filter which decided what was retrieved and privileged from what was demoted as being less relevant. As Charmaz (2006: 47) notes, “We construct our codes because we are actively naming the data.” For the first ten interviews, my own questions and comments were coded to reflect critically on how these questions might be influencing the participant, and how they might introduce areas of potential bias. Analytic memos were written to further explicate the meaning of each focused code and to ensure it captured what was happening in the data. Placing these focused memos together created a document of more than one hundred single-spaced pages. This memo writing process provided reflective spaces to think analytically about what the data were inferring and meant that, over time, the name of a focused code could change from ‘having religion’ to expanded codes that speak more to what the data were inferring, for example ‘trusting God’, ‘using the Bible’ and ‘being a Christian’. It became apparent these specific codes more accurately captured what participants were saying about how they respond to trauma. Thus, a focused code could be expanded into several codes to make it less generalising. Conversely, similar codes could be collapsed under one broader focused code that had more analytic potential. As these modifications continued, it was necessary to return to previous interviews to ensure the new focused codes related to the ‘older’ data as well. In this way, following these processes set the agenda for theoretical sampling.

### **Theoretical sampling**

One of the inherent complexities arising from inductive analyses is how to make the leap from the particular to the more general. Part of this problem is resolved within grounded theory through theoretical sampling, which Glaser and Strauss (1967: 45) define as the “process of data collection whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his [sic] data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [sic] theory as it emerges.” Theoretical sampling is differentiated from normal sampling in that it is not about investigating cases but is an instrument used towards generating theory. Charmaz (2006: 189) further outlines this term, stating:

[The] researcher aims to develop the properties of his or her developing categories or theory, not to sample randomly selected populations or to sample representative distributions of particular people... the researcher seeks people, events, or information to illuminate and define the boundaries and relevance of the categories.

Categories are elaborated upon in the next section. Some examples of theoretical sampling used in this study include deeper explorations into participant understandings of trauma, spirituality, masculinity, hybridity and healing. The study prompted increasing interest in how the Sudanese participants thought that professionals outside their community could work better alongside them. These discussions, as opportunities for theoretical sampling, were conducted in the following ways:

- Meeting with participants for subsequent interviews;
- Participation at community events;
- Talking with key gatekeepers, elders and community leaders;
- Reading the extant literature (both academic and grey).

Theoretical sampling from these activities helped clarify abstracted thinking to ensure a close alignment of interpretation and data. Subsequent interviews and community meetings, as forms of theoretical sampling, were not audio-recorded but generated associated memos in which I discussed the refined questions and understandings arising from these interactions. These notes provided a further basis for the later analytical steps of developing categories and concepts. This process not only fostered an in-depth understanding of very specific ideas, it also allowed for theory generation.

My increasing interest in how the studied community responds to trauma in different contexts led me to create additional study questions about how participants define and conceptualise trauma, link a sense of hope with their spirituality and negotiate masculinity in resettlement contexts. Initiating conversations around these themes provided rich opportunities within the numerous informal and formal social settings to further refine understandings of the interviews.

### **Ongoing memo writing and creating categories**

The next stage of the analytic process involved taking the most salient and significant focused codes and abstracting them into categories to look further across multiple and larger groupings of data. Charmaz (2006: 186) states that categorisation is the “analytic step...of selecting certain codes as having overriding significance or abstracting common themes and patterns in several codes into an analytic concept.” This process

helped to re-elevate the conceptual level of the data from description towards theory. Dey (2007: 183) cautions that the process of coding is about creating metaphors that can be inappropriate if the later analytic steps are not linked to the grounded data. This is where categories come to the fore. Using the lexicon of participants' lived experience through *in vivo* comments, such as 'walking the line' to describe resettlement, 'keeping hope in front of you' in the refugee camps, 'having a hangover' from experiences of conflict and 'having trust in Jesus' as a way of mediating traumatic events, provided powerful insights into their lives. Further inquiry into what these terms meant produced refined understandings of participant terminologies and meanings embedded within interviews, subsequent meetings and community events.

A significant component of developing such categories required further memo writing. The process of creating memos documented the emerging theoretical analysis through all stages of the research. It was used to further define and abstract the data. The associated memo writing from theoretical sampling, follow-up interviews and ethnographic field data using the constant comparative method ensured that any inappropriate theoretical interpretations were not imposed on the data. Memos addressed the following:

1. Initial coding from the first participant interview.
2. Ethnographic field data at community events.
3. Follow-up meetings with participants.
4. All focused codes.
5. All categories.

Memos related to the first four listed items were used to help construct the development of the important analytic step of creating categories. All interviews and field note data were also analysed using the constant comparative method to write increasingly theoretical memos. The associated theoretical memos helped generate the categories, such as 'trusting Jesus' and 'keeping hope in front of you', enabling me to theorise what this information meant for the participants. The memo writing process related to 'all categories' helped me identify the emergent concepts within this study.

## **Elevating categories to concepts and theory generation**

The most significant categories were grouped together to develop broader concepts that led to theory generation. Major categories such as masculinity, maintaining one's culture, having a sense of collectivity and spirituality were considered simultaneously to create a more coherent understanding of the men's responses to trauma. Concepts subsume categories and provide the interpretive frames to offer abstracted understandings of relationships that remain grounded to the data (Charmaz, 2006: 139-40). The major categories and concepts are thus foundational to forwarding a comprehensive theory across interviews and other field data. 'Walking the line' and 'maintaining a workable synthesis of one's past and present' have been the major data-derived concepts that subsume multiple categories and focused codes. These concepts have proven powerful metaphors that account for the contested notions surrounding resettlement, trauma, culture and masculinity. They also provide a critical perspective for professionals and organisations working to support people from refugee backgrounds. The concepts speak to the bulk of the data and ground the multiple stages of analysis, enabling further theorisation of what this research represents, as discussed in the following chapters.

Having begun to present a case for rigour in this first part of the chapter, I now further this discussion in Part two in which I describe potential limitations and important considerations of the research.

## **PART TWO: Considerations of the Research and Limitations**

The constructivist approach applied to this research, rather than trying to develop a general abstract theory about refugees or even the Southern Sudanese community resettling in Adelaide, provides a means to embrace the situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991) of a particular group of Sudanese men. Such an orientation underlines the importance of emphasising that the analytic processes and the conclusions that follow represent an *interpretation* of the Sudanese male participants living in Adelaide rather than an *objective portrayal* of who they are. Therefore, while this part of the chapter focuses on the study population, it also necessarily addresses several limitations and establishes the theoretical orientation within which this research is interpreted.

## **Participant demographics and representation**

Charmaz (2006: 20) introduces a critical question of working with relatively small sample sizes: “From whose point of view is the given process fundamental and from whose is it marginalised?” The group of men that comprise this study is not meant to be representative of the Southern Sudanese as a whole nor the entire resettling community in Adelaide. Southern Sudan is a vast region composed of more than one hundred distinct tribal identities (Deng, 1972). Breaking Southern Sudan into the three states of Bahr El Gazal, Upper Nile and Equatoria, 10, 8 and 6 participants respectively took part in this study. As stated earlier in the thesis, twenty-four Southern Sudanese men who came to Australia as refugees were interviewed. A total of seventy interviews were conducted, which involved on average between one and three interviews subsequent to the initial meeting to check transcript accuracy and understandings of the data. These additional meetings also provided an opportunity for theoretical sampling. The highest number of meetings with a participant was six. It is worth noting that one person decided to withdraw his interview after participation, and that another who signed a consent form did not complete a formal interview.

The selection of participants and sampling strategies used in qualitative analysis are important considerations for theoretical rigour. However, for the purposes of this qualitative study, there was no requirement that the sample population be statistically representative and thereby generalisable to all refugees or people from Southern Sudan. It would be misinformed to make generalisations about this diverse group of people as a whole based on such a small-scale study. The stories of the twenty-four participants cannot be seen as representative of the Southern Sudanese community. However, the participants’ experiences provide a rich and detailed account of what this group of people have endured and how they have created meaning. What does this grouping mean for representation? According to the proponents of grounded theory, sampling should be designed towards theory construction, not for establishing a representative population (Charmaz, 2006).

The group of participants has a general bias predominantly towards male elders and community leaders. It was these men who expressed an interest in speaking on behalf of their communities and about their personal experiences associated with forced migration and resettlement. They recognised the need to address the expressions of private pains

and community concerns related to forced migration and resettlement on broader levels. Their commitment to their community has been striking; they respond to crises in the middle of the night and travel long distances to support others. These participants had some of the highest educational backgrounds relative to their community, with many of them having completed a tertiary degree, or being in the process of pursuing or planning to enrol in one. Most of these men had taken some form of leadership, held an elder status and/or were respected members within the Sudanese community in Adelaide. They spoke English at a conversational level high enough to negate the need for an interpreter to conduct the interviews in English. This specific grouping of participants represents those who are arguably doing best in resettlement contexts, as evidenced by language mastery, educational qualifications and prominent positions within the community. Most participants were aged between 30 and 40 years, with three men in their twenties and two others over 50 years of age. However, a number of these men could only estimate their age as their date of birth was assigned by the UNHCR. One man from the community states:

*Well the UNHCR says that I am 31, but I think I am probably more like 36.*

Thus, it was difficult to state the participants' ages. Many Southern Sudanese celebrate a universally applied UNHCR birthday of January 1. All but six participants are married. The married participants have an average of three to four children. Two of the single men stated that they also have children. Three participants have been in Australia for one year or less. The majority have lived in Australia for between two and six years. Seven others stated they have lived in Australia for seven years or more. More than 90 percent of participants identify as Christian. It is worth noting that the terms *elders* and *community leaders* do not necessarily relate to older men. Several of those who identify as being part of the 'Lost Boys' are in their early thirties or late twenties and are seen as community leaders and elders (they are sometimes the oldest people within their particular sub-communities).

It is acknowledged here that by conducting formal interviews only with men the research neglects the important voices of women.<sup>26</sup> Whilst conversations with women at

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<sup>26</sup> Jane Kani Edward's (2007; 2001) book and book chapter on South Sudanese women, and Giles et al. (1996), Buijjs (1993) and Pittaway (1991) provide important contributions in this area

community events and within people's homes were possible, it became clear that there were a number of barriers to accessing this group because of very clear gender and cultural considerations. Further, it is well documented that many women living in refugee camps such as Kakuma in Kenya have experienced sexual violence (Beswick, 2001), and that discussions about responses to trauma could inappropriately present sensitive and gendered issues. It is hoped that this research might serve as a flexible framework for other researchers to develop further insights with groups of people whom this study does not accommodate.

It is also necessary to acknowledge that the men interviewed do not include non-English speaking Sudanese community members. Despite initial intentions to use interpreters, it proved extremely difficult to locate interpreters who were acceptable to the different sub-communities of the Sudanese community in Adelaide. Whilst this study has not incorporated these voices, it is important to acknowledge that a better understanding of this population (which is more difficult to access) is very much needed. The fact that the participants come from a relatively privileged position within their communities (as evidenced by status and educational levels) highlights again the importance of locating the particular population of Sudanese men that this study accommodates.

Despite the identified limitations to generalisability of the study findings to larger contextual groupings, the research offers some helpful perspectives that could be used to critically document the intersections between refugee lives, trauma and recovery. The next section illustrates the process of saturation, which allowed for the conclusion of data collection.

## **Saturation**

One of the most critical considerations of a grounded theory study is to ascertain when it is possible to leave the field. Most proponents of grounded theory suggest that the research question must meet the test of saturation. Charmaz (2006: 189) defines saturation as the point where gathering further information does not reveal any new or further theoretical insight into the emerging grounded theory. Thus, it is of critical importance to delineate what the research questions are and who the study participants represent.

Interviewing new participants and attending community events occurred over time. As

time went on, these conversations and interactions tracked down fewer new paths with respect to how Sudanese men respond to difficult circumstances. Whilst each new participant's story was unique and offered powerful insights into existing codes and categories, the interviews did not move the analysis in new directions. As the twentieth participant spoke about the importance of social connectedness, spirituality and the influence of his parent's teachings in responding to trauma, these conversations (while fascinating and adding to an empirical base) did not take the analytic process down new paths of inquiry. At this point, and after multiple forms of theoretical sampling and interviewing new participants, the questions were becoming saturated, which influenced my decision to stop conducting participant interviews. This decision was reinforced through the weekly engagements with the Sudanese community, which provided triangulation with the interview data and analysis.

### **Establishing rigour – fit and relevance**

Bryant and Charmaz (2007: 14) caution that research using grounded theory has to “avoid the Scylla of ‘mere description’ on the one side, and the Charybdis of ‘immaculate conceptualization’ on the other.” This quote emphasises the importance of theorisation (as distinct from establishing rich descriptions) while remaining grounded to the data during the analytic processes. Charmaz (2006: 54) states that a grounded theory study must have fit and relevance, which she defines as follows:

- Fit – fits the empirical world when you have constructed your codes and developed them into categories that crystallise participant's experience
- Relevance – offers an incisive analytic framework that interprets what is happening and makes relationships between implicit processes and structures visible.

A primary way in which the analysis in this research had a degree of *fit* with participants' experiences and meanings was through triangulation. By attending multiple community events, it was possible to cross check what participants expressed in individual encounters and to link these statements to observed actions within the community. The constant comparative method and an ongoing ethnographic engagement enabled fresh data analysis. The NVivo software helped make this process more auditable and traceable as it served as a chronological repository of analytic processes.

The first ten interviews also included coding my questions and statements, which ensured greater *relevance*. Coding these actions made it possible to reflect critically upon the implicit processes in collecting participant narratives, which helped me develop a conscious awareness of how the interview process was directed and how difficult situations discussing trauma were negotiated. This coding provided a means to reflect on areas where the data might be unduly influenced. After conducting this process in the first ten interviews, only a few core focused codes were used to ensure participant safety and avoid leading questions. A solid focused coding structure had emerged by the fifteenth interview (another indicator of saturation), which was subsequently used to recode the entire first set of ten interviews to ensure coding consistency across interviews and over time.

Addressing the *fit* and *relevance* of grounded theory research, I now discuss eight considerations identified by Chiovitti and Piran (2003: 427) to enhance rigour:

- (1) Let participants guide the inquiry process;
- (2) Check the theoretical construction generated against participants' meanings of the phenomenon;
- (3) Use participants' actual words in the theory;
- (4) Articulate the researcher's personal views and insights about the phenomenon explored;
- (5) Specify the criteria built into the researcher's thinking;
- (6) Specify how and why participants in the study were selected;
- (7) Delineate the scope of the research; and
- (8) Describe how the literature relates to each category which emerged in the theory.

These considerations were addressed in my research as follows:

1. Participants often led the inquiry process, even though there was a semi-structured interview schedule. It was not necessary to rush the interview process because it was possible to meet with these men on multiple occasions. Sometimes it could take up to six months to obtain a participant-endorsed transcript.

2. Participants were able to check the meanings by looking at the transcripts directly. Opportunities for theoretical sampling from multiple sources provided forums to confirm that the theoretical constructions spoke to participant meanings, actions and narratives.
3. The participants' *in vivo* comments, such as 'walking the line', 'having a hangover from war' and 'keeping hope in front of you' amongst many others, have been used to develop the categories and concepts, and ultimately to theorise what the data represents.
4. My reflexive position is discussed and further established later in this chapter with respect to professional background and training, relationship with the Sudanese community and assumptions/dispositions around narrative practices.
5. The analytic steps of constructivist grounded theory, writing memos and theoretical sampling have made it possible to stay close to the data, check the emergent interpretations with participants and community members, and ultimately elevate the theoretical abstraction of the data.
6. Participant demographics have been outlined explicitly. What this particular grouping means for representation has been discussed. Participants were selected through purposive sampling that was predicated upon having a relationship and rapport with the Sudanese community.
7. Similar to number six, the scope of this research has been outlined and is not intended to be generalised to the entire Sudanese community. It is maintained, however, that the findings of this research provide helpful considerations when working with other Sudanese or refugee populations.
8. The later chapters will show how extant theory and academic literature relate to the emergent analysis. In particular, drawing upon scholarly works that have 'earned' their way into this study adds significant depth to the analysis. Included are works discussing hybridity, recognition theory, discourses on trauma, Western approaches to healing, masculinity and post-colonial theory.

### **Questions of 'authentic' knowledge**

Another challenge with refugee-related scholarship is to ascertain whether the information participants give a researcher has a degree of authenticity.<sup>27</sup> Jacobsen and Landau (2003: 10) write about ethical and methodological considerations of researching refugees, stating:

Refugees and IDPs might (consciously or unconsciously) be reluctant or afraid to tell researchers their true views, or they might wish to promote a particular

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<sup>27</sup> Much of this section is informed from Marlowe (2009a).

vision of their suffering. Their responses could be part of their survival strategy. Refugees are unlikely to tell researchers anything that might jeopardize their (the refugees') position in the community. After all, why should a refugee tell a researcher anything that is not in their interests?

Their perspective highlights the difficulty of gaining access to populations of people who have a distrust of the 'Other', who may represent a government or authority figure. Kohli (2006: 712) acknowledges this distrust stating, "What researchers find when entering the lives of refugees is a type of functional distrust that maintains a level of integrity that allows the refugee the best chance of survival in a potentially hostile encounter." A refugee may be very cautious about what they say to another person – not because they are inherently dishonest or devious, but because of the very real consequences of a statement being misinterpreted or taken out of context (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003; McKelvey, 1994). In addition, refugee accounts of 'hard' facts may not represent an objective reality and may be presented in conflicting ways (Kirmayer, 2007a). For example, several men in this study spoke about their perilous journey fleeing civil war and walking hundreds, if not thousands of kilometres across Sudan seeking safe haven. Whilst hearing these stories, I noted occasional time and date discrepancies between one story and another, leading me to ask: Does one account negate the other? Arguably not, as both stories support an understanding of a long and difficult journey where time as measured by days or becomes obscured through experiences of hardship and survival. As Eastmond (2007: 260) maintains:

Stories are never transparent renditions of reality, but partial and selective versions of it, arising out of social interaction. 'Narrative truth' refers to the inescapably imperfect and fluid work of memory, organization and meaning. Narration as purposive action also relies on a certain measure of control and a situation in which... the criteria of credibility and plausibility are known to both narrator and audience, if not shared by them.

This quote illustrates the complexities of understanding a person's narrative in resettlement contexts. What then should we take from a person's story if it is clouded by notions of power, opportunity, meaning and context? Kelley (1996) provides an important distinction in documenting such lives, noting that while a person's story may not portray the past accurately, it says something about his or her present situation. Such a perspective allows the researcher to explore a person's narrative beyond a false

dichotomy between truth and fiction as it thrusts the imperfections of memory into a context situated within a person's present and future. Embracing this concept allows the listener to grapple with and explore the hopes, dreams and aspirations of those who have made a journey between two worlds.

This study is based upon the respondents' self-reports and discusses only what they were clearly comfortable disclosing. The interview process, confidentiality and safety protocols were made as clear as possible to reduce any anxieties about disclosing particularly difficult memories and experiences. Paramount to the interview process was that participants were repeatedly told to discuss only what they felt comfortable disclosing and that a safe space was developed in which they could share their powerful stories.

### **Inter-rater reliability and other considerations**

Inter-rater reliability can help ensure that a coding structure more accurately interprets text from the raw data. The decision to avoid this technique was based firstly on the knowledge that to understand the data on a number of levels required a relationship with the community that would be difficult for an outside interpreter to attain. My relationship with the Sudanese community in Adelaide meant the transcripts were interpreted and embedded within a community engagement that provided multiple sources for interpretation, interaction and analysis. Second, the ethnographic field experiences gave a depth and life to the text that went beyond what was available in the transcript. In fact, the researcher's community involvement over a period of several years was a lynchpin in this study, going beyond the snapshot in time that is obtained exclusively through an interview. Adopting the principle that if a concept is present in one place, it is likely to be present elsewhere enabled the researcher to explore rich sources for theoretical sampling and undertake an analysis beyond the coding structure situated within NVivo.

In addition, re-coding the first ten interviews and comparing this analysis with my previous coding efforts provided intra-rater reliability. Use of NVivo provided opportunities to look across focused codes and categories, and participant interviews ensured that the emergent analysis remained grounded to the data. Most importantly, by going back to participants and the community on numerous occasions, it was possible to cross check the emerging analyses across the life of this study. Two supervisors also

read the de-identified interview transcripts, then commented on the appropriateness of the coding structure and associated analysis.

It is acknowledged that reproducing this research would be a hard task that could raise questions of validity because the data obtained were highly dependent upon my interpersonal relationship with the community and participants. It would not be possible for another researcher to replicate the research process; I am irretrievably intertwined with its production. In spite of this personal connection, the processes I have undertaken in my research design, implementation and analysis are explicit, as described in this and the preceding chapter.

### **Locating oneself in the research – a personal reflection**

Central to a grounded theory analysis is that preconceived ideas cannot be forced upon the data. Often, extant theories and interpretive frameworks can only ‘earn’ their way into the analysis after much of the inductive analytical work is done. This perspective was important for recognising the narrative principles that informed the study; people are not passive recipients to trauma and their lives are multi-storied (White and Epston, 1990). Therefore, it was critical to remain consciously aware of the intentionality behind my questions while at all times endeavouring to allow the participants’ words, expressions and responses to be their own. This required me to try (as much as possible) to understand how my own habitus or preconceived notions, values and associated actions influenced the research process, and to maintain an ongoing critical self-reflection.

Particular to this discussion is Benhabib’s (2002) focus on distinguishing the standpoint of the social observer from that of the social agent. This focus was heightened by me recognising my place (in many ways) as part of dominant culture compared to that of the Sudanese participants who represent an outside minority and marginalised community. Thus, I have had to take a reflexive and critical stance towards trying to understand what it might mean to be dominant; to not have obstacles in my way that might be part of other people’s daily existence (see Dominelli, 2002). In other respects, the fact that I am a married male similar in age to most participants might have made it easier for them to relate to me or limited what was appropriate to discuss. As Benhabib (2002: 5) notes, “The social observer... is the one who imposes, together with local elites, unity and coherence on cultures as observed entities.” Again, as stated in the

introduction, this study does not look to present an objective view of Southern Sudanese in diaspora. Rather, it seeks to present an interpretation that situates, and attempts to locate, the research within the inter-subjective and potentially contested domains between social observer and agent. One participant makes a powerful statement about my role in the interpretation and collection of Sudanese narratives. He acknowledges that the intentions and outcomes behind research are not always evident:

*What you have written today, or what you get from me, that is my history, my firsthand experience and you will go and share it with the people. And if you go and misinterpret it in the wrong way – we have NYIN PEEL ANYIC YUOM [which means that] God knows what you are doing and what you have done. What I have told to you is what I have really experienced. And I am happy that people will share our suffering and our long journey between two worlds. And what are the values of our people, the Dinka. Interpret it and know that I have no obligation. Interpret it and it will be God who knows what you are doing and what you have done. Because, I don't know what are the other interests – that is why you come to interview me but I don't know if it is the same interest or if it is for research to create a better understanding between Sudanese people and others then I am happy. (Participant 12)*

This participant's comment echoes the reminder that research always has something at stake. There are inherent power relations between the researched and researcher. It is my hope and belief that I have accurately interpreted the comments of Sudanese participants. I have done this through the process of creating checks and balances in my data analysis as summarised below:

- Gradually elevating the conceptual abstraction of the data;
- Member checking transcripts and emergent analysis with participants;
- Theoretical sampling in a number of settings;
- Delineating participant demographics and sampling processes;
- Providing a justification for saturation by looking across multiple sources of information.

I acknowledge my active role in the collection, interpretation and dissemination of this research. My professional background as a social worker, my personal history and reasons for conducting this research necessitate self-awareness rather than denial of my

privileged position. As the editor who has elevated select participant comments to the position ‘significant’ and deemed others less so, I am reminded by ‘nyin peel anyic yuom’ that research is not conducted under neutral or completely objective circumstances.

## **Summary**

This chapter has outlined the analytical process using grounded theory. The first part of the chapter has shown how the data were analysed and increasingly abstracted through the constant comparative methods of grounded theory. This involved concurrent data collection and analysis to inform more nuanced research questions and directions using initial and focused coding. Through the processes of initial coding, writing memos, focused coding, theoretical sampling, establishing categories and finally developing concepts, a grounded theory has emerged. The process of writing memos at every analytic stage made it possible to abstract the theoretical ideas from the rich data on an ongoing basis. As these renditions became more theoretical, categories and concepts were developed via theoretical sampling. This series of steps, which resembles more of a spiralling process than a linear pathway, has provided the necessary scaffolding to elevate the analytic potential of the data from description to theory generation. By following these interpretive processes, receiving participant endorsement of transcripts and using NVivo 8 software, I have created a more auditable and accountable analysis. Thus, the first part of this chapter began to present a case for rigour, which was expanded further in the second part with a description of the potential limitations and important considerations of the research.

Finally, and writing personally, I identified several key reflexive considerations that reminded me to recognise myself as a researcher with interests, agendas and biases, and therefore, potential dangers when immersed in refugee-related research.

Having described the data collection and analysis processes, in the next chapter I review the salient literature to provide the intellectual rationale for documenting people’s responses to trauma.

# Chapter 4

## The 'Refugee Experience' and Understandings of Trauma

The term refugee has analytical usefulness not as a label for a special, generalizable 'kind' or 'type' of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of different socioeconomic statuses, personal histories, and psychological or spiritual situations. (Malkki, 1995: 496)

### Introduction

There is little doubt that experiences of war, forced migration, living in refugee camps and acts of political violence can expose people to traumatising experiences.<sup>28</sup> Much of the literature acknowledges the plight of those who find themselves entangled in conflicts or untenable situations that are beyond their immediate control. There is debate, however, whether those who experience acts of political violence and threats to one's sense of safety are left with indelible marks on their mental health and wellbeing. Not all refugees who survive harrowing experiences develop psychological problems in the wake of traumatic events. Critical to this understanding is documenting how people have managed to make meaning in their lives, respond directly to adverse situations, and locate sources of healing and recovery.<sup>29</sup>

This chapter is broken into three parts. The first provides a contextual and historical account of research into forced migration. It examines the understandings and debates on trauma arising from the refugee literature.

Part two briefly discusses the academic foci on refugee lives within medicalised perspectives, first as a summary and then as a critique. Addressing concerns about a

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<sup>28</sup> This chapter is informed by Marlowe (2009b).

<sup>29</sup> The words 'healing' and 'recovery' are not meant to suggest an *a priori* medical view that there is something either in the person's body or psyche that needs fixing. This study will approach these words and consider them within medical, social, cultural and spiritual realms, an important focus for Chapter 6 in which participant responses to trauma are discussed. The terms 'healing' and 'recovery' are placed within the understanding that healing and recovery can also occur within sociocentric, ecocentric and cosmocentric domains amongst others. Kirmayer (2007b) and Westoby (2009) provide broader conceptualisations of healing that go beyond a medical model view.

potentially narrow focus on trauma in refugee-related research, this section identifies two divergent viewpoints. The first introduces a predominant biomedical understanding of trauma associated with forced migration. This perspective often uses Western diagnostic categories of distress to understand the negative effects of forced migration (Malkki, 1995; Miller et al., 2006). The second perspective critically engages the value of applying Western forms of psychopathological phenomena to groups of people who come from different social, cultural and historical realities.

Part three explores the contexts of recovery and provides further justification for the research design. This section pulls all parts of the chapter together and reinforces the intellectual rationale behind the study.

Whilst acknowledging the value of medicalised perspectives, I maintain that there is a need to place greater emphasis upon indigenous and local forms of knowledge and healing, based on the literature discussed. Research with refugees that has focused primarily on the prevalence of psychiatric symptoms and forms of distress can potentially obscure other helpful perspectives when employed as a singular lens. When juxtaposed and examined together critically, medicalised and alternative perspectives offer an integrated understanding of a person, their community and the contextual situations from which they originate.

It is worth noting again that participants in this study were not assessed for psychiatric symptomatology or asked about their previous mental health history. However, a review of the refugee literature in relation to trauma and mental health is highly relevant as many participants asked to take part in this study because they wanted to address what they saw as one-sided, trauma focused understandings of their community. This review provides a backdrop to conceptualising why this study places importance on both *responses to* trauma and the *effects of* trauma. It highlights the necessity for understanding both forms of inquiry.

## **PART ONE: The Rise of Trauma Research and Debate in Forced Migration Studies**

A substantial body of literature documents the sequelae of those who have borne witness to, and experienced the atrocities of civil war, conflict, and oppressive regimes

(Cienfuegos and Monelli, 1983; Coker, 2004; Fazel et al., 2005; Goodman, 2004; Jeppsson and Hjern, 2005; Khawaja et al., 2008; Mollica et al., 2007; Silove, 1999). Acknowledged in these associated accounts are common expressions of guilt, sadness, despair, fear, shame and psychological distress. The formal recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 1980 resulted in a sharp and sustained spike towards understandings of trauma and associated forms of Western psychopathological phenomena in the refugee-related literature (Ager, 1999; Furedi, 2004; Summerfield, 1999b). Ingleby (2005) argues that while there were few mentions of 'trauma or PTSD' and 'refugee' within the bibliographic literature in the early 1980s, the growth of articles published since have increased. The diagnoses of PTSD, and to a lesser extent depression, anxiety and schizophrenia, are now widely acknowledged mental health outcomes stemming from traumatic experiences related to war, conflict and political violence. PTSD has gained almost worldwide currency as being a common outcome for those who have experienced traumatic events.

The recognition of PTSD primarily arose after 'shell-shocked' United States veterans of the Vietnam War struggled to cope in their post-war environments (Ingleby, 2005; Summerfield, 2001). Since the recognition of PTSD in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), this diagnosis has gained strong currency in relation to many types of traumatic experiences ranging from sexual assault, natural disasters, motor vehicle accidents and organised violence. Refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced people are no exception. Numerous studies now find increased prevalence of PTSD in war torn societies.

However, the challenge in ascertaining psychological disorders across cultural and social localities lies in establishing whether a person's reported distress represents a normal and expected response to situations associated with forced migration or is indicative of a psychopathological condition (Bracken et al., 1995; de Jong, 2004; Kleinman and Kleinman, 1996; McFarlane, 2004; Summerfield, 1997). Although the symptoms of PTSD are noted world wide, Kleinman (1987) cautions that it is a category fallacy to assume that because the features or symptomatology of a particular psychological disorder are observed in one locality they necessarily mean the same thing in a different locality. Herein lies an area of major contention. Aroche and Coello (2004) identify within the literature two primary and diverging viewpoints that relate to

people experiencing forced migration and trauma. The first places a strong emphasis and importance upon focusing on, and treating psychological traumatising as a key element in post-conflict recovery. The second places privileged Western concepts of psychopathology, such as PTSD and depression, as another form of cultural imperialism (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and psychological colonisation (Pupavac, 2002).

As will be discussed in the next section, underestimating the negative sequelae associated with forced migration could disenfranchise and marginalise the mental health needs of those who have lived through such adversity. This viewpoint is contrasted with other studies that argue Western diagnostic categories of distress and pathology are inappropriately applied to people coming from diverse cultural, historical and social backgrounds. As a result, there is a significant corpus of literature presenting conflicting claims and findings, indicating a necessity to understand more deeply the broad diversity of refugee experiences, trajectories and aspirations. The next sections outline findings supporting both arguments and highlight the contested field that addresses the intersections between refugee lives, trauma and recovery.

### **Provisionally engaging trauma**

Trauma has polysemic and powerful discursive understandings within psychiatric domains, medical terminology and more generally in newspapers and popular magazines. Furedi (2004) illustrates how ‘trauma’ is in many respects a hopelessly tangled term that has infiltrated and colonised the everyday (e.g. ‘It was traumatic trying to find a car park’). Even in academic books that focus on trauma, a clear definition often eludes the reader. It is almost as if the term ‘trauma’ is taken as an *a priori* understood concept that escapes the need for definition, and that the locus of inquiry begins after trauma – whether the focus is upon therapeutic approaches, associated sequelae or documenting people’s testimony. Kirmayer (2007a: 4) engages this term historically, stating:

Like any generative trope, the metaphor of trauma shapes our thinking in ways that are both explicit and hidden. The history of trauma, then, is not simply a story of the march of scientific, medical, and psychiatric progress toward greater clarity about a concept with fixed meaning, but a matter of changing social constructions of experience, in the context of particular clinical, cultural and political ideologies.

Trauma as a contested concept is located within multiple professional domains and theoretical positioning – a concept that can be viewed as a spiralling process which takes one to deeper meanings as each path is explored.<sup>30</sup> Even within Herman's (1997) flagship book, *Trauma and Recovery*, it is difficult to ascertain the definition that she uses to encompass trauma. Interestingly, this term pervades every chapter but is not listed within the index. Herman's focus seems to rest primarily within psychological trauma – the sequelae that follow an extraordinarily difficult event. It is within her chapter on 'terror' that trauma is most comprehensively conceptualised:

At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of humans we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning. (Herman, 1997: 33)

This chapter attempts to critically deconstruct the first part of this definition by critiquing and challenging the helpless victim model. However, the fact that both disasters and atrocities can disrupt a person's sense of control, connections with others and meaning structures is important. This discussion locates trauma provisionally within these disruptions, regardless of the traumatic event. In Chapters 5 and 6, I delve deeper into this by ascertaining how the Southern Sudanese men participants conceptualise and respond to trauma.

### **Negative effects associated with forced migration and trauma**

Much of the academic literature cites psychological distress, and most notably PTSD, as common outcomes for people who experience what is referred to commonly as 'war trauma'. Silove (2004) notes in a review of recent systematic studies across culturally diverse war torn countries that the prevalence of psychological disorders surpasses those from non-war affected Western countries. Fazel et al.'s (2005) meta-analysis of large PTSD studies suggests the prevalence of PTSD in resettled refugees can be as much as ten times higher than that of the age-matched general population. Another meta-analysis of 59 studies finds that refugees have poorer mental health outcomes than those of the general population (Porter and Haslam, 2005). Neuner et al. (2004), in their study of

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<sup>30</sup> Westoby (2009) investigates Sudanese expressions of distress within the interpretative framework of cultural trauma, social trauma and social distress. This analysis clearly shows how understandings of trauma exist within multiple domains and are informed by numerous actors.

more than 3000 Sudanese and Ugandan nationals, maintain that there are positive correlations between the number of traumatic events experienced and the development of PTSD. At the extreme end of the spectrum, K. de Jong et al. (2000) present a study in which the people surviving the war-related conflicts in Sierra Leone have a PTSD prevalence of 99 percent.<sup>31</sup> Whilst this literature appears to confirm that the prevalence of PTSD is significantly higher in refugees than in the general population, Fazel et al. (2005) stress caution when interpreting such findings. They note that larger and more rigorous studies report significantly lower prevalence of psychiatric illnesses than smaller scale research designs. K. de Jong et al. (2000) have also modified their original claims.

Several epidemiological studies comparing groups of people who have experienced torture with those who have not suggest that the prevalence of PTSD is higher in the torture group, but it is worth noting that those exhibiting such symptoms were still in the minority (Jaranson et al., 2004; Mollica et al., 1998). J. de Jong et al. (2001), in a study of more than 3000 people from four post-conflict countries, found that conflict-related trauma is a risk factor for the development of PTSD in Algerians, Cambodians, Ethiopians and Palestinians. Several longitudinal studies report similar findings. Mollica et al. (2001) maintain that Bosnian refugees who remained living in the region after the war displayed psychiatric problems three years after assessment, suggesting sustained psychiatric symptoms over time and highlighting the importance of coordinated mental health intervention. These findings are supported by Lie's (2002) longitudinal study of 240 refugees, which maintains the ongoing severity and chronic nature of post-traumatic stress and psychological symptoms over a three-year period. Overall, these findings show that trauma, with respect to dose effect (relating to frequency or number of experiences) and specific type of exposure (e.g. rape, torture, extended stays in refugee camps), is a risk factor for adverse mental health outcomes.

The aforementioned studies documenting the negative sequelae of trauma are important in that these findings, when interpreted cautiously, highlight the risk and protective factors associated with forced migration and resettlement. These findings can provide powerful evidence and justification for advancing social policies and funding programs,

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<sup>31</sup> This study is frequently cited as an example of how trauma focused inquiry deduced from a Western perspective has limited use in other contexts. Whilst this particular study could be a 'straw man' against the biomedical model, it does highlight the need to critically engage all forms of research-based inquiry with culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

and implementing interventions specific to the wellbeing of displaced populations. However, the academic literature contests the risk factors and sequelae associated with trauma. Thus, these cannot be taken as *a priori* assumptions (i.e. someone who has been tortured is traumatised or has PTSD). Rather, these studies provide a helpful foundation to explore the specific concerns, needs and experiences of a particular person or community.

### **Another perspective – resilience, recovery and growth**

Whilst acknowledging that some refugees and asylum seekers experience ongoing adverse mental health outcomes, Summerfield (1999b) argues that most research studies overestimate the level of psychological trauma sustained by people surviving war zones. Rosseau and Measham (2007) provide a review of quantitative studies that highlights the resilience of people living through trauma and how their experiences can be a source of growth and transformation. This different perspective on the negative impact of trauma arising from experiences related to forced migration asks the critical question of how the majority of refugees manage to avoid the negative outcomes of trauma. Such a perspective is relatively under-explored terrain, and highlights the need to think beyond the risk factors and pathological outcomes associated with trauma. Silove (1999, 2005), whilst acknowledging that some refugees and asylum seekers experience ongoing adverse mental health outcomes and that specific forms of trauma can be a significant associated risk factor, argues that most research studies find the majority of people surviving conflict settings do not suffer from long-term psychological problems. For example, Silove (2004: 22) reviews several longitudinal studies conducted in North America and Australia and concludes that refugees experience diminishing levels of ‘affective disturbance’ over time, as measured through several diagnostic instruments. One such study by Steel et al. (2002) followed more than 1000 Vietnamese refugees living in Australia. It found that trauma exposure is an important predictor of mental health status and that there was a dose-specific relationship. However, Steel et al. (2002) also maintain that the prevalence of mental illness reduced over time and that most of the participants did not have ‘overt mental ill health’.

It cannot be denied that the literature illustrates a number of risk factors associated with trauma and forced migration, but these findings are not without contention. Murray et al. (2008), in a literature review of refugee health and wellbeing in Australia, note that

there are significant disparities between numerous studies regarding the development of early and later psychological adverse symptomatology. Ingleby (2005) provides an example by citing Summerfield's (2002) epidemiological study of more than 800 Kosovarian asylum seekers, which suggests that work, schooling and family reunification are their major concerns, with very few participants reporting adverse psychological symptoms. Ingleby (2005) then cites Turner et al. (2003), who researched the same group and maintained that just under half of them had PTSD, measured through self-report. These contested findings highlight the need for rigorous research and a highly critical lens to evaluate it. Tempany (2009) reviews the literature on Sudanese wellbeing and finds that most quantitative studies identify higher rates of psychopathology while mixed method studies caution that although participants exhibit such symptoms, their functioning is not necessarily reduced. She maintains that most participants within these studies are more concerned about their present situation than the traumas predicated in the past.

The importance of biomedical research with refugees cannot be discounted. It provides a powerful empirical base that acknowledges the difficulties associated with forced migration and resettlement. In addition, the literature discussed in this section highlights that not all who experience trauma from forced migration are necessarily traumatised people. This critical distinction is often neglected in media presentations (see Gale, 2004; Klocker and Dunn, 2003; Robins, 2003; Windle, 2008) and, at times, in the academic literature (Ingleby, 2005; Pupavac, 2008; Summerfield, 2001; Westoby and Ingamells, 2009). The following section provides a critique of a trauma focused inquiry, which is often associated with biomedical research. This critique is not intended to discredit such research, but seeks to widen the focus to include alternative perspectives.

## **PART TWO: Critiquing Trauma Focused Inquiry**

A critique of Western discourses of trauma usually associated with the biomedical model is presented in three different domains. The criticism directed toward (but not discounting of) the aforementioned approach is as follows:

- (1) The biomedical model primarily resides in the domain of individual psychology that often medicalises and pathologises people with refugee status;

- (2) This model often fails to appropriately recognise the structural forces and powerful institutions that directly influence people's daily lives; and
- (3) It does not adequately acknowledge local, traditional and indigenous forms of healing.

This critique will question the universality and applicability of PTSD and other Western forms of psychopathology to people coming from different cultural, historical and social backgrounds.

### **The domain of individual psychology and pathologised understandings**

A key criticism of trauma focused inquiry is that this approach is situated primarily in the domains of individual psychology and obscures the political, social and historical realities from which refugee lives emerge. Sociologist Vanessa Pupavac and anthropologist Lisa Malkki have written insightful contemporary discourses of 'refugeedom', noting the historic shift from a political to a medicalised perspective of refugees.<sup>32</sup> Malkki (1995: 510) reflects critically upon this process, stating:

The quest for the refugee experience (whether as an analytical model, normative standard, or diagnostic tool) reflects a wider tendency, in many disciplines, to seize upon political or historical processes and then to inscribe aspects of those processes in the bodies and psyches of the people who are undergoing them.

Ways of inscribing such processes into the body and psyche reflect a predominant tendency towards medicalisation. Hoffman's (2004: 34) commentary on the holocaust includes the critical statement, "Trauma is the contemporary master term in the psychology of suffering, the chief way we understand the personal aftermath of atrocity and abuse." This statement points to the critique that individualised trauma focused inquiry can lead to dangerous and pathologising identity conclusions if it is a singular perspective used to understand people's lives, yet it is valuable when placed in a broader context. Pupavac (2006) employs Talcott Parson's concept of the 'sick role' to outline this critique – a concept in which refugees may be seconded. Parsons (1965) presents the sick role as a form of sanctioned deviance, which goes beyond simply being sick to actually being assigned rights and obligations based on the norms

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<sup>32</sup> Park (2008) provides a relevant account of how 'refugee' discourses have been constructed and changed within social work practice in the United States.

surrounding it. Pupavac (2006) argues that the sick role, as an ascribed status, moves refugee discourses from a political focus towards a narrowly medicalised lens of trauma that situates refugees as victims in society. Similarly, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) argue that the medicalisation of refugees may lead them to move into a 'victim role'. Later in this thesis (see Chapter 8), I will maintain that trauma as a form of recognition impacts directly on people's ability to participate as peers in civil society through the 'othering' constructions of 'refugees as a traumatised community'.

Parsons (1965) saw the sick role as a temporary condition. Whether other positive forms of identity can replace the attributions of being a refugee and *a priori* assumptions of trauma remains to be seen for the emerging Sudanese community in Australia. Related to this, Furedi (2004: 97) writes about the sick role in more contemporary contexts and questions the temporality of Parson's original concept in today's society, stating:

According to its original formulation, the sick role is conceptualised as a temporary episode. However, if as today, the sick role is experienced as an affirmation of identity, it is likely to assume a more durable character. Terms like 'cancer survivor' and 'recovering alcoholic' testify to a growing tendency to represent illness as constituting a long-term influence on identity.

The refugee label, as discussed previously, is no exception, where trauma imposed upon the psyche and body becomes a dominant descriptor/identifier and enduring understanding of people's lives. A focus upon pathologised perspectives and trauma discourses is alive and well with African refugees whereby notions of the 'Dark Continent' from Conrad's (1995/1902) novel come to the fore. In Australia, the majority of media stories that cover Sudan are stories of war and the atrocities that have been committed in Darfur and Southern Sudan. Other notable newsworthy events are those of abject poverty, with images of a displaced and emaciated mother clutching a baby next to a derelict and shaky dwelling. Windle (2008) provides evidence of how the Australian media predominantly presents African youth in resettlement contexts in a racialised, problem focused manner. Media in the United States come under similar criticism by Robins (2003), who argues in an analysis of America's top newspapers that the Sudanese 'Lost Boys' are presented as coming from what she terms a 'devastated and backwards Africa', and that the papers often employ reductionist colonial metaphors to generalise and superficially analyse highly complex situations (see also

McKinnon, 2008). Often these stories use trauma, pathology and risk as the primary medium to convey Sudanese refugees in resettlement contexts. Consequently, these perspectives can become a dominant understanding through which the general public acknowledge the refugee community.

The bulk of refugee research looking into psychological wellbeing has been based on deficiencies usually couched in individualistic domains (Ryan et al. 2008). Thus, the story of a person's experience(s) of trauma and forced migration, and how it has negatively influenced his/her life, can easily overpower other aspects of a person's life that might emphasise something very different about what he or she values. A 'thin description' (Geertz, 1973) of the individual is created from this exclusive understanding of a person's experiences of trauma, and other important considerations of identity can be lost or hidden. An individual's preferred understanding about their life can become subordinate to the one about pathology, loss and trauma (White, 2004). Therefore, while there is a value in medicalised understandings of the impacts of trauma, these perspectives on micro-agency and Western psychopathological phenomena may fail to acknowledge the powerful structural forces that have a direct influence on people's daily lives.

### **Failure to appropriately recognise the structural forces and powerful institutions that directly influence people's daily lives**

A focus on individual pathology has the potential to diminish and even obscure the political and social reality from which refugee lives emerge (Malkki, 1995; Pupavac, 2002; Summerfield, 1999b). This emphasis can reinforce a 'therapeutic culture' that medicalises distress (see Furedi, 2004; Kleinman, 1995), which may lead to myopic, or neglect of, considerations of how unjust social policies, government agendas and powerful institutions erect structural barriers to people's wellbeing. These considerations require a macro-level analysis rather than further explorations of micro-agency. As Silove and Ekbald (2002) argue, if refugees are presented to host countries as psychologically damaged, then the debate of asylum can easily move from humanitarian responsibilities to the economic implications and associated fears of accepting them. Ryan et al. (2008: 2) acknowledge these implications, stating that the "trauma discourse focuses on high-impact events that occurred in the pre-migration environment. One of the dangers of this focus is that it overshadows basic needs in the present lives of resettled refugees." Indeed, Miller et al. (2006: 415) maintain that

displaced survivors of political violence often are more concerned with daily stressors related to adjusting to a new environment, social isolation and lack of access to basic resources – concerns that may extend beyond individuals' decisions and actions.

The significant body of literature examining the prevalence of mental health concerns related to trauma from forced migration has been complemented by literature that places growing attention on resettlement experiences encompassing a focus upon housing, employment, integration, discrimination, social inclusion and poverty. Simich et al. (2006), in their mixed methods study with resettling Sudanese refugees in Canada, found that stresses associated with resettlement and social disadvantage were risk factors for higher levels of psychological distress. Refugees resettling in a new country often encounter new challenges that can be as difficult or traumatising (albeit under different circumstances) as those of forced migration (Beiser et al., 1993; Miller and Rasco, 2004; Sundquist et al., 2000). Briggs and Macleod (2006) found that a population of 64 resettled refugees in New Zealand exhibiting symptoms of non-specific psychological distress did not benefit from clinically-based interventions to the same degree as would be expected with the general population. These authors suggest that employment is a critical helping factor and put forward a theory on the concept of 'demoralisation', which places emphasis on people's current feelings of hopelessness and lack of social support as a necessary focus for intervention. In this vein, Miller et al.'s (2002) qualitative study with 28 Bosnian refugees notes the post-migration stressors of social isolation, poverty and loss of daily life projects as problems causing significant distress. In sum, refugee concerns are not always related directly to past experiences associated with war trauma/political violence. Rather, they present challenges related to the daily practicalities of living and social inequalities in resettlement contexts. Such concerns are present- and future-focused rather than dwelling upon trauma predicated in the past – an important distinction that will be discussed in all future chapters of this thesis.

Whilst trauma discourses can make wider society aware of the atrocities and difficulties associated with forced migration, such understandings can also place and embed people in roles that inhibit agency and equity of access to certain resources in resettlement contexts. As Malkki (1995: 507) states:

The development discourse on refugees has sometimes facilitated the continued de-politicisation of refugee movements; for instead of foregrounding the political, historical processes that generated a given group of refugees that reach far beyond the country of asylum and the refugee camp, development projects tend to see the whole world in a refugee camp.

If the outsider's understanding of a person's world is limited to the refugee camp, trauma arising from forced migration and adverse mental health outcomes, then these descriptors can have an adverse influence on the roles refugees can assume. In relation to the sick role, for example, Ingleby (2005: 23) indicates that the pathologies commonly associated with refugees actually redefine their rights and position in society, stating, "Though the status of 'victim' may help in obtaining political asylum, it can create an extra handicap when it comes to social integration." A number of studies have emerged which document how social disadvantage characterises the daily experience of resettling refugee communities. In Australia, recent studies show the presence of a segmented labour market in which African migrants are allocated low status, if any, jobs regardless of their prior skills and training (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006, 2007a; Fozdar and Torezani, 2008). And Simich et al. (2006) report that economic hardship remains a significant risk factor for psychological distress for Sudanese refugees resettling in Canada. These authors note how high unemployment and the non-recognition of prior qualifications and training has prevented Sudanese people from exercising a true sense of agency.

As will be discussed in the later chapters, although every participant in this study has encountered traumatic experiences associated with forced migration, their reported concerns are situated most often within current resettlement contexts related to the practicalities of daily living rather than from past traumas. These concerns are expressed in individual interviews and community engagements, and highlight the necessity of recognising broader social forces. Understandings of the personal experiences of refugees are clearly important, but so too are the social histories that inform political landscapes and the development of ethnic identities. As Silove (2004: 14) states:

Where refugees have been welcomed and offered opportunities to develop their capacities and to participate in all the affairs of the host country, they have overcome major adversities of the past. In contrast, where refugees are marginalized, victimized, or constrained, they tend to become entrapped in

negative stereotypic roles that are self-reinforcing, leading to further persecution and deprivation.

These comments echo Pupavac's (2006: 7) cynical sentiments that "the closeness of the refugee burden, rather than the possibility of a refugee fate, has exercised policy-makers' minds." It is then an easy step for policy makers to express the issue (burden) of refugee lives through unemployability, adverse mental health, and incompatibility in resettlement contexts. A focus on such concerns speaks to an emphasis on what Ulrich Beck (1992) refers to as a 'risk society'. Rather than acknowledging Australia's role as signatory to the UN 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the perspective of risk and burdens fails (whether deliberate or not) to acknowledge the powerful structural and historical processes that influence people's daily lives.

### **Inadequate acknowledgement of local, indigenous and traditional forms of healing, and idioms of distress**

There is a growing critique that Western forms of psychopathology may not be as highly salient as other local forms of distress. For example, Eisenbruch (1991) argues that the dominant emphasis of PTSD and associated Western symptomatology of trauma in Southeast Asian refugees could be better understood as cultural bereavement, which considers the loss of spiritual and social belonging, home and connection to land. Others question the value of Western forms of counselling with those who do not come from such backgrounds (Eyber and Ager, 2002). Summerfield (1999b) maintains that many studies overestimate the level of psychological trauma sustained by people surviving war. Numerous authors critically question the appropriateness of Western psychosocial interventions to address the 'emotional states' of refugees and others who have survived conflict settings (Bracken et al., 1995; Furedi, 2004; Pupavac, 2001, 2002; Summerfield, 1999b; Westoby, 2009). A strong critique of such interventions is that they are 'expert' informed, often neglecting or subjugating indigenous and local forms of healing that are highly resonant to particular localities and cultures. Miller et al. (2006) introduce a term called 'trauma focused psychiatric epidemiology' (TFPE) in their criticism of the unnecessarily narrow research focus on refugees that employs the biomedical model of psychiatry and the field of traumatology.

### **Trauma Focused Psychiatric Epidemiology**

Whilst Miller et al. (2006: 410) recognise the importance of studies employing the

biomedical model, they question the dominance of this focus over other important perspectives, stating:

Reflecting its strongly positivist underpinnings, the TFPE framework has prioritized the identification of universal patterns of distress, emphasizing findings that can be generalized across diverse settings (e.g. PTSD as a universal human response to traumatic events) while minimizing the exploration of local variations in the ways that people understand, react to, and are affected by their experiences of violence and displacement.

Miller et al. (2006) argue that the TFPE framework, creates the locus of inquiry firmly within the individual and pathological, which predominantly legitimises quantitative methodologies, utilises symptom checklists and essentialises universal patterns of distress. Checklists used with refugee populations to establish such distress and psychiatric disorders include: The Harvard Trauma Checklist; DSM-IV PTSD; ICD-10 DCR PTSD; and the Hopkins symptom checklist. These quantitative measures are not without controversy. A number of authors have critiqued the utility of checklists across cultural and social boundaries, and their ability to capture accurately what is occurring for people coming from specific localities. For example, Peters et al. (1999) conducted a study with more than 1300 participants and found significant differences in the prevalence rate of PTSD diagnosis between two main diagnostic instruments for establishing PTSD, namely the ICD-10 DCR PTSD and DSM-IV PTSD.

A questionable assumption built into such checklists is that these are universally applicable across diverse cultures, societies and groups of people (Wessells, 2007, 2008). Thus, there is an assumption that the same checklist can be used to establish PTSD prevalence whether it is a Sudanese man who was tortured for being from a marginalised ethnic identity, or an Afghani asylum seeker who had been separated from her family by rapidly advancing Taliban forces. J. de Jong et al.'s (2001) epidemiological survey found a wide range of PTSD symptoms across four diverse cultures from post conflict countries. They concluded that when studying traumatic stress it is essential to consider the multiple contextual differences of people's place of origin.

Hollifield (2005) cautions the relative dearth of empirically derived instruments that can adequately assess and capture the broad range of traumatic experiences and responses to

trauma associated with forced migration.<sup>33</sup> Ahearn (2000) also critically questions if psychological measures developed by ‘Westerners for Westerners’ have complete relevance and validity outside this context, particularly for people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Others debate the reliance on psychometric scales due to concerns about construct, method and item bias within cross cultural research (van de Vijer and Leung, 1997). Studies that focus upon the ‘refugee experience’ have been criticised for frequently failing to acknowledge the social context of one’s experience (Bek-Pederson and Montgomery, 2006). Thus, it is maintained that TFPE presents an important consideration amongst a number of other perspectives that include a person’s social, cultural, historic, economic and current resettlement backgrounds. When juxtaposed, these understandings can add depth and sophistication to understanding people’s forms of healing and pathways to responding to trauma in the past and present.

### **Mobilising Professional Practice**

An edited book, titled *Broken Spirits* (Wilson, 2004), intimates that there is some inherent form of disability or damage in having acquired the status of refugee or asylum seeker – namely that one is broken. Whilst this book provides helpful considerations for working with refugees, several sections use pathologised understandings and place expert intervention at the core of healing rather focusing upon local knowledges and understandings. Wilson presents some important considerations in the opening chapter, but also speaks of the refugee’s spirit in many ways as ‘broken’, using words such as ‘despair’, ‘apathy’, ‘dispiritedness’ and ‘fragmented’ to describe the fallout and sequelae from trauma. Wilson (2004: 112) provides a partial antidote to this situation by stating, “The shattered self is broken into shards, which if re-assembled well, can become a new architectural form of strength and beauty; a transformation of the fractured integrity of the object.” The problem with this well-intentioned solution and transformation is that the practitioner/helper assumes that such formative processes are necessary in the first place. Therefore, trauma informs what is possible to know for both refugees and practitioners, often at implicit levels. For the former, it lays the claims for achieving refugee status and is one of the few platforms from which they can leverage political claims (e.g. we are traumatised). For the latter, trauma is the medium through

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<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Miller and others have established checklists and questionnaires through intensive community consultations that are more highly resonant and designed for specific localities. See Miller and Rasco (2004), Miller et al. (2006) and Macmullin and Loughry (2004).

which one's professional training is mobilised. Furedi (2004: 3-8) argues that many Western societies now live in a 'therapeutic culture'. He writes how British media citations of words with 'counselling', 'syndrome', 'trauma', 'stress' and 'self-esteem' have grown exponentially from the early 1990s to the year 2000. This vantage point shows how easily trauma and Western-based expert interventions can obscure other perspectives of refugee lives if not approached cautiously and critically.

J. de Jong (2004) estimates that in Southern Sudan there is one psychiatrist per 4 to 10 million inhabitants, indicating a clear need for alternatives. In countries such as Australia, Western-informed interventions are readily available but the question remains whether such services are as highly resonant as indigenous and traditional forms of healing for resettling populations.<sup>34</sup> However, it is acknowledged that many people who have sought and received refugee status have encountered experiences of overwhelming adversity, and that some people may need a great deal of support, including but not limited to Western therapies, to recover from acts of injustice and abuse. One refugee-related example where such interventions can provide assistance is Doka's (1993) concept of 'disenfranchised grief', where the griever's loss is not socially recognised or legitimised and as such is difficult to mourn. Losses including sexual violence, dislocation, leaving behind loved ones and being forced to commit atrocities are examples of taboos whereby a person's loss/losses can be disenfranchised by their community or family, or even by the person themselves. Speaking with a professional therapist in a safe environment could help someone transcend such losses and discuss the associated experiences – when and if appropriate.

Overall, the three primary critiques within this review are not intended to further polemicise the debate between medicalised and alternative perspectives on trauma or healing. Rather, it echoes the call to engage critically with dominant discourses to examine a number of possible vantage points and pathways towards understanding and working alongside refugee lives. The next section elaborates on this comment by discussing several contexts and discourses of recovery, and forwards the imperative of elevating refugee voices.

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<sup>34</sup> Furedi (2004) provides powerful documentary evidence of a 'therapy culture' whereby the number of mental health professionals has increased exponentially over the last three decades in a number of Western countries.

### **PART THREE: Towards Healing and Alternative Approaches**

A number of studies have recently documented the forms of strength and pathways to recovery that help Sudanese people resettle and live their lives in meaningful ways.<sup>35</sup> Many of these studies attempt to document local, traditional and indigenous forms of coping, meaning making and resilience that endeavour to elevate participant voices. This growing body of scholarship highlights the importance of people's stories and provides a more integrated approach to navigating the complexities around refugee lives, culture, structural forces and trauma. Khawaja et al. (2008), in a mixed method study, found that social support networks, use of religion, reframing past difficulties and focusing upon the future were all helpful coping strategies for resettling Sudanese people in Australia. Such strategies are largely reflected in the three different chronological periods examined: pre-migration; countries of first asylum; and post-migration. Goodman's (2004) qualitative inquiry suggests that Sudanese adolescents identify strongly with a sense of collectivity as something that helps them cope after difficult experiences associated with forced migration. Westoby (2008, 2009) uses a dialogical model of inquiry with a Sudanese community living in Australia and maintains that often their understandings of distress are situated within the social milieu. Correspondingly, he concludes that these people's pathways to healing are social.

Other studies elicit the forms of strength, resilience and coping that help the Sudanese community live their lives in meaningful ways despite the difficulties associated with resettlement (Lustig et al., 2004; Mitchell et al., 2007; Patrick, 2005; Sampson and Gifford, 2009; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Simich et al., 2006; Stoll and Johnson, 2007) and forced migration (Hoeing, 2004; Jeppsson and Hjern, 2005; Patrick, 2005). Others have identified broader issues related to segmented labour opportunities and educational barriers for Africans living in Australia (Colic-Peisker, 2008; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006; Fozdar and Torezani, 2008; McDonald-Wilmsen et al., 2009), by various highlighting the necessity of meaningful engagement and empowering practices to better resolve injustices predicated in both the past and present. Such approaches embrace the perspectives of Sudanese people beyond their refugee status and associated medicalised understandings of trauma.

The importance of story is emphasised throughout this study. Story is the primary

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<sup>35</sup> See the second footnote of this chapter regarding the study's perspective on healing and recovery.

medium through which much of the data has been generated. Eastmond (2007) focuses on documenting people's stories in her research with Bosnian and Chilean refugees, stating, "Stories may also illuminate the reaffirming of self, in order to contest over-generalized and de-individualizing images promoted in a receiving society or a camp situation." This quote suggests that if refugees are presented solely as outsiders with sensationalised stories of trauma and life in the camp, they will remain precisely that – outsiders. By taking people's stories and contextualising them alongside trauma-informed understandings, it is possible to move into other helpful perspectives that situate people with refugee status beyond the nomenclature of victims or outsiders.

Miller et al. (2006) note the potential of constructivist methodologies to document the rich local variations of how particular groups, communities or individuals respond to trauma associated with forced migration. These authors are not arguing that all research methodologies should embrace constructivist underpinnings, but that research should be seen as another lens amongst many to shine light in areas of refugee scholarship left unseen by other approaches. As outlined in Chapter 2, Mackenzie et al. (2007) provide some helpful perspectives of conducting this research in ethical and reciprocal ways. This growing body of scholarship (empirical, theoretical and methodological) provides an integrated approach to navigating the complexities around the cultural, political, historical, social and structural domains of people's lives and trauma. However, it is still necessary to proceed carefully, as cautioned by Ryan et al. (2008: 2), who state, "Trauma discourse has little to say about the actual migrant adaptation process or the impact of the host social environment on the psychological well-being of refugees." Of particular note is the value of both qualitative and quantitative studies.<sup>36</sup> As Silove (2004: 20) acknowledges:

Qualitative studies aimed at understanding communal responses will not readily enumerate individual forms of psychopathology, with the converse being the case when the methods of epidemiology are applied. The complex challenge is to combine different methodologies of research in order to achieve a more holistic picture of posttraumatic reactions and consequent forms of adaptation at the communal and individual levels.

The critique of predominantly trauma focused methodologies that are used to research

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<sup>36</sup> Gifford et al. (2007) provide further insights about qualitative and quantitative research into forced migration by critically engaging a study's focus on 'meaning or measurement'.

the correlates and prevalence of PTSD and other Western psychiatric idioms of distress does not discount the value of such research. Whilst such understandings are necessary, this critique illustrates that these forms of inquiry can be narrow in scope about what can be explored in people's lives. As highlighted previously in Chapter 2, maintaining an emphasis on understanding how reality is socially-constructed has made it possible within the purviews of this study to inquire further into Sudanese men's responses to trauma and concerns in resettlement contexts. This approach places greater emphasis on their human agency to respond to adverse situations and create meaning, rather than making *a priori* assumptions about their experiences.

Malkki (1995: 510) states, "We cannot assume psychological disorder or mental illness *a priori*, as an axiom, nor can we claim to know, from the mere fact of refugeeness, the actual sources of a person's suffering." Thus, although many refugees live through traumatic events, it does not follow that they are traumatised or even that their current concerns or problems are predicated upon past traumatic events. As will be discussed in the remaining chapters, many of the Sudanese participants' concerns were present- and future-focused whereby the practicalities of daily living and getting on with their lives remain their most pressing issues.

### **The contexts of recovery**

Numerous authors write about how people can recover from experiences of trauma. Western talk-based therapies present a powerful evidence-based approach to helping people work through experiences of trauma (see Furedi, 2004; Herman, 1997; Kirmayer, 2007b). Herman (1997:1), one of the most cited authors in the field of trauma and professional practice, states, "Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims." This quote is widely referenced in the academic literature and ubiquitous on numerous websites that have a trauma focus. The conclusion from Herman's statement suggests that a necessary (even cathartic) release occurs when one speaks of terrible events. However, who one talks to and under what circumstances remains an open enquiry.

Pupavac (2002: 490) accuses a number of agencies that rely predominantly upon Western psychological interventions in Non-Western populations of 'therapeutic governance', which problematises these communities as dysfunctional, traumatised and

unable to heal themselves. Westoby and Ingamells (2009: 8) also critically engage the assumptions constructed around trauma:

In Anglo-American culture, trauma and *trauma stories* confirm suffering, and confer moral status and legal rights, so there are benefits for individuals who identify themselves as traumatised (original emphasis).

In this sense, talking about trauma with a professional is not about a cathartic release; it is a political claim for moral and/or legal recognition. Pupavac (2002: 503) continues this debate, stating, “While local actors may try to play the trauma card, the therapeutic paradigm does not serve their interests overall since the trauma model ultimately questions their moral agency and capacity for self government.” The concern within these critiques is that recovery is colonised by professionals and necessitates their expertise. The need for professional intervention removes the agency of healing from the ‘victims’ themselves. The victims must necessarily remain so in order to receive particular claims for recognition or access to services.

Several authors (Ingleby, 2005; Summerfield, 1999a; Wessells, 2008) raise questions about Western therapies that involve talking about or working through trauma – especially for people from non-Western backgrounds. Westoby’s (2006) study of Southern Sudanese refugees in Australia critically acknowledges and critiques the view that healing for refugees has become what he terms a ‘therapeutic fact’ (Westoby, 2006: 91) that necessitates expert intervention. Wessells (2008) uses his extensive experience in responding to humanitarian crises in numerous countries to demonstrate how the structure and delivery of international aid can cause more harm than healing. Alongside his conclusions, this study advocates for a strong community engagement, capacity building and an ability to contextualise a particular situation within a more integrated purview that considers not only biomedical understandings but also social, political and historical perspectives.

## **Testimony**

Cienfuegos and Monelli (1983) acknowledge the therapeutic elements of testimony expressed by those who survived the persecution of the Chilean dictatorship under Pinochet. Since then, many studies document the therapeutic importance of those ‘breaking their silence’ and speaking of the atrocities they have witnessed and

experienced (Agger, 1992; Blackburn, 2005; Denborough, 2006; Lustig et al., 2004; Schweitzer et al., 2007; Weine et al., 1998). The idea is that people who give testimony about the atrocities they have experienced have the potential to redefine or transform the trauma story from one of private/personal pains into public dignity (Agger and Jensen, 1990; Blackburn, 2005). Bourdieu (1999: 629) makes a related statement:

Producing awareness of the mechanisms that make life painful, even unliveable, does not neutralize them; bringing contradictions to light does not resolve them. But, as sceptical as one may be about the efficacy of the sociological message, one has to acknowledge the effect it can have in allowing those who suffer to find out that their suffering can be imputed to social causes and thus to feel exonerated...

However, scholarly literature addressing the mental health implications of being interviewed and sharing one's refugee journey is scant (Procter, 2005b). There are questions about whether individual interviews, often conducted in unfamiliar agency settings, are culturally resonant with refugees from non-Western backgrounds. These questions underpin the use of a flexible interview framework in this study, informed further by cultural consultants.

Recognising the need to think about private pains, public troubles and the need for dignity (Mills, 1959; Schwartz, 1969), double storied testimony presents a way to allow participants to direct an interview process whereby they can choose to focus on responses or effects associated with trauma. Participants can also decide whether they wish to locate their narrative within a highly personal or a broader community format. Overall, this approach was chosen as a way to engage participants because:

- It is not about disenfranchising the experience of trauma; in fact double storied testimony can be highly validating of it
- It highlights agency – people are not passive recipients of trauma. This inquiry opens spaces in which to move to consider alternatives alongside trauma focused inquiry
- It provides a platform to move beyond the pains of the past as participants often chose to speak more to resettlement than forced migration
- Participants often wanted to be interviewed to address misconceptions about their community. In this way, the expressions of their private pains present a forum to address larger public issues.

There are multiple contexts of participant narratives, just as there are multiple contexts

of recovery. It is within this understanding that the following chapters endeavour to critically engage trauma, theorise how the participants respond to it and further locate the role of the helping professions when working alongside emerging communities.

## Summary

This chapter has provided a summary of the divergent research paths and perspectives used in the literature to view refugee lives. One path focuses on understandings of trauma and associated sequelae, often through Western psychiatric forms of distress; another places further emphasis on local knowledge and approaches towards healing by recognising the political landscapes (past and current) from which refugees emerge. Whilst acknowledging the value of both approaches, it is maintained that the latter has been unnecessarily limited in scope. Pathologised perspectives informed through traumatic experiences can create ‘othering’ dynamics whereby notions of the ‘Dark Continent’ (Conrad, 1995/1902) and traumatised refugees come to the fore. It is then a short step towards using poverty, despair and chronic conflict as dominant descriptors of people with refugee status. These understandings can impede the realisations of employment, social integration and equity of access in resettlement contexts. As Kohli (2007) once lamented in his work with children asylum seekers in the United Kingdom, it seems that outsiders’ interests in displaced people’s lives only begin and end with them as displaced peoples. Acknowledging refugee lives beyond the camp and associated traumas with forced migration is an important step in recognising them as *peers participating in* rather than *victims surviving within* Australian society – a key focus of later chapters.

The critique of predominantly trauma focused methodologies looking into the correlates and prevalence of PTSD and other Western psychiatric idioms of distress is not meant to discount the value of such research. The resultant understandings are needed, and can create powerful justifications for advancing social policies and funding programs to help with the resettlement process. Whilst acknowledging the effects of trauma in people’s lives and associated impacts on people’s wellbeing are important areas of inquiry, there is a call to examine refugee lives beyond the purviews of trauma-dominated perspectives. This shifted focus helps render other important considerations visible in resettlement contexts, including structural inequalities, unjust social policies and forms of healing/resistance from traumatic experience(s). It is now time to engage

the Southern Sudanese men's narratives. Their voices provide windows to understanding how they conceptualise trauma in their lives and offer associated insights about pathways to recovery.

# Chapter 5

## Conceptualising Trauma

*It was not an easy thing. I had been separated from my parents and not knowing where was I going? Away, away, and no one knows... I would say in general it was traumatising because I left my parents, and from there, war broke out and I went to bush and I was just running and not knowing where to go. There was no food, nothing. I had to decide what to eat, without knowing whether something was harmful to eat or not, you just try it and if you do not die then it is good.*

*All those things were traumatising and at the same time it was very educative. Because, up 'til now, it has made me think that life is not easy. It is about struggle, it is about what we have, you know, all these sorts of things. It has helped me to be able to face any challenge that comes from nowhere. I can say that any challenge that is impacting me here, anything anybody will say to me that is challenging, I know that I will have a solution for it because I made it through times when I did not even have any food. So, I would say that it was very challenging and traumatising, but even getting here [Australia], trying to learn the new environment, the new culture, coping up with the time – all these things are not easy. (Participant 23)*

## Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the Southern Sudanese men participants' narratives and associated ethnographic fieldwork related to understandings of trauma.<sup>37</sup> It highlights how expressions of trauma are located primarily within the social and situational domains of the participants' lives. In other words, participants speak about being separated from loved ones and lacking the opportunity to contribute to family and community wellbeing (often through education and employment) as some of the most difficult aspects of their 'refugee experience'. It is worth emphasising again that this research focused initially upon trauma in forced migration contexts. However, following the inductive and emergent processes associated with grounded theory, it was possible to follow these men's narratives into resettlement. It was often in resettlement contexts that participants wanted to speak about their conceptualisations of trauma and outline their current concerns and aspirations.

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<sup>37</sup> This chapter is informed by Marlowe (2009c).

Overall, this chapter highlights the challenges to these Southern Sudanese men across time and locality to provide a deeper insight about how participants themselves define and conceptualise trauma. Three distinct parts contribute to this overall content. Part one discusses how expressions of trauma are distinguished, analysed and subsequently interpreted. Part two introduces the Sudanese men's narratives and examines what they report in relation to their experiences associated with forced migration, or more specifically, their journey of leaving Sudan, living in refugee camps and waiting in transit while making their way to Australia, sometimes over the period of many years. Part three discusses participant expressions of trauma within resettlement contexts.

The ethnographic fieldwork and spoken text of the men's narratives provide a grounded base to connect the analytical interpretations with the data. It is important to establish that the following quotes are not 'cherry-picked' as the most interesting or sensational. Rather, they are chosen as representing what the bulk of the data and grounded analysis infer from the theoretical sampling and saturating categories, as discussed previously. Although each section within the parts of this chapter employs only one or two quotes to illustrate the analyses, it is the understanding of these quotes that speaks to a much larger and more significant breadth of data not presentable in such a concise manner. Interpreting the data is not primarily reliant on existing theories because the grounded analysis emerges from the researcher's in-depth interactions with the community. Deciding to present the expressions of trauma in this chapter and discuss participant's responses to it in the next could be viewed as privileging, and placing primacy on, Southern Sudanese forms of distress – a criticism of the biomedical model presented in Chapter 4. This is not the study's intention, nor the intention of this chapter, which first tries to broaden the purviews that might encompass trauma in refugee lives, namely beyond, but including, the psychological. Participants are given greater voice to identify the particularities of their experiences associated with forced migration and resettlement, rather than the researcher making *a priori* assumptions about the 'refugee journey' and manifestations of trauma. Thus, the discussion in this chapter provides a vantage point from which to explore the rich multiplicity and diverse knowledge towards healing, recovery and resistance to the trauma story itself in the following chapter.

## **PART ONE: Delineating Expressions of Trauma**

The key focus of this part is to delineate the participants' multiple expressions of trauma. A particular challenge of qualitative research is deciding what data should be privileged and focused on above other information. Meeting with participants as many as six times to obtain a participant-endorsed interview, having numerous written memos and multiple fieldwork encounters generated an extensive amount of data to interpret. Through the initial and focused coding of the reported difficulties and challenges, it was possible to aggregate traumatic experiences across participant narratives and other relevant field data. As this process continued, theoretical sampling via follow-up interviews, attending community events and reading the grey literature helped illuminate theoretical depth and develop a more sophisticated analysis for the critical engagement of trauma.

I assumed initially that the term 'trauma' would need to be defined for participants. However, they are highly familiar with it as a word that carries profound power and significance for its ability to help them gain entry into refugee camps, acquire refugee recognition and access services in Australian contexts.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, trauma can be viewed as a currency and platform for laying one's political and social claims. Rather than having a deduced definition of trauma, the inductive interaction with the community has created a more interesting and relevant research question. Again, the tenets of grounded theory illuminate a process where explorations of meaning can be developed further. Whilst this approach presents a potential criticism of the research in terms of consistency, allowing participants to define trauma on their terms highlights the contested landscape from which their understandings emerge, and the necessity of elevating their voices.

### **Establishing most difficult and ongoing effects**

As participants offered to speak about their experiences of leaving Sudan and coming to Australia, it was important to establish what had been, or was still of greatest concern to them in relation to the many things about which they spoke. Participants were asked to identify what they thought were the most difficult effects of their traumatic experiences.

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<sup>38</sup> My ongoing engagement with the Sudanese community demonstrated that I needed to step back and re-evaluate my research question with regard to trauma. Rather than starting from the premise of trauma and looking for responses, I realised it was necessary to critically engage this term in order to understand how the community primarily understands, defines and even mobilises trauma discourses.

This question aimed to differentiate the multiple expressions of trauma and to discover what the men found most salient in their experience. As the researcher, I recognised that such questioning was confronting and could highlight a person's sense of vulnerability and/or lack of agency. Therefore, I reframed the question as follows to make them less direct was: "What do you think are some of the most difficult effects that your community has experienced related to the experiences of forced migration and resettlement?" This framing of the question on a broader community level was used early in the research process after ongoing consultation with elders. It was highly resonant with participants' interests and concerns because most men chose to participate in the study to address community-based issues. Often, after participants spoke about their community they would volunteer to speak about the most difficult effects in their individual lives.

The second question related to ongoing effects of trauma. Again, the question was slanted towards the more general community, and again participants often offered to speak of it more personally over time. Focusing on responses to trauma enabled me to explore its ongoing effects in a way that did not place sole primacy on traumatic experiences. It is worth mentioning that the 'most difficult' or 'ongoing effects of trauma' questions were not pushed on participants. Thus, not all participants responded to these questions within the contexts of their personal experience or the life of the community's lives. It was inappropriate to ask these questions in some interviews as it would have further highlighted a person's sense of vulnerability. Finally, participants could choose to respond to these questions in either forced migration or resettlement contexts. This flexibility allowed participants to select for themselves what they saw as the most relevant situations and expressions of trauma – whether past- or present-focused. The decision to use this flexible approach to questioning is reflective of the fact that traumatic experiences for refugees are not necessarily demarcated by clearly defined temporal boundaries wherein the past influences the present and vice versa. This present-ness of the past highlights the importance of considering resettlement and forced migration experiences not only separately but also together.

Using the NVivo software was a helpful tool to look at similar codes and expressions of trauma across interviews. The associated emergent coding framework provided a powerful and more 'global' overview to engage the data and my own analytic processes.

Being able to return to previous memos and retrieving textual data via the software allowed for increased reflexivity around the interpretive processes to conceptualise trauma. For example, if caution was not taken when interpreting the data it was easy to remember a Sudanese man's *extra-ordinary* story of escaping a wild lion or an account of torture and place greatest emphasis upon these because the stories could be so engaging it. However, following the processes of constructivist grounded theory and organising the data with the NVivo software helped establish the significance, emphasis and interpretation of the participants' concerns and responses. The ongoing community interactions helped triangulate participant narratives with actions, and subsequently to theoretically render the data from codes to categories to concepts as the research process continued. The grounded theory's constant comparative method proved invaluable in my returning to the data in this way. Often when this was done, being separated from friends, family and community were reported in the narratives as being far more difficult and traumatising than escaping from lions.

The associated responses to the most difficult and ongoing effects questions are striking. As the second and third parts of this chapter will elaborate, expressions of trauma in both resettlement and forced migration contexts are communicated most often through *social* and *situational* domains. More specifically, the most difficult and ongoing effects have more to do with loss of learning opportunities, lacking a sense of agency and, most notably, being separated from loved ones.

### **Differentiating traumatic events and traumatised people**

Every participant speaks about the negative sequelae of war trauma either from a personal or community-based standpoint. The experiences associated with forced marches, being detained and having a fear for one's life are unquestionably traumatic. However, this study consistently maintains that it is important to differentiate a traumatic event from a traumatised person. One participant makes this distinction very clear:

*We need to get rid of that thinking that our people are traumatised. We were traumatised, yes this is true and that is fine. But that does not mean what we are. We are something different and we can provide. We can offer. We can contribute. (Participant 24)*

This distinction is paramount. The argument here is that while there is no question that

forced migration can be traumatising, it does not necessarily follow that a refugee is a traumatised person. This perspective is echoed by Westoby and Ingamells (2009) who return to Arendt's (1969) analysis and critique that while war-related violence will inevitably lead to suffering, the associated experiences are not necessarily traumatising. What emerges from the Sudanese men's comments and the community interactions is that they primarily express trauma within situational and social domains rather than within psychopathological symptoms or negative mental health outcomes. In terms of reporting what men identified as being traumatic, it needs to be emphasised that this research does not challenge the fact that a number of refugees have experienced psychological distress and traumatisation. Much of the academic literature reviewed in Chapter 4 supports these findings, even though the reported correlates and prevalence of psychopathological phenomena can vary widely. Further, a number of participants describe the negative experiences associated with forced migration as 'war trauma' and having a 'hangover from the war'. When asking a participant about how he thought the community was recovering from the adverse effects associated with forced migration, I received the following reply:

*We are not there yet [recovery] but growing towards that because we still have a **hangover** from the war yet in this area. There is peace but there are remnants of the hangover that caused all that to happen, which are still, you know, creeping up. They are still surfacing. (Participant 8)*

And

*A hangover is something that they are keeping in their heart; they keep every now and then remembering and being reminded of these things. Remembering and remembering. If you don't deal with it today, you can have a **hangover** tomorrow. The bad things can come back in their minds. They might see some [police] officers here [in Adelaide] and think that they might hurt them. (Participant 22)*

It is critical to acknowledge these 'hangovers' and, in relation to these, to recognise the importance of the biomedical model with its predominant individualised focus which, while critiqued in this study, can provide invaluable insights about the effects of trauma, offer several pathways to healing and potentially deliver compelling evidence to create more just social policies.

Returning to the data, most participants recognise war trauma as being part of their refugee experience but are quick to emphasise that it does not necessarily embody an indelibly deleterious impact. Chapter 6 presents the many ways participants respond to these difficulties; responses that situate the participants as active agents who have skills and knowledge to use towards healing, coping and recovery.

Most participants did not express psychopathological symptoms such as depression, hyper vigilance, sleeplessness, anxiety and other forms of psychological distress within their narratives. However, they maintain that significant war-related trauma can be a difficult experience to work through:

*Some continue to remember and some flashback comes to them. But for some of them it goes quickly. But the more educated you are the more quickly you forget about that. You just find a way to unblock that. But others it takes a long time to work through it. (Participant 13)*

It is important to acknowledge here that some participants provided accounts of being tortured. As discussed in Chapter 2, establishing safety and placing emphasis on the person's response to trauma was important, as I recognised how an experience such as torture can leave a person feeling powerless if it is explored only with respect to its effects and consequences:

*Yeah, what really makes someone to recall the things that happened to them, they cannot forget them until they are dead. Look here (shows a scar on his arm), here I was tied like this (hands and feet bound together). My legs could not move and they used a very hot stone, this part of mine is put on it (his chest) and they stand behind here while others hold the tight ropes. So here you feel something is burning you. It is something that I will never forget. Like another person I saw, they use plastic weapons where they take like milk cartons, the white ones, and burn them and drip the hot liquid and it burns. When it catch fire, the fire turns blue, yellow. It is bad. It burns your eyes, your stomach. Even though it does not happen to you, you see it with your eyes and you will not forget. Sometimes it makes me really worried. (Participant 3)*

And:

*I was arrested and tortured and brought to Khartoum. And in Khartoum things weren't ok so I decided to escape to Egypt. (Participant 20)*

Some men spoke of such experiences without being prompted, although at no time were

any pressed for answers. Whilst torture is not covered to any adequate depth within this study, it is important not to underestimate its destructive potential. The importance of both the trauma story and a person's response to it as a way of navigating through people's narratives in a way that reduces the risk of re-traumatisation, and if appropriate, opening spaces to validate and dignify such experiences is discussed in Chapter 8. The fact that participants do not speak of psychopathological manifestations of trauma does not necessarily deny their presence. This observation points to participant narratives placing a higher priority elsewhere (defined later in this chapter as the *situational* and *social* domains of refugee lives). The importance of acknowledging these domains provides a broader vantage point to critically engage (rather than render invisible) Western discourses on trauma. As Westoby (2006: 157) writes about Sudanese people's lives within the contested landscapes of trauma and recovery, "There is little space for refugee voices to interrupt these colonizing processes and articulate their own aspirations for reconstructing a social world that would facilitate well-being on their terms."

Part of promoting wellbeing on participants' terms is allowing them to express their conceptualisations of trauma rather than making *a priori* assumptions about it. A potential critique of this study is that the participants were not willing to give 'insider' access to their stories outlining hypervigilance, nightmares, anxiety and depression. Further, the participants' consistent commentary upon the social and situational domains could either represent the magnitude of these issues or just be a safer thing to mention than detailing particularly difficult past traumatic events. It is important to acknowledge that the men spoke of experiences that could have affected their request for refugee status determination or humanitarian entry to Australia. Many of their stories were of a profound and personal nature. Regardless of the veracity of their comments and the ability to capture the true sequelae of trauma, the participants' focus on the situational and social domains needs further consideration. As will be elaborated in Chapter 6, it is after these issues are addressed (often located in agential domains of employment, language acquisition and education) that the interpersonal work of resolving psychopathological sequelae and distress can be better addressed, if resonant and needed.

## **PART TWO: Expressions Relating to Forced Migration**

Part two reports upon the Sudanese narratives related to trauma arising from forced migration. Whilst outlining a number of experiences and events commonly associated with the ‘refugee journey’, such as living in camps, leaving behind loved ones and lacking adequate resources for basic survival, participant reports reflect the associated effects that are situated primarily within the social and situational domains of their lives. The social consequences of being separated, and the situational outcomes of lacking an education and limited opportunities for meaningful employment are recognised repeatedly as being the ‘most difficult’ and ‘ongoing effects’ associated with trauma. These domains are presented separately while acknowledging that there is a dynamic interplay between them. Part three will discuss these domains correspondingly in resettlement contexts.

### **SOCIAL DOMAIN: The ‘Separation’**

The most commonly expressed form of trauma from forced migration arises from social understandings. The participants’ experiences of political violence and displacement have been highly disruptive to the important social fabric of friends, family and community. Bhabha (1992: 88) relates the connection between people and place, stating that “for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers.” Leaving behind communities when conflict surrounded them, crossing into neighbouring African borders and ultimately deciding to step onto a plane bound for Australia illustrates the power of those ‘few feet’. These liminal spaces provide a particular way to understand trauma, as it symbolises the separation of important social worlds and relations. Here, the word ‘social’ is used to highlight the inter-connected nature of Sudanese lives. Many participants speak about the transgenerational transmission of honour and shame. Others emphasise how a particular view or course of action generally is not supported unless there is community consensus around it. Thus, ‘social’ for this study provides a way of looking at the collective, communal and connected nature of both the past and present between individuals and those living around them.

The participant accounts of trauma, in terms of both intensity and frequency mentioned, focus on it as being separated from loved ones – most notably one’s parents. Many of the men’s narratives detail fleeing into the surrounding bush when armed militias

stormed their communities. As a consequence, they left their village by the safest means possible, which and often meant they were not able to account for family members or friends (even decades later). Two participants speak of this experience:

*When the attack came to my community, and I feel my life threatened, I ran and my kin ran in a different direction, and that was the way to separation. From there we hid. There was no food and we went to Ethiopia.*  
(Participant 6)

*In 1987 when the war broke out in the village, I was very small child, I was just playing with the kids outside. In the evening hours. So the village was attacked, and I did not know what happened because I was so small. People were running and running to see what happened. So like me, the children run. So, I run. I tried to run and find where my parents went but I could not find them. Somebody came across to help me and he took me to the bush. I was crying. From there I could not find my parents, so we just stay in the bush and could not eat anything. We took an emergency exit.* (Participant 5)

Parental separation consistently remains one of the most difficult experiences participants identify. As more than half of participants were separated from their parents as either young children or adolescents, the impact of this sudden parting is unquestionably difficult. A man who identifies as being part of the 'Lost Boys' expresses this experience of being displaced as an adolescent and separated from his parents and family:

*This happened when I was 15 years old. I have grown up in Ethiopia and in difficult ways. Which is really the wrong way when you don't know your parents... It is really really important to have your parents behind you. So this thing when it happened and we all run into the bush, it was really hard for us. Because you don't have a cousin, you don't have an uncle, you don't have niece and whatever. All of these people, they were not there. So, they were all by themselves. Mostly boys, teenagers and when we go out to Ethiopia that is what lead us to have more history like the 'Lost Boys' or something traumatic.*  
(Participant 11)

A number of participants state that they have not heard about the status of parents, brothers, sisters or other family members for more than 25 years. Many Sudanese people's situation is one of not knowing what has happened to loved ones; not knowing whether friends or family are alive or dead. Boss (1999) introduces the concept of ambiguous loss, which represents a loss that lacks finality as it remains unresolved and

an ongoing experience.<sup>39</sup> This ambiguity is the case in forced migration and resettlement contexts. Luster et al. (2009, 2008) write about the ambiguous loss of the many Sudanese youths who fled their communities and who, to this day, have not heard about the status of their parents. This lack of clarity makes it difficult to ‘move on’ because the situation lacks a sense of finality or ‘past-ness’ like the way it would be around other losses such as death. One man speaks of this experience in the context of being separated from his father and not knowing his whereabouts for more than 20 years:

*Yeah, like now. I have dreams of meeting my parents but I do not greet them. Like a time ago, I dream that I meet with my father but I don't really greet him. I dream that I go to the village... So I wonder now, if I go back to Sudan, would I find my father because some people have been released from the prison. I do not know. (Participant 4)*

These expressions highlight how being separated from loved ones consistently embodies some of the most difficult experiences related to forced migration. Participants particularly express how parents convey how one should live in the world and provide advice throughout one's life. This separation (particularly for those who were children or adolescents at the time) represents not only the loss of what has been termed an ‘indigenous education’ but also a critical social support in the present. Other studies also document how the loss of social networks is a significant source of distress for refugees (Goodman, 2004; McMichael and Manderson, 2004; Stoll and Johnson, 2007). This emphasis upon the social provides important considerations in later chapters when Sudanese responses to trauma are explored and theorised further, as social expressions of trauma are often resolved through social processes.

## **SITUATIONAL DOMAIN: Work, Education and Exclusion**

The second domain that highlights Sudanese expressions of trauma is located within situational domains. This domain is expressed predominantly as life in refugee camps where there were very few opportunities for employment and the ability to support oneself or family. When asked about the most difficult and ongoing effects of trauma,

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<sup>39</sup> Boss (1999) provides examples of situations where people have gone missing and their whereabouts/status is unknown. This loss is ambiguous because it is not clear if the person is alive, happy, unwell or even dead, making the grieving process highly complex as the griever does not know exactly what to grieve. It highlights the importance for a person to know what has happened, to have a ‘complete’ story.

participants frequently identify lacking an education as one of the most lamentable outcomes of Sudan's civil wars. Further, the exclusionary practices of discrimination and racism exacerbated these situational expressions and challenged the hope for a better day in the future. Expanded below, the situational domain is what almost all participants identify as being traumatising – not being able to pursue an education, unemployment and lacking an overall sense of agency.

### **Work and agency – ‘Kakuma was the worst place’**

There is a rich body of literature documenting the squalor and adverse living conditions commonly associated with life in refugee camps and places of transit such as Cairo.<sup>40</sup> Living in overpopulated and geographically small localities, there is often a struggle to find adequate resources, and a dearth of opportunities to find meaningful work and engagement. Some sources document extreme boredom (Lischer, 2005) and few opportunities for self-determination as being some of the most common complaints of those living within the confines of camp life (Goodman, 2004; Hoeing, 2004; Jeppsson and Hjern, 2005; Mackenzie et al., 2007; Paardekooper et al., 1999; Turner, 1999). Most participants have spent at least a year, if not many years, as displaced persons in such settings, either as refugees or applying for refugee status. One participant describes life in the camps:

*You should see the background and life that they have been in. And why they are here – you will ask more questions. People are taken to a desert where there is no water except in a big padlock – a big one. They can get their water in the morning, they go to fetch it and then again in the afternoon, the padlock is open so you can get it. And food that they give you, it is very little and they say that this should last you until next week. And the worst part of it is that these people could not cultivate for themselves because the location of the camps has a lot of [negative] effects for the refugees. (Participant 22)*

The limited opportunities to cultivate one's food and lacking basic resources for survival are common experiences of camp life, highlighting the limited agency afforded within such locations. Another man relates his experience of working but earning almost nothing for his efforts:

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<sup>40</sup> Also see a number of autobiographical works of Southern Sudanese writers who provide first hand accounts of these experiences in Ethiopia and Kenyan refugee camps (Deng et al, 1995; Dul Dau, 2007). Rowe (2009) offers insight into the daily lived experiences of being Southern Sudanese in Cairo. Lischer (2005), whilst presenting refugee camps more generally, provides a sobering perspective on these 'dangerous sanctuaries' and the dilemmas of humanitarian aid.

*You are given handouts and you don't work. There are even times that you have to survive for days without any handouts. You can't work. I was lucky enough to be working in the refugee camps. Six days a week, 10 hours a day - to get \$100 US dollars a month. It was terrible. (Participant 13)*

Another participant laments the fact that people's skills were not used in camp settings, which further ensconced a sense of hopelessness to make meaningful changes and contributions to their lives and to others around them.

*In the other camps, like Efor and Kakuma, sometimes you are a teacher and you are denied to help even in a small way. To even teach. If they give you a chance and they say that they will pay you but it is less than \$50 dollars a month. Maybe even just 20 dollars a month... Those people with skills were not used. (Participant 4)*

Many participants note that this lack of agency is one of the most traumatic experiences in the camps because they had placed so many hopes on their lives being better once they got there. Experiences of racism and discrimination in forced migration contexts were common in the associated accounts of internal displacement, living in refugee camps and trying to make a living in places such as Cairo. Marfleet (2006: 229) documents a number of the difficulties that South Sudanese people experienced living in Egypt, including discrimination, exploitation and abuse.<sup>41</sup> This situation is echoed by one of the participants in this study. Speaking about being displaced from his home in Southern Sudan and living in Khartoum, he states:

*Most of the people in Northern Sudan you know, they call us slaves. They call us slaves you know. Imagine someone saying the same thing every day to you. It is really bad. (Participant 10)*

Seven of the participants had lived in Cairo as a place of transit (sometimes for several years) before coming to Australia. Many of them note the extreme racism and discrimination they encountered there on a daily basis. Viewed as a burden to society, participants report feeling like third class citizens who enjoyed few legislated rights:

*Yeah, in Cairo. If you are just walking along the road alone, from up the stairs they pour hot water on you. (Participant 22)*

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<sup>41</sup> For further reading about life in Cairo, Edward (2007); Coker (2004); and Rowe (2009) also document the multiple difficulties that the Southern Sudanese experienced in Egypt.

These experiences placed these men in uncertain environments where they needed increased vigilance better to ensure their wellbeing and safety. The experience of discrimination in particular, which meant that many people could not find work, further marginalised a refugee's sense of agency and ability to support friends, family and their community.

### **Education – 'it builds you up'**

The situational element participants emphasise most frequently is lacking the opportunity to receive an education. The consequence of not being able to attend school has been fewer pathways for meaningful employment and acquiring specialised skills to contribute to community wellbeing and to support one's family. In relation to this, one participant acknowledges the importance of education and how it can help to 'build you up':

*Yeah, I think in my lifetime I have experienced a lot of difficulties because of the current war. One is – I have lost my education. I have lost my education so that is my big worry because without education you don't have a future or foundation. Without education you will not have a good job. Without education you have got no word to say in your society or the community. Because education helps you to see and think different things, it **builds you up**. That is my big big difficulty. (Participant 3)*

This 'building up' provides the opportunity, or at least the hope, of being able to make a difference and improve one's life in future contexts. 'Building up' is a present- and future-focused expression. Rather than speaking of themselves as damaged in some way from war trauma, participants emphasise the injustice of not receiving an education and how it impacts their lives today. Most participants highlight that a man's role in Sudanese society is to provide financially for the family. Limited opportunities for employment directly challenge this sense of self-concept and the social constructions around manhood. Correspondingly, participants identify education as a means to address this expression of trauma. The focus on education not only places understandings of trauma in past contexts but thrusts it into explorations of the present and future.

Having demonstrated how participant narratives provide a grounded base to illustrate that the predominant expressions of trauma are situated primarily within social and situational domains, I move on to Part three of this chapter, which considers

resettlement. The resettlement context represents where participants and community members were most interested in expressing their understandings of trauma. As will be reiterated, the challenges associated with forced migration do not end upon resettlement. Often, the same experiences that participants lament within the refugee camps are embodied similarly in Australia.

### **PART THREE: Expressions Relating to Resettlement**

Part three focuses upon participant expressions of trauma in resettlement contexts. Interestingly, the social and situational domains presented in Part two also relate to what participants primarily emphasise in resettlement, highlighting a continuity of expressions across time and locality. Participants note again how exclusionary practices, which embody experiences of racism and discrimination, further impact upon these domains. The inclusion of resettlement is significant because the participants' narratives illustrate that the resettlement experience (albeit under different circumstances as forced migration) can be just as difficult as the traumatic events associated with leaving one's country of origin:

*You know, because the most important thing is that our people are from a very different background. The experiences that they have been through are the hardest ones. And the experience that they are getting here, for some it is worse than what they were experiencing [in forced migration contexts].*  
(Participant 4)

Related to this narrative, another participant states why he decided to come to Australia when he was living in a refugee camp:

*Having known that the standard of living in the Western world is very high, I said that I have to go there, but that too was very challenging and to an extent, very traumatising. I was just dropped into Australia and it was really just very strange. You go to a place where there are no parents, you don't know where you are going to stay, you don't know nothing. You've got no money. And the education you come with is not so promising, it is not sufficient enough. Because even if I come to this country well educated, [employers] will say no.*  
(Participant 21)

As discussed previously, life in the refugee camps and experiences of forced migration

reduce people's sense of agency whereby opportunities for self-determination, employment, and prospects to pursue an education are very limited, unstable/temporal or nonexistent. When Sudanese people arrived in Australia, they invested in finding opportunities for greater self-determination and the ability to contribute to their families, community and the wider society. They placed their hopes on resettlement to provide the opportunity for such realisations. Whilst some of these hopes have been met, other aspirations remain elusive.

### **SOCIAL DOMAINS: The Separation and the Transnational Gaze**

As introduced in Part two, the separation and the 'few feet' between borders and frontiers were some of the most awesome and powerful experiences of trauma that Sudanese men expressed (Bhabha, 1992). This statement, coupled with the transnational gaze of life in Australia coinciding with commitments and concerns to those still living back in Africa, further illustrates the power of frontiers. The borders demarcated by national boundaries and barbed wire fences in African contexts are now established by thousands of square kilometres of ocean. The UNHCR (2008) identifies refugee resettlement in a new host country as one of the three 'durable solutions' for positive outcomes, as was discussed in Chapter 1. However, this durable solution does little to ameliorate the fact that a humanitarian entrant has to leave behind many important people from their country of origin or first asylum. Often those left behind remain in dangerous or perilous positions. This situation is certainly the case for many Southern Sudanese people whose loved ones remain in refugee camps, still reside in neighbouring countries of asylum (such as Uganda, Kenya and Egypt) or have been repatriated back to Sudan under what is a tenuous and unstable cease fire. New reports of violence and instability are commonplace in all three living situations:

*I can say now, my life is alright. I've got food and water, and security – I can walk anytime. But there, there [in Kakuma] is sometimes no food, no treatment, and insecurity. So it makes me to think to them. (Participant 11)*

Other studies highlight similar issues where the impact of family fragmentation and daily worries about people's lives back in Africa remain an ongoing concern (Rousseau et al., 2001; Stoll and Johnson, 2007). I was invited to community functions on numerous occasions because someone in Africa had died due to sickness, violence or lack of basic amenities such as food and shelter. Other events involved meetings where

the community would discuss how to respond to crises that were occurring back in Sudan at local, regional and national levels. This transnational gaze highlights how many people maintain responsibilities and roles on two or more continents, and explains why separation from community and family is one of the most common expressions of trauma in resettlement contexts. One participant relates to such fragmentation as a disease. He speaks about how it is possible to treat symptoms that are causing psychological distress, but if the underlying disease is not addressed (the separation), negative symptoms will continue:

*So, what I am talking now is just like [you can] treat the symptom, but the disease is still there. Or if you are sleeping with the symptom, might be that it will not go away... So, what I mean with that is when we just sit down and we talk about what can help here [in Adelaide]. I just say being together is like helping with the symptoms. So it will help, but the disease – that is the separation. (Participant 6)*

Here, separation is expressed as an illness in sociological terms as the person directly experiences something that is distressing and/or causes pain in their lives. Even in the absence of diagnostic symptoms or pathology, the pain of the separation is very real, as illustrated in Coker's (2004) research with Southern Sudanese refugees and somatisation.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the distinction between an illness (something that people experience as having an unpleasant impact upon their lives) and a disease (an abnormal and harmful condition on the human body) intersects with how a person's culture and social being influences these understandings (see Moore, 2004). The 'separation' as a social expression of trauma represents an *in vivo* concept that describes and defines the difficulties arising from forced migration and resettlement. Whilst this commentary is not altogether surprising, it is worth noting how often both participants and community members highlight how separation causes ongoing problems in their lives. A participant relates to the somatisation of separation in the absence of a Western diagnostic condition:

*JM: So you have not seen your parents since 1987?*

*Yeah. (Laughs) A long time. And where they are I do not know. I do not know what has happened. There are other people who I do not know about. It keeps*

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<sup>42</sup> See also Kirmayer (2007a: 8-12) who further discusses trauma and the somatisation of distress.

*me thinking a lot. But when I go to the hospital they tell that there is nothing at all, I am healthy. (Participant 2)*

Participants speak of the separation most often in relation to parents, but it is understood also in the context of family and even more broadly the community. The social consequences of forced transnational movement are without question the participants' and community's most emphasised and significant expression of trauma. What is worth noting here is that participants could have mentioned forced marches, going without food and water, constant fear for one's safety or living in refugee camps, sometimes for many years. However, what participants mention almost without exception and with powerful emphasis is the nature of separation rather than individual experiences of trauma. Other types of separation that were mentioned many times included community, family, cultural values and traditions, and the distance between Africa and Australia.<sup>43</sup>

Examining the most commonly reported 'ongoing effects' and 'most difficult effects' related to trauma in resettlement contexts again has to do with separation. Not knowing the status of those back in Africa, and the associated ongoing guilt of leaving family behind or being unable to secure a job to financially support those in Africa reinforces the difficulties accorded to these social domains (Akuei, 2005; Simich, 2004). The ambiguous loss where family members remain unaccounted for, or where resettled refugees have been waiting for family members' applications for Australian visas, which moves at a very slow pace, is ongoing and unresolved. The expectations around providing ongoing support to family in Africa remains a pressing issue that impacts many members of the Southern Sudanese community on a daily basis. Numerous community members acknowledge the pressure to provide for family members living abroad (both nuclear and extended family) because of the perspectives on how Australia offers limitless resources and opportunities. One participant speaks about this pressure of receiving weekly telephone calls and text messages about supporting family back in Africa for schooling, healthcare and housing. He relates this experience in the contexts of being unable to get short-listed for a job and his transnational responsibilities:

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<sup>43</sup> Attending a community memorial for a man who had died in Sudan, a man stated to a group of more than eighty people, *Who here can say that they have not lost a loved brother, sister or friend to this war?* As no one raised their hand, I almost sheepishly realised that I was likely the only one who could have lifted their hand of the eighty people present, highlighting the tragic impact of Sudan's civil wars on this society's social fabric.

*Yes, it is a pressure. It definitely is. It is not only limited to your parents and siblings. You are supposed to help your relatives and this is not only limited to your parents, brothers and sisters and even friends. Sometimes, I get calls from people who need support. Like my cousin's sister, she always when she calls she says she needs money... We tell them that we don't have the money, but they don't believe us. And we feel – we have that feeling that we are not able to help our people. One of the things that are affecting us is that we have this sense of collective sharing with your own people. And there are families here [in Australia] who send most of their money back home to help relatives because of that feeling and sense of guilt. And sometimes they [those resettling] forget about the things that they need here and they also have families here.*  
(Participant 19)

There is a significant body of literature documenting the incidence of remittances being paid to family members and friends who are living in a migrant/refugee's place of origin or elsewhere in diaspora (Akuei, 2005; Lindley, 2007; Papastergiadis, 2000; Shandy, 2003; Stoll and Johnson, 2007).<sup>44</sup> The responsibilities associated with these duties are manifold and create additional pressure in already difficult settings. Finding the right balance between one's obligations and responsibilities in resettlement contexts and supporting family and friends back in Africa can be a difficult, if not nearly impossible, situation to navigate financially.

### **Gender and youth dynamics**

The different gender dynamics between Sudanese men and women presents a new social encounter that potentially disrupts traditional boundaries and expectations. This rupture has caused a significant source of distress for the Sudanese community as families try to maintain social relationships in Australian contexts.<sup>45</sup> The interplay between culture, socialisation and resettlement highlights the new upward and downward mobilities of men and women. Participants often speak about how women can now receive government payments and at times can find work more easily than their husbands (traditionally male dominated roles). This situation means that both men and women may need to renegotiate familiar familial and gender roles:

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<sup>44</sup> Zetter (2007) cites several sources noting that migrant remittances in some countries substantially exceed the financial aid provided by OECD countries for development.

<sup>45</sup> This rupture is also evident in other situations, as Edward (2007: 93-94) illustrates how the meaning of marriage takes on a new construction in the contexts of South Sudanese living in Cairo. Similarly, Rowe (2009) discusses Sudanese masculinities in the same context.

*Our culture is a man and a woman. And man, is the head of the family and the house. And he has responsibility for everything, the decision maker and every demand. But here [in Australia], it is not like that. There is our culture, but then you see our culture is really much contradicting with other cultures in society. They are contradicting. (Participant 6)*

The different constructions around gender roles, relationships with youth and how masculinity is constructed will be theorised in Chapter 7 as the process of ‘walking the line’ (finding a workable synthesis of one’s past with the present) becomes increasingly relevant.

### **SITUATIONAL DOMAINS: Adapting to New Contexts**

Part two of this chapter highlighted that a common expression of trauma arising from forced migration was the situational domain of lacking agency and self-determination in refugee camps. Similarly, many participants mention that resettlement opportunities are where they place their hopes of addressing such limitations. However, the multiple new social, cultural and historical contexts outsiders must navigate can make the tacit assumptions of Australian life extra burdens to negotiate:

*This story that I am telling you today – I can call it a story. Today we are making a story of Sudanese people. It is a series or a story of a journey between two worlds. Because all people came from a first world to a second world, you can say. Yes, you can say it is a journey between two worlds and this journey between two worlds, some people will not understand. (Participant 12)*

Whilst resettlement in Australia is far from life in African refugee camps, the multiple challenges of creating a new existence have proven daunting as refugees transition from one social world to another. Learning a new language adds further complexity, as Green (1982: 69) poignantly states, “No two languages are sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality.” The associated losses related to social practices, connection to place, foods, traditions and numerous other experiences familiar to the senses often demark the migrant experience (see Cox and Pawar, 2006; Lyon et al., 2006). Participant 12 has described the journey of leaving Sudan and coming to Australia as a *journey between two worlds*. This journey, as many note, can be very difficult; it can be just as traumatising as forced migration:

*And also what I can just add, if you have been attacked by your government [in Sudan], by the system that is supposed to protect you, one of the things that is taken away from you is the dignity. To live as person. The feeling of even having a right. And when you come and join in another society, you already have no good perception of what is liberty. Because you have never been given liberty. Some people have their cultural heritage stripped away. And when you come here, you come and get the new concepts of liberty, rules and even they are administered in a different way. And they [Australians] also have their own body language with hidden connotations. All these things take a very long time to learn. Some people, they just give up. (Participant 14)*

As this quote illustrates, there are many challenges associated with understanding what many native born citizens take for granted in Australian life. The *in vivo* concept of going *slowly slowly* embodies the notion that integrating into new social, cultural and political contexts is not a fast process:

*The majority of our people are not educated. They cannot read and write. Sometimes also, even a little letter like this one [holding up the letter that introduces this study on university letterhead] sent to somebody who has just arrived will think that they are in trouble. Because, that is also a sign of authority putting you into a difficult position... It is the fact that they are in a position whereby they cannot perceive certain things the way that people who are born into this country or culture perceive them. (Participant 14)*

The different constructions around time, family, relationships with neighbours and the distribution of resources creates an environment where tacit Australian meanings, relations and responsibilities often remain obscure for outsiders to decipher. The Australian legal system presents a new framework that one must operate within, which essentially legislates particular social behaviours and norms. Whilst speaking very generally, Sudanese participants note that in Africa a social problem is usually convened and resolved by the community, and people can generally move on from it afterwards. In Australia, by contrast, a Sudanese man warned others at a community event, *Records can follow you*. This caution is a particularly important point because if one is acting within one's understanding of what is appropriate (but not so within Australian contexts), the cards can be quickly stacked against them if a criminal record follows from driving without a license or having a domestic conflict where the police are involved. Sometimes these lessons are learned only after an offence has been recorded. This highlights the importance of educating the community about the Australian legal system and how it differs from African contexts.

The often tacit, authoritative knowledge many Australians take for granted represents a complex array of symbols, gestures and forms of interacting that require an ability to step outside one's own frame of reference to incorporate these new rules in a new, coherent dialogue with their past. These complex processes will be part of the focus in Chapter 7, in which the in-between or interstitial spaces of refugee lives and resettlement are theorised further.

### **Employment and education – searching for agency and meaning**

Whilst participants acknowledge finding gainful employment and seeking an education are difficult endeavours in forced migration contexts, this impediment becomes extended and exacerbated in resettlement contexts. A well documented experience for many migrants and refugees who come from positions of respect and rank is that their background and training are neither highly valued nor acknowledged in a new country such as Australia (Ager, 1999; Cox, 1989; Marfleet, 2006; Papastergiadis, 2000), as illustrated by a participant who speaks of the 'diploma disease' that makes it difficult to secure a job:

*Because in the Western World, there is this practice which I call getting the certificate in order to be accepted. I call it diploma disease. When they [employers] say, "But where is your diploma?" Even if you are able to do the job properly. (Participant 21)*

This situation is evident in Australia where the literature acknowledges that African migrants have higher unemployment rates, and, when employed, occupy 'lower' status jobs (see Colic-Peisker and Tilbury 2006; Fozdar and Torezani, 2008; Tilbury and Colic-Peisker, 2006).<sup>46</sup> Simich (2004) reports that the most frequently identified concerns of 240 Sudanese refugees resettling in Canada were addressing employment, education, community fragmentation, family reunification and language acquisition. These concerns, while not negating the impact of war trauma and psychopathological sequelae, highlight the salient concerns in the social and situational domains of resettlement. As one participant in the Adelaide study states about unemployment and hope:

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<sup>46</sup> Related studies in Canada support similar findings (see Krahn et al., 2000).

*At the moment, I don't work. And I am optimistic one day that I will find work. Sometimes this keeps troubling me and when I arrived in Australia I discovered that at the moment I did not have the qualifications to get a job. So I am still struggling to attain work. I hope to find work to be able to manage myself. (Participant 4)*

Another participant spoke about a recent arrival who said he would have preferred to have stayed in the refugee camp where he was a respected headmaster rather than being a welfare recipient where he cannot get short listed for a job. Many Sudanese men speak with pride about their culture, heritage and background. A major associated role to which these men relate strongly is the ability to provide for their household. This pride is often compromised after prolonged unemployment, lack of recognition of foreign-acquired skills/qualifications, protracted experiences with Centrelink<sup>47</sup> and discriminatory practices associated with finding employment:

*You see, every person I think has the ability to contribute and work when he comes here. But when he comes here and he cannot find work, it is a problem. In my case it was very very painful too. Because you feel that you have come to a place where you cannot offer and you are forced to rely on Centrelink for money and sometimes there is a lot of pressure from Centrelink for you to find work and you have just arrived. You don't know even know how to write a resume or a job application. In most of Africa and also in Sudan, we are not familiar with these processes. (Participant 19)*

Being unemployed compromises a person's ability to support oneself and one's family. This loss disenfranchises one of Sudanese men's most important roles – the power to make financial contributions in the familial sphere. Stoll and Johnson (2007: 627) acknowledge the immense emotional and financial strain that Sudanese men experience when trying to fulfil their role as what these authors term 'global breadwinners'. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, participants passionately emphasise that the pathways towards healing usually involve employment and having a sense of agency in which they can better realise their own hopes and aspirations for the future. Thus, while Australian life is far from experiences of the camp, the conditions of unemployment and limited opportunities for upward social and economic mobility directly impact on this community's ability to contribute to individual, familial, community and the broader society's wellbeing.

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<sup>47</sup> Centrelink is a federal Australian statutory government body that administers income support.

## **Racism and discrimination**

A number of men in this study reported experiencing racism and discrimination in forced migration contexts, and these accounts are also acknowledged in resettlement circumstances. Numerous authors have documented the evidence of racism and discrimination for newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers in Australia (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007a; Gale, 2005; McKinnon, 2008). Although in the minority of expressions, the only time participants really speak of hopelessness is as a result of exclusionary experiences:

*We understand that Australia is a multi-cultural country. But to us, it is different. It is not a multi-cultural country to us. Because there are certain people who dominate Australia, but that one [multi-culturalism] is just a propaganda you know – ‘It is a multi-cultural country’. But I can’t really see it. (Participant 17)*

Chapter 6 will highlight how opportunities for meaningful work and receiving an education have been pathways to rekindle hope. These pathways, however, are potentially blocked by exclusionary practices, exemplified through sensationalised media presentations, polarising political commentary and unfounded racist claims.<sup>48</sup> These powerful voices and mediums create exclusionary spaces, thereby diminishing opportunities to participate as peers in society:

*Since I came here, I have been working and studying and in all this time I have experienced racism in this country. It is not a good place to be if I am being honest. Australia is not a good place to be. (Participant 18)*

An unexpected outcome of this research has been that several participants have listed me as a referee, without notification, when applying for jobs. When these potential employers called, it was a little difficult to note my relationship to the person without violating any confidentiality and privacy obligations associated with the research. Often these reference checks were done before applicants had been interviewed as a way of short listing through screening. Some of the questions employers asked were of a racist and discriminatory nature, tailored to risk, or, more specifically, what the employers themselves constructed as qualities that created risk. For example, ‘Does this person

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<sup>48</sup> An associate professor from Macquarie University, Andrew Fraser (2005), controversially claimed that the Africans generally have much lower IQs than white people. This created public outcry. For a response to these statements, see Macdonald (2005) and Perera (2006).

come from Africa?’ ‘Do you know if this person was a refugee?’ ‘What do you know of their experience in Africa?’ These questions had little to do with a person’s capacity to do the unskilled jobs for which they had applied. Employers were trying to ascertain *what* these applicants were (refugee, African, traumatised) rather than *how* they could successfully carry out the job role. Of the multiple calls these employers made, not one resulted in an interview. Only four of the twenty-four participants in this study have permanent job postings (remaining mindful that they are community leaders and some of the most fluent and best educated members of their community).

Experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion are a common theme expressed throughout the multiple interactions of this study. What makes resettlement different from forced migration contexts, to a degree, is that many people have opened themselves (even embraced) to the hope that their lives will be markedly better when they can finally address the social and situational expressions of trauma. Australia, as a utopian construct in refugee camps, has been presented as a land of golden opportunities where everyone can find riches almost beyond the imagination. Such discourses are supported in American popular culture, evident in rap videos that embody rampant materialism, the ‘pull yourself up by your own bootstraps’ folklore of capitalist enterprise, and the Western promise of the market’s unbiased hand. These discourses fail to acknowledge the lack of employment opportunities, experiences of discrimination and the educational obstacles that Southern Sudanese refugees experience in Australia. Human rights are not relative. Thus, saying that life in Australia is better than the camp does little to think through the lived experience of oppression with multiple ascribed discriminations (refugee, trauma, African). The exclusionary practices embodied by racism and discrimination impact directly on the situational domains of being able to access education/job skill trainings and find meaningful employment. This discussion will be expanded further in Chapter 8 when theories of recognition and redistribution help marcate what is at stake for refugee communities in resettlement contexts.

## **Summary**

This chapter has outlined the expressions of trauma in forced migration and resettlement contexts. Initially, the research question meant to focus around the responses to trauma from forced migration but participants and the community repeatedly highlighted the

importance of resettlement. In fact, one of the main reasons participants chose to take part in the research was to have a voice in contemporary situations. Grounded theory was thus an apt methodology because it provided a process for following the data from beginning to end and modifying the research inquiry accordingly. Hence, understandings of trauma have been discussed within both forced migration and resettlement contexts. The discussion shows that while the circumstantial elements between these two contexts are very different, the social and situational expressions about trauma often remain similar. Overall, understandings of trauma can be summarised as follows:

- Trauma is a word highly familiar to participants – in many respects it represents a ‘currency’ that has helped them lay claims for recognition (entry into camps, refugee status determination and access to services in Australia)
- Participants most often situate expressions of trauma within the social and situational domains in which there are limited opportunities to contribute to their own community’s wellbeing and that of the greater society
- The social domains of trauma are primarily defined through parental separation but also include considerations of family and community dislocation
- The situational domains of trauma are expressed through educational limitations and few opportunities for meaningful employment – both of which participants identify as indicators for self-determination
- The resettlement experience can be just as (if not even more so) traumatising as forced migration due to negotiating a new social reality
- The exclusionary experiences of racism and discrimination exacerbate the social and situational expressions of trauma, and represent the only time participants spoke about feelings of hopelessness
- Navigating a new social reality in resettlement contexts highlights the difficulties of finding a workable synthesis between one’s past and present.

Whilst acknowledging that the associated impacts of trauma on people’s wellbeing are important areas of inquiry, there is a stronger call to examine refugee lives beyond the purviews of trauma-dominated perspectives. Such a shift helps traverse past victimised and pathologised vantage points towards other alternatives whereby people with refugee status can be seen as agents who are capable of making meaningful contributions to Australian society (see also Bracken et al., 1997; Pupavac, 2008; Summerfield, 1999b;

Westoby and Ingamells, 2009).

This chapter has detailed Sudanese expressions and conceptualisations of trauma, and builds on an awareness of the power of their stories. This understanding is buttressed by the participants' responses, which establish forms of healing, resistance and survival distinct from the trauma story itself. These participant responses to trauma are the focus of the next chapter. The theorisation resulting from the grounded analysis that has emerged from the researcher's in-depth interactions with the community is placed next to the extant literature and theoretical perspectives in Chapters 7 and 8.

# Chapter 6

## Responding to Trauma

In the same way that trauma does not happen in a vacuum, neither does healing.  
(Aroche and Coello, 2004: 59)

### Introduction

This chapter focuses upon how Sudanese participants respond to trauma. As with other chapters, it is divided into parts. Part one documents the sources of healing and resistance associated with experiences of trauma within forced migration and resettlement contexts.<sup>49</sup> The dimensions of responses, like the expressions of trauma, are discussed within the different domains of ‘social connectedness’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘having agency’, and a sense of ‘spirituality’. Participants speak of how these domains help embody notions of hope, whether it has been walking across an African desert, living in a refugee camp or finding pathways to participate as a peer in Australian society.

Part two locates the multiple roles of professionals outside the Sudanese community to further illuminate what is helpful in resettlement contexts. Central to this analysis is an engagement with the value of talking about traumatic experiences as an approach to recovering from trauma. Participants generally note the benefits of sharing their stories with others provided these conversations are conducted in safe and resonant ways. They also acknowledge how outside professionals can work alongside the Sudanese community more effectively by addressing concerns that relate to issues such as employment, education and initiatives that build community capacity. This section is critical because it provides the justification for increasing not only the capacity of the Sudanese community but also those who work around and within it.

It is important to acknowledge that documenting participant responses to trauma is not meant to trivialise or minimise the challenges and adversities associated with forced migration and resettlement. There is no panacea to resolve the pain or suffering related

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<sup>49</sup> The second part of this chapter is informed through Marlowe (2009c).

to the multiplicity of refugee journeys and challenges, but the following participant's experiences of the effects of trauma show how, it can be difficult to recover from the associated 'wounds':<sup>50</sup>

*The war has had so many affects in our community. War is really very destructive, it has destroyed lives. What I mean by destructive is not just by the buildings but it actually destroys lives... It is not easy to heal those wounds. People who have seen their fathers killed in front of them or their mothers or their kids dying from hunger. Those wounds are really hard to be healed... It is not easy to imagine how destructive war is. (Participant 8)*

Whilst this man maintains that it is not easy to heal from significant trauma, every participant's narrative offers insight into pathways of healing, recovery, resistance and survival. All experiences associated with trauma should be validated and dignified, as should people's responses. This chapter aims to do this while providing a platform to look beyond the participants' experiences.

Similar to the previous chapter, here I will focus primarily upon an emergent and grounded analysis from in-depth interactions with the community and participants rather than employing interpretative frameworks or existing social theories. In the following chapters, extant theory that has 'earned' its way into the data will be used to abstract and theorise the study's implications more broadly.

## **PART ONE: Responding to Trauma and Locating Hope**

These men's narratives presented in this part of the chapter are representative of most responses within the primary domains of social connectedness, maintaining agency (often through education and employment) and having a sense of spirituality.<sup>51</sup> Participants relate to these three domains as areas that foster hope – something that is a key mediating factor for responding to traumatic events. The strength of these domains is demonstrated in the following transcript from one participant who speaks about what advice he would give someone who had been through similar experiences to assist them

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<sup>50</sup> The words 'healing' and 'recovery' are again not meant to suggest an *a priori* view that there is something either in the person's body or psyche that needs fixing. These words are understood within social, cultural and spiritual traditions that sit outside a medicalised view.

<sup>51</sup> Chapter Six will present the participant voices to present their responses to trauma. Chapter Seven highlights the complexity of these responses in a broader context by discussing how these relate more broadly to youth culture and gender relations.

to recover from trauma:

*Pray to God, remember your parents, go to school. If you go to school, you will learn and become a good person. (Participant 12)*

Participants note how the domains of the social, spiritual and agential help embody and embed notions of hope arising from adverse situations. In forced migration experiences, hope was something that helped participants place one foot in front of the other as they crossed expansive deserts and lived in refugee camps. The hope of increased agency through education and employment in resettlement contexts assisted participants to address the situational and social expressions of trauma mentioned in Chapter 5. Several of the men mention the *in vivo* concept of *placing hope in front of you* as a way to cope with difficult situations or events. Numerous other studies highlight the importance of hope in Sudanese lives (Goodman, 2004; Khawaja et al., 2008; Luster et al., 2009).

Whilst the three domains are discussed separately, it must be stressed that they interact in complex ways, as evident from the following quote, in which a participant talks about the educative centres that help his people move past traumatic experiences:

*So we are looking at three areas of what I call educative centres. One I call the parents, the second from the biblical teachings and the third is from education. And all three have really impacted upon me and have shaped the way that I look at things and the way I perceive things. All these three areas have made me as a person. And all of this has helped me to, you know, live in harmony. (Participant 21)*

These educative centres provide direction for the Sudanese community to respond actively to trauma and adversity. Responses such as placing faith in Jesus, following parent teachings, pursuing an education and surrounding oneself with community are identified as critical elements for healing and survival in the numerous contexts that characterise the diaspora of the participants' lives, both past and present. The concept of hope remains highly salient within the social, spiritual and agential domains that follow.

### **SOCIAL DOMAIN: Two Hands Clap Together, One Hand Cannot**

Chapter 5 demonstrated that Sudanese participant expressions of trauma often were communicated through social domains in which being separated from loved ones was expressed as a disease and an ongoing source of distress. In response, several

participants state that being with other members of the Sudanese community helps to alleviate the associated symptoms. It follows that the way these men respond to social expressions of trauma is often through social processes. As established in Chapter 5, the word ‘social’ within this study is understood as the collective, connected and interpersonal relations with others. Similar studies with resettling Sudanese communities also document the important local and endogenous social roles of healing (Khawaja et al., 2008; Westoby, 2008, 2009). A participant speaks about the importance of having people around him to negotiate difficult situations:

*What I think can help me is to have a relationship with other people. But I can't help by myself alone... Why? It is because – one hand cannot clap, but two hands can clap themselves. What I mean by that is when we meet or do something, nothing difficult for two or three people to take this. (Participant 11)*

Sudanese hands are brought together in a multitude of ways through the social functions and associated knowledge located within the community milieu, familial relations and support from elders. These social spaces are now discussed separately.

### **Community – a problem shared is a problem halved**

The community presents a clear pathway of responding to trauma, as its members often rally around each other to provide mutual support. This social connection was highly evident at community events in which the group helps to shoulder the burden of individual difficulties:

*So problems become a shared kind of community problem so it is not an individual problem. When you take problem from an individual problem to a community problem, you have lessened that effect of it. (Participant 24)*

This collective value is evidenced by a Sudanese proverb repeated in interviews and at community events: *A problem shared is a problem halved*. Respondents consistently maintain the value of community with respect to resolving problems and spending time together as a resonant approach to mediating trauma. Another participant emphasises that a conclusion is not recognised as valid if it is not generally supported by the group.

As outlined in Chapter 3, most participants are seen as leaders within their community. Interviews with these men were frequently interrupted by phone calls, and almost half

of all interviews were cancelled and rescheduled as participants responded to the immediacy of what was happening in the community:

*If you come to our community, you will see we live as a community.  
(Participant 6)*

*The community is helpful. Because at least we can get together on big days. We can celebrate and do activities on big days like Christmas and New Year. Yeah we are being together. That's the most [important] thing. (Participant 7)*

Westoby's (2008, 2009) study with another Sudanese community in Australia maintains that their distress is often situated within the social milieu and that the associated pathways to healing are through social processes (see also Khawaja et al., 2008; Stoll and Johnson, 2007). McMichael and Manderson (2004) also suggest that the protective factors of family and community social support can help mediate the experiences of past violence. The importance of community connection is illustrated by one of this study's participants, who notes the social and supportive function of community:

*Our saying that we have in Dinka – we always say, “No one can bury themselves.” That means even though you are poor, you will still be buried by other people. You always seek help from other people. (Participant 11)*

Knowing that community support is available during hard times serves a vital role in giving people confidence that they need not face future difficulties alone. This knowledge underpins the expression *putting hope in front of you*; an expression that demonstrates the importance of acknowledging people's endogenous, traditional and local pathways for resolving challenges. Many times I observed the community's ability to respond to difficulties situated in both the past and present. A quote illustrating the importance of community and associated relationships comes from Participant 4:

*What I think happened is, since we are part of a community, we tend to work together. Yeah, sometimes we are close together we are always talking and always chatting and then it gives fairly limited room for the brain to start wondering into some funny, funny things. So it is like being culturally close.  
(Participant 4)*

Here, the traumas of the past are partly resolved by maintaining a cultural connection with community members. As one participant acknowledges, people define themselves

through their relationships with others:

*I will take you back a bit for our society – we are being a community. **Being together.** So like, I think you witnessed it one day [referring to a mourning ceremony for a community member], and I think that now for most of your time when you go where there are Sudanese, you will see that they are together. So, we are... **we are being found with relationships and these relationships – this is the value for our lives.** (Participant 6)*

These comments are bolstered by fieldwork observations at community mourning events where there were multiple mattresses lying on the floor and women were cooking for almost 100 people, with children running in every direction. A number of these people would remain in the person's home and sleep there to ensure that the person was never alone in the early stages of a major loss. On many levels, the community responds as a given rather than from a special request. The expressions of trauma in Chapter 5 were often of a social nature. In response, the community provides a resonant social pathway for working through major difficulties and obstacles.

### **Family – extending the collective**

Family also provides a resonant response by keeping one busy and preventing a person from dwelling upon the effects or experiences of trauma. Many participants maintain that family serves a critical role in being able to discuss issues that are considered taboo in Sudanese culture and wider community forums. Experiences such as torture, rape and active membership in the armed resistance can be difficult to discuss within the community. The threat of ostracism arising from discussing such experiences is well documented in the literature (see Wessells, 2008). However, several participants note that family can help overcome these taboos because the associated issues are kept personal and relatively private. The importance of family is demonstrated by the following input from a participant, who acknowledges the critical role his aunt played in helping him navigate experiences he identified as being particularly sensitive:

*She guided me you know and said, “We have to find a way out of here so that you can continue your study. And one day you will be alright and you will be able to help your people who are in the war and fighting and all that.” And she said that I can be a better person and yes, I can do this. And every time, if I am feeling down I just keep telling myself, “Yep, I can do this. I can overcome my problems.” My mother's sister, we don't call her auntie. We call her mother. So you go and explain the issue to them and they will **intervene in the right way.** And also, they come and spend time with each other. When it comes to a*

*problem like when there is a grief or someone who dies in the family, the people come together and the relatives may stay with that person sometimes for more than a month. (Participant 10)*

The focus upon intervening ‘in the right way’ is important. It refers to social responses that provide a direction forward, potentially reducing the likelihood of re-traumatisation or of one’s experiences being invalidated or rejected. Many of the Sudanese participants’ families evidence extended and collective elements. In numerous discussions, their definition of family often extends to, and incorporates neighbours and close members of the community (see Stoll and Johnson, 2007: 625). This flexibility and acknowledgement of family highlights its important role in social functions. In particular, many Sudanese people state that notions of honour and shame can be transgenerational – the actions of one’s parents and grandparents are attributed to relatives and children.<sup>52</sup> Within these understandings, a Sudanese person must remain cautious about their actions or utterances, as the wider community may interpret these as defiling. Keeping such stories within the family provides a culturally resonant and safer way to work through any experiences that may be harmful to social relations.

### **The role of elders – wisdom and bringing the collective together**

Elders play an important role within the Sudanese community. In particular, elders’ involvement in educating the community, knowing through experience and maintaining culture are important roles that foster a cohesive community structure during difficult and joyous times. In this study, elders also performed a gatekeeper role in my accessing of potential participants (see Chapter Two). A number of participants acknowledge the importance of elders:

*We have social gatherings and the elders, they try to counsel. For those who have lost their parents, an elder will come around and counsel that person. They gather around and we mourn together. We do not leave it him, we do it together. We mourn together for a week or until the person is settled. (Participant 2)*

And:

*The elders are comparing difficult life and good life. So, we really find actually that the elders are supporting people according to our culture. And even they are giving very strong advice when you go to another country that you should*

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<sup>52</sup> Kirmayer (2007a) provides a related account of transgenerational trauma where the experiences, actions and history of one generation are passed on to another.

*understand the way of life there in order to fit in with people. (Participant 11)*  
This demonstrates how the parental functions can be transferred and disseminated through the elders. In resettlement contexts, where a significant number of participants have lost their parents from civil war and associated poor living conditions, having elders to bring people together and impart their wisdom serves an invaluable function in the resettlement context. As expressed by one elder:

*In our culture, if somebody is in difficulty, I am going to have to intervene to help. It is culture actually if there is a small boy wandering around here, I cannot sit just allowing him to do bad things. I have a responsibility as an elder and maybe punish him or her and tell them to not do that thing. And the parent will not feel unhappy about it. They will feel happy about it because that is education. (Participant 5)*

Thus, elders can serve a role in providing a context for one's situation in resettlement and help a person negotiate a workable synthesis of one's past with the present. The relationship between the past and present will be further discussed in Chapter 7, which explores the role of hybridity, identity and culture to illustrate the 'walking the line' metaphor associated with resettlement.

Whilst the responses from community, family and elders highlight the importance of the interconnected and collective elements, these social structures should not be romanticised. Several authors write about the downside of social capital and how local community structures can be uncompromising, unhelpful and potentially oppressive (Simich, 2004; Stoll and Johnson, 2007; Wessells, 2007; Westoby, 2009).<sup>53</sup> Later in this chapter and the ones that follow, I problematise similar discourses around trauma, community and healing.

### **SPIRITUAL DOMAIN: A Spirit Working in the Air**

The second major pathway for responding to trauma is through one's spirituality.<sup>54</sup> Many people in Southern Sudan are Christians, and more than 90 percent of participants identify as being Christian. A significant part of the fieldwork was conducted in churches and in numerous social events often following these gatherings. Generally,

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<sup>53</sup> Stoll and Johnson (2007) and Simich (2004) in particular illustrate how Sudanese elder structures can be excessively rigid.

<sup>54</sup> The term 'spirituality' was chosen over 'religiosity' even though the predominant expressions related to Christianity, as others spoke about spirituality in Dinka terms. To encompass both considerations, spirituality is a more inclusive term.

spirituality is either strongly emphasised in a participant's narrative as being a helpful response or it is absent. More than half the participants make direct references to how Christianity and a faith in God help them to respond to adversities in both forced migration and current resettlement contexts. This domain assists participants in the following ways:

- (1) Transcending conflict and suffering;
- (2) Fostering hope;
- (3) Receiving direction from the Bible; and
- (4) Creating social connectedness and cohesion.

These four considerations were initially identified as focused codes and elevated to categories to help theorise how spirituality helps Sudanese men respond to trauma. Boehnlein (2007: 261) summarises the works of Geertz (1973, 1983) to acknowledge the importance of religion in the aftermath of trauma:

From the perspective of the individual as part of a social unit, religion serves as a source of conceptions of the world, the self, and the relations between them... It also incorporates ultimate values and meanings that inform life.

Seen in this way, the religious and spiritual provides an interpretive framework for a meaningful relationship between individuals, communities and the broader social world. Several participants speak about how religious words entered their hearts and helped them to maintain hope, or *put hope in front of you* during experiences of overwhelming adversity. Similarly, Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003) acknowledge that religious beliefs contribute to an approach towards enduring one's suffering with the hope of finding a better day tomorrow (including as an afterlife). Khawaja et al.'s (2008) study found that the most commonly preferred coping strategy for Sudanese refugees in Australia to deal with difficult experiences was religious practices and beliefs (see also Stoll and Johnson, 2007). This is borne out in this study, as illustrated by one participant speaking about how having religion kept him alive in the refugee camps:

*JM: Would these experiences that you had back in Sudan, would they have been different for you if you had not had your religion?*

*Yes, definitely, yes very different.*

*JM: How different would you say?*

*It would be different because religion has got strong rules that can guide you without somebody watching you over. Without police without security. It will work automatic with nothing. It is a spirit working in the air. (Participant 3)*

The 'spirit working in the air' provides a context for one's life beyond the sufferings associated with so many Sudanese journeys. Those who identify with having God/Jesus as their companion and receiving direction from the Bible note how their associated faith offers direction in situations that border on the absurd in refugee camp life and the challenges of negotiating a new social reality in resettlement.

### **Transcending suffering, fostering hope and following the Bible**

Numerous participants identify having a sense of a divine overseer and being part of a grander spiritual narrative as pathways to mediate experiences of trauma and transcend the immediacy of suffering and conflict. The stories of forced marches, escaping lions, eating leaves off trees and the atrocities associated with political terror could bring a sense of absurdity into one's life. How does one explain what Arendt (1963) refers to as the 'banality of evil'? What are the conditions that can create an environment where people can cause the profound suffering of so many others? This question is asked within a number of contexts and vantage points from writers such as Primo Levy (1996), Rigoberta Menchu (1983) and Viktor Frankl (1964). Within this study, the male participants acknowledge that their spirituality fosters hope and provides a meaningful framework to live their lives honourably despite situations or experiences of destitution, distress and despair.

Receiving direction from the Bible helped these participants respond to crises in ways that help them transcend the suffering of the present and past. They identify that the lessons within the Bible provide a 'higher order' frame of reference, including what it means to live a good life and to realise salvation. Numerous participants acknowledge that these spiritual groundings and having a belief that one is part of God's greater plan assisted them to maintain hope throughout their forced migration and resettlement journeys.

*I don't lose hope. Because I know God will help me out in any situation that I find myself. I should not be disappointed. Even though I might be disappointed, I know that one day one time that I feel happy. And I take that as a part of life. Life is not sweet all the time. (Participant 17)*

*Because during the war, our people really were praying to God because it was the only hope for our people. We did not have any other hope. Follow Jesus, pray to God and God will at least one day will save us from our suffering and help them. So it was really helpful to us to pray to God and it was our only hope. (Participant 12)*

More than half of all participants signal a belief that suffering is a test which represents part of the human condition whereby, if one is able to endure difficulties, there will be better days in the future. Participants emphasise that this sense of spirituality or religiosity continues to serve a critical purpose in steering them away from existential despair.

### **Spiritual gatherings – reinforcing social connectedness**

Maintaining a sense of spirituality has been helpful in keeping people socially connected to others, and relates back to the first social domain presented. Attending numerous Sudanese church services highlighted the social function of such gatherings. Interview participants emphasise the importance of having the church as something that can aid the healing process by serving as a primary means of connecting people both within and outside the Sudanese community. In Sudan, participants note that everyone knows their neighbour and that these people are treated as family. This situation differs in Adelaide where one may not even know the first name of the people living nearby, and the Sudanese community is dispersed across a number of Adelaide suburbs. Thus, the church provides a consistent meeting place for people to gather, worship and socialise. Several participants speak about how the church provides an important link to meeting people within and beyond the Sudanese community:

*Well, during that time, I was new in the country [Australia]. I used to go to the church more frequently. Because there was no community at that time, very, very few people. So, some of the friends that I have were of the church. And I think that it gave me the strength and it sustained me until my family came, and until I had more and more friends. (Participant 14)*

Numerous other participants stress that interacting with the wider Australian community

in normal contexts (riding the bus, seeing a neighbour, attending school) is very difficult. However, the church environment seems to negotiate or shrink this distance, enabling participants to meet people outside their community.

*Now because of the religion, I become familiar to Australians, now I become social. Any social contact with white people that I know because I don't feel like shy that I do not speak English. With the little English I have, I can say "Hi" and just go and start talking to someone. So, I feel comfortable and just happy.  
(Participant 3)*

This comment reflects a desire for increased interaction with the wider Australian community and highlights participants' interest in broadening their social connectedness. This interaction can also contribute to reducing stereotypes and discrimination. It enables people to view refugee lives beyond sensationalised accounts of trauma and 'othering' discourses. Everyday interactions challenge such discourses by helping people consider what they share in common. Discussion of this point represents a major focus of Chapter 8.

As in other studies of Sudanese and other East African refugees, this commentary demonstrates that religious or spiritual practices and beliefs (prayer, feeling part of God's plan, living a good/moral life and the hope of salvation) help mediate the suffering associated with forced migration (Brune et al., 2002; Halcón et al., 2004; Holtz, 1998; Khawaja et al., 2008; Stoll and Johnson, 2007). It is worth noting again that participants either strongly emphasise their spiritual practices or these are absent within their narratives. Similar to the social responses to trauma discussed previously, considerations of the spiritual cannot be reified or seen as a panacea to the multiplicity of refugee lives.

### **AGENTIAL DOMAIN: Commitment and Struggle**

The situational domains of life in refugee camps, lacking an overall sense of agency and having few opportunities to pursue an education/employment have been some of the most common expressions of trauma (as discussed in Chapter 5). Similarly, participants identify realising personal agency through education and employment as the most healing action. These agential markers provide greater opportunities to contribute to self, family and community wellbeing. Personal agency instils the hope that future opportunities are possible despite past and present obstacles:

*Well, keeping [hope] constant in the sense that I looked at myself as a person who was resourceful in the first place. And through all of that, I had no opportunity to use my personal resources or contribute but through that hope – I believed that I had something to offer – it kept me going. (Participant 23)*

This one example from many demonstrates that having the belief one has something to offer and the hope to contribute in the future sustains the person through harrowing experiences. Participants identify the following agential considerations of work and education as related pathways to self-determination and fostering hope.

### **Work – contributing to society and family**

One of the most traumatic experiences for Sudanese participants was the lack of agency in both the camps and resettlement contexts. These situational expressions of trauma challenge their sense of self-concept as providers for family and community wellbeing. Correspondingly, a participant maintains that opportunities for employment and self-determination are pathways to address these challenges:

*I think for us in this world is that we probably would recover [from traumatic experiences] more quickly if we had jobs you see. One of the requirements for people to forget, or not forget but to put aside all the experiences of past difficulties is when you are constantly engaged and when you are doing something that will help yourself and helping others. But if you don't, if you are not employed and you feel that you are depending upon other people and Centrelink sends letters every fortnight and you are asked to report and so on and so on. Then, you will feel intimidated and sometimes that one will remind you of your life when it was not good and what you have gone through. But work is rewarding because it will help in many things. (Participant 19)*

Here, gainful employment relates to one's capacity to help oneself and others – it is a direct link to agency and provides alternatives to dwelling on traumatic experiences. The critique outlined in Chapter 4 demonstrated that trauma-dominated perspectives, looking into negative mental health outcomes, can encompass people within a pathologised and victimised master status of 'refugee'. This master status, if ascribed, predictably limits the opportunities for meaningful employment and social engagement in resettlement contexts (see Chapter 8). One participant notes how a particular refugee camp made greater efforts to let those living there have opportunities for self-determination and agency:

*Kigodongo camp was the best camp, the Masindi camp in Uganda. And the life of people, they were very happy. Because these people were given the land and then they asked the elders and planned together and said, “What do you want us to do for you?” And they said, “Look, we are people who can cultivate, give us land and give us six months and you will see us surviving and we will be ok. We do not just want your food.” And in six months time, they were sending their maize to the cities in Uganda and the government and feeding the nation. They were sending to areas where people needed food. (Participant 22)*

The men seem to have a clear expectation that they are the financial supporters and providers for their family (see Chapter 7). Opportunities for self-determination and participation within the broader public sphere may help transform a prevailing discourse of refugees from burdens and victims towards recognising them as peers who are capable of making meaningful contributions to Australian society. Such a shift could go a long way to providing agential paths to recovery through increasingly inclusive public spaces that include employment.

### **Education – pursuing one’s vision**

Another helpful pathway participants emphasise in both forced migration and resettlement contexts is having an education, including the hope of acquiring one. Participants who identify as being one of the ‘Lost Boys’ state that they made their way to Ethiopia partly with the hope of finding an education. Others speak of how this hope helps them to understand the nature of Sudan’s civil wars in broader contexts. One man relates to a notion of *commitment and struggle*, where he went to great lengths to pursue an education at Kakuma refugee camp:

*There was no water for me, no water to drink and I had to travel [by foot]... this is how I did my education. This is the way that I begun. For me it is about a commitment and a struggle. Yeah. Commitment and a struggle. When you struggle for something it needs commitment and commitment needs to be strong and hard also. When I was studying this education it looked like a dream. And now, it is not too bad for me... and I will still keep going. (Participant 11)*

In response to the question about their vision, almost all respondents note the value of education and their desire to use their skills to contribute to the Sudanese community and wider society. They also voice their goals of trying to educate their community better, and possibly returning to Sudan one day for the same purpose. In this respect, having an education represents the hope of creating a better tomorrow. The constant

goal of education is illustrated by the following transcript, in which a participant speaks of this process of educating others in the refugee camps:

*In times of... let's say that we were fearing, our hope was important and we hoped that our situation would change that it was not the end of the world. It was only the end of the journey. I was constantly hoping that one day one time that we would get somewhere when everything would be fine. I was even hoping that one day that we could educate people and that things could change. And that hope was constant. It was constant. (Participant 23)*

Receiving an education not only provides a broader perspective on the civil war but it means that the Southern Sudanese history will not be lost. As stated in Chapter 1, the word 'refugee' is a painful but important term for participants. It provides the historical contexts that brought them to Australia and serves as a reminder of those who have died and those still living in Africa.

### **Forgetting: Thinking Critically about Participant Responses**

Forgetting is an *in vivo* concept that most participants speak about in terms of recovering from experiences of trauma. Upon further exploration of what 'forgetting' actually means, it became clear that it is not just a process of denial or completely erasing traumatic memories. A number of men note that there are some experiences burned into their memory. They mention that it is possible to distract oneself from traumas of the past but some of these experiences will always be there, highlighting the extreme adversity faced by so many. This commentary reinforces notions where the ideas of repressing trauma, not talking about it and distraction come to the fore.

Participant narratives and community interactions highlight that the process of forgetting can be achieved through the social, spiritual and agential domains discussed above. For example, participants speak about forgetting through religion as something that helps mediate the difficulties of traumatic past memories:

*Yes, because of the religion now, I can forget. I can forget. I can forget. Because if I pray, these wrong ideas that happened to me before, they make my heart pain, so because of the religion I feel alright. (Participant 3)*

And:

*Because of religion and God, sometimes music helps. That friend of mine, he talk to me about the war. It make to forget what I have experienced. So I was*

*very pleased with that pastor. So I say thank you very much because he himself, with those spiritual words that come from his mouth, it helps me a lot. Nowadays, I am able to forget myself what happened. (Participant 12)*

The notion of forgetting through education also is mentioned as an agential domain. A participant notes how some members of the Sudanese community are angry because of the injustices associated with camp life, and then speaks about how people are able to forget these experiences through education:

*JM: So these people are angry because being in these camps was a humiliating experience?*

*Yes it was.*

*JM: How was it that these people might go about forgetting about these things?*

*Some continue to remember and some flashback comes to them. But for some of them it goes quickly. But the more educated you are the more quickly you forget about that. You just find a way to unblock that. But others it takes a long time to work through it. (Participant 13)*

Another participant relates forgetting to the necessity of having meaningful work so one can contribute to family and community wellbeing:

*Yeah, yeah. And I think for us in this world is that we probably would recover more quickly if we had jobs you see. One of the requirements for people to forget, or not forget but to put aside all the experiences of past difficulties is when you are constantly engaged and when you are doing something that will help yourself and helping others. (Participant 19)*

These quotes illustrate how the lack of agency (through education or employment) directly relates to being ‘humiliated’ – a common expression from life in refugee camps. These situational expressions of trauma, as presented in Chapter 5, can be addressed partly through agential opportunities in resettlement contexts. Other participants speak of forgetting within social domains:

*Yeah actually, when bad things happen or I think about them, I go to a friend and we go and play chess. It lets me forget. It gives me some time to forget and then we talk and then we laugh. Then I can forget about it and that is how I manage it. So I go and play chess and spend the day there. (Participant 9)*

And:

*We compare. We come together. So, we have conversations. We forget it and feel refreshed. (Participant 16)*

Overall, forgetting does not suggest a process of solely suppressing the past. Rather, it represents the power of social, spiritual and agential domains to help people work through experiences of trauma. The participants' comments further highlight the Sudanese community's diverse knowledge and abilities it uses to locate its own resonant and effective pathways to healing and recovery. This analysis is elaborated further in Part two, which discusses psychological and practical outcomes.

## **PART TWO: Professional Practice and Engaging Trauma**

This discussion uses the word 'professionals' to describe people who are employed as social workers, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists and other allied health fields.<sup>55</sup> This word is what participants most often use to describe people outside the community who work alongside them. The role of professionals outside the community has been absent in the Sudanese participants' narratives so far. Whilst participants acknowledge that professionals can play an important role within their community, they also speak critically about their interactions with Western-based counselling approaches. Thus, it was important to explore, from participants' perspectives, what professionals could do that would be helpful. Related to this discussion is the emphasis on talk-based therapies, as introduced in Chapter 4. Participants were asked a key question: Does speaking about trauma lead to healing? The following discussion critiques the value of talk-based therapies on the basis of participants' responses to the above question. Most participants note the value in sharing one's difficulties, but state that talking about traumatic experiences is not usually done with a professional; it is done with someone from their own community. This highlights again the social domain of healing. In response to this commentary, Part two concludes with a discussion on *practical* and *psychological* outcomes, and emphasises the necessity of thinking critically about both types of

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<sup>55</sup> In the contexts of this chapter, participants are referring to 'professionals' as people predominantly with Western-based training. It is recognised, of course, that when this term is used more broadly there are numerous contexts (educational, cultural, social, spiritual) in which people can be trained professionals.

outcome in professional practice.

### **Building and bridging relationships**

Several participants state that Western counselling generally is not relevant because it does not focus enough on relationship building. Participants emphasise that counsellors can be more helpful when they try to form relationships with the people with whom they are working and do not rush into talking about traumatic experiences. Most participants acknowledge that counselling and social support structures in Africa are different from Australia. In resettlement contexts, they emphasise that further assistance would be helpful in navigating the different types of services offered by the government and NGOs:

*We usually can solve our issues alone but if we can't, then your people can be involved. Some of us understand that. (Participant 20)*

Participants stress the importance of building a relationship so that the person knows who they are working with and can establish trust.<sup>56</sup> Again, this analysis highlights the importance of social connectedness predicated on a relationship. The fact that to access a participant interview required 15-20 hours of fieldwork further evidences the importance of spending time with this community and having a sincere interest in their lives:

*I think I prefer if the worker was to approach them in the community. If you work in the community and you are there, then they know you and they can meet with you. If they really want to meet with you, they can always ring. Once they know you, they can meet with you. (Participant 22)*

Turning to more system-focused issues, participants demonstrated that they are also aware of how broader government and institutional systems impact their lives. For example, numerous participants stress a desire that, when possible, it would be helpful to have a better relationship with the police by finding ways of working collaboratively to resolve community-, family- and individual-based issues. They note that this engagement could make the working relationship with the community far stronger and

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<sup>56</sup> Such conclusions are supported in much of the interpersonal social work literature. See Fischer (1978) Hepworth and Larsen (1986), Lee (1994) and Shulman (2006). These authors have a strong influence from Carl Rogers' (1951, 1961, 1968) client centred approach.

its members increasingly receptive to police presence. Whether it is working with police, child protection, health care professionals or community development workers, the participants continuously emphasise the benefits of building relationships that can lead to a bridging of understandings.<sup>57</sup> One of the primary reasons the men decided to participate in this study was to bridge understandings between their community and wider Australian society. As an experienced social worker and researcher, I have no doubt that solidarity helps us all to deal with social issues and manifestations of oppression – whether it is as social work professionals or members of a particular community. Participants in this study, while recognising that the Southern Sudanese community has its own tools and approaches towards recovery, also acknowledge how outside professional bodies can help address the structural inequities sometimes associated with resettlement.

### **Talking about trauma – ‘going slowly slowly’**

Recognising the debates around the necessity of speaking about traumatic events as presented in Chapter 4, Sudanese participants, almost without exception, maintain the value of talking about one’s experiences as being potentially healing or cathartic. Several participants acknowledge how speaking about traumatic experiences can be a ‘release’. However, who one talks to, where such stories are shared and about what specific content are deeper questions that require further consideration.

Trauma arising from forced migration can have a silencing nature. The experiences of torture, extreme deprivation and violence can disrupt the social fabric of families and communities. Such experiences are effective weapons of war that can provide a lasting and powerful effect because of the associated taboos, shame and feelings of guilt. It is not too surprising then that participants note that it is easier to talk about experiences which are commonly shared by many members of the community; experiences such as going without food, forced marches and being separated from loved ones. Other experiences, however, are more difficult to relate, leading to the question: Is there value in talking about these experiences? Participants generally emphasise again that sharing experiences of a taboo nature can be helpful, even cathartic, but also stress the importance of trust and having a relationship with the listener. This conclusion returns to the participant concept of *going slowly slowly*, in which it is possible to gradually

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<sup>57</sup> The relationship between the Sudanese community and professional bodies such as the police and child protection authorities is discussed further in Chapter 7.

move into stories of profound significance. A number of participants are quick to caution that sharing these experiences can be potentially damaging if not done carefully and respectfully. The following discussion examine situations where speaking about traumatic experiences is helpful and unhelpful.

### **Speaking as HELPFUL – notions of catharsis**

Overall, the men's narratives primarily suggest that sharing one's experience with another person is helpful, provided it is shared with someone they trust and in a culturally resonant context. This is highlighted in a participant's account of his involvement in assisting Sudanese children who were living in refugee camps to discuss traumatic experiences within safe environments:

*One of the things that I discovered when I was with the children; especially those who were traumatised – **after exposing what they were faced with and discussing it with others, that was a time that relief came to them.***

*JM: When they discussed it with others?*

*When they discussed it with others. So it is the same thing that I have adopted. If I have a problem, what I will do first is that I will discuss it with my age group. One or two people. To analyse the issue what it is. (Participant 21)*

Whilst several men emphasise the dangers of speaking about one's difficulties (both social and psychological), there seems to be a general consensus that speaking with friends, family or community one trusts is of benefit (as highlighted through the social domains presented in Part one). Most participants agree that some people may choose to stay quiet about their difficulties, especially if these are of a highly personal nature (e.g. torture, rape or being a child soldier). However, if it is something experienced by the community more generally, it is more appropriate to talk about it:

*The Southern Sudanese are more likely to talk about their problem if it affects many, but when it comes to a personal problem or a family problem like something to do with rape, something to do with other things – they would prefer to keep that one to themselves because that is too personal. (Participant 19)*

Even with considerations of transgenerational defiling (mentioned earlier in this chapter), there are pathways to discussing particularly taboo issues. Numerous participants express the importance of 'releasing', based on the idea that finding an

appropriate pathway to release past traumas can help resolve the anger, frustration and despair associated with such experiences. One man comments upon how the denial of a traumatic experience is not a long-term solution:

*What I mean like you know, some people they hide whatever they experience and they don't tell people about it. You ask if this happened and they would be like, "Nope." If someone or whatever shot him with a gun, or he saw his mum dying in front of him or something like that. He just would not forget about it. And in fact, it is really inside him. It is still in there. (Participant 10)*

These comments generally concur with Western ideas that suppressing one's negative experiences is generally unhelpful. Part of this analysis leads to notions of catharsis, in which talking about and sharing one's difficulties is a way of releasing negative experiences. In the case of the study participants, this sharing was usually done with a trusted person who had been through similar experiences. One man relates his experience of supporting friends and family in a refugee camp. He says that once they spoke about some of the difficulties they had endured it was like a weight was lifted from their shoulders. Another participant, downplaying the seriousness of his refugee journey, states:

*I reckon myself that I have not gone through a lot of problems hearing the stories from other [Sudanese] people. But as a human being, anything that touches you, anything that destructs your thinking, anything that always keep your chest heavy and you can't release it – it is always a burden. (Participant 8)*

Others acknowledge that talking about one's experiences helps keep their history alive for their children and community. It also renders the atrocities and loss of life within the transgenerational resistance honourably visible, and connects people to their historical ways of living and heritage. Several participants note that by sharing one's experiences with the community, healing spaces open for themselves and the community:

*Yes, it is important because when we share our experiences with others, others will learn good things and the different opinions about it – that is good. It is better than to just close up yourself with the feelings that you have and don't want to share them with others. (Participant 17)*

And:

*Yes, if I speak what happened out, then I release it, so I feel free and not feel ashamed. I cannot think about it anymore, so it can help me and it can help others in the future. If somebody has shared in the same thing in the future, you can say “This will happen,” and then they can say, “I might do it like that and I could do it better and it will be alright,” that’s all. (Participant 1)*

It is, however, an overly simplistic and potentially dangerous statement to say that speaking about trauma is necessary to release a burden. To whom a person might speak and under what circumstances must be examined critically. These questions are elucidated further after exploring the other side of sharing one’s story – might such an exercise be unhelpful, inhibit healing or even lead to re-traumatisation?

### **Speaking as UNHELPFUL – the ‘culture of counsellors’**

Participants acknowledge that talking about trauma with a trusted person can be helpful, but the potential for re-traumatisation and misrepresentation places important caveats on when to share such stories and with whom. Participants provide clear statements about the dangers of delving into stories of profound suffering:

*So here, people talk about it but one of the problems is that they might not prefer to talk about it because it will also remind them. And sometimes, it is problem when you talk about how you find yourself here. (Participant 13)*

And:

*I think that if anything, ahhh... this [journey to Kakuma refugee camp] would form some of the core reasons to make me be here in Australia. And umm, it would not be a very good idea for me to go and talk about it in an elaborate way because sometimes it reminds me of some of the bad things that I try to push back. (Participant 4)*

The necessity of speaking about trauma needs further reflection. It can be validating and healing or dangerous and damaging to both social relations and psychological wellbeing. This concern highlights the need to think critically about professional practice and how to work in the best way with resettling populations. A participant notes the importance of relationships and how speaking with an unfamiliar person can make members of the Sudanese community cautious and guarded:

*We don’t have this culture of counsellors or social workers and so on. This is a new thing to us. And sometimes, most our people do not really like to go to these*

*counsellors. After all, they are people who they do not know. And to talk to them about their own problem, they are sometimes very reluctant. (Participant 19)*

The ‘culture of counsellors’ would refer to what Furedi (2004) critiques in Western societies as ‘therapy culture’. Others criticise the dominance of the Western psychological model when used with people who come from very different cultural and historical realities (Bracken et al., 1997; Pupavac, 2002; Summerfield, 1995; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Related to this, a participant speaks of his experience of being hired by a Western NGO to deliver psycho-social interventions in a refugee camp:

*When I was working in Kenya for an NGO<sup>58</sup>, I was working in the capacity of social worker, I do sometimes provide counselling. But counselling was not very much relevant because it was a Western style of managing a problem. So people did not in the short run appreciate the way because the Western way of counselling do not give the ‘helpee’ responsibility of exploring his or her own problem, evaluating and then to choose the alternative solutions. You only as the counsellor, you just maybe offer some kind suggestion from which the client can either choose or not choose. (Participant 24)*

Numerous participants’ reluctance to engage with outside professionals needs acknowledgement. This reluctance, however, is not always the case. Some others recognise that speaking with someone outside their community can be of value, particularly if the issue is considered taboo.<sup>59</sup> In these circumstances, the participant concept of *going slowly slowly* is a helpful construct for delving into such stories. The Sudanese men’s narratives also emphasise that the ‘culture of counsellors’ can play another healing role, particularly when the associated interventions work towards addressing the concerns of daily living, such as suitable housing, education, employment and health care; concerns considered in the spheres of *practical* and *psychological* outcomes.

## **Psychological and practical outcomes**

Recognising the participants’ critical comments about outside professionals, a question that often followed was, What could these professionals do that would be helpful in resettlement? The participants’ passionate answers stimulate a critical engagement with

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<sup>58</sup> The actual international NGO is not disclosed to protect the participant’s identity.

<sup>59</sup> See also Doka’s (1993) related concept of disenfranchised grief presented in Chapter 4.

psychological and practical outcomes. The word ‘psychological’ here refers to professional work that primarily resides in addressing the individual psyche; an issue that exists in a person’s mind. Psychological outcomes in professional domains often require specialised and expert-informed interventions. The word ‘practical’ refers to professional work that primarily tries to address issues that exist outside the psyche, such as housing, employment, family relations and access to education. It is paramount to note that social workers, psychologists and similar professionals can incorporate practical and psychological outcomes. A number of interventions associated with these professions highlight the need to address both the individual and the broader issues. Thus, thinking about psychological and practical outcomes together provides a starting point to think about professional practice that considers the gamut of possibilities instead of dichotomous thinking of one or the other.<sup>60</sup>

Most participants overwhelmingly suggest that professionals could be most helpful by assisting Sudanese people to access practical support. Addressing issues such as access to housing, finding employment, helping their children succeed in school and English language acquisition are concerns that can help members of the Sudanese community find their own solutions and mobilise their own forms of healing and recovery to a greater extent. Pupavac (2002: 499) cites an International Red Cross report where its workers frequently found refugees saying to them, “Give me a roof over my head for the winter, then I will talk to you about psychosocial problems.” In Australia, Khawaja et al. (2008) argue that Sudanese refugees are unlikely to benefit from mental health counselling while they remain economically disadvantaged and lack social support. These authors point to the need for professionals to help mobilise community resources to increase social connectedness and practical support, such as English language tuition, to help empower community members’ sense of agency in resettlement contexts. Khawaja et al. (2008) maintain that when these outcomes are achieved, clinically-based mental health services can yield better outcomes (see also Briggs and Macleod, 2006). This literature points to the social, agential and (possibly) spiritual domains that could

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<sup>60</sup> It is further recognised that practical outcomes can have psychological benefits. This discussion is not meant to polemicise these two outcomes. Rather, it is intended to show that starting from the premise of practical or psychological-based outcomes can involve different work and associated interventions.

be an area of greater focus for professionals.<sup>61</sup>

Part one illustrated the value of social responses to trauma through community, family and elder interactions. The participants primarily identify with these social domains rather than seeking help from a specialised outside professional.<sup>62</sup> However, the participant comments do not challenge that psychotherapeutic approaches, counsellors and Western-informed interventions can be helpful *in specific circumstances*.<sup>63</sup> Participants acknowledge the role that professionals can play in helping their community, but they emphasise that often, accessing this assistance is considered only after an issue cannot be resolved within the community.

A common message that emerges is that lived experience is highly valued, as others who have been through similar experiences can provide guidance. This statement partly relates to why participants claim that outside counsellors/professionals and talk-based psychological approaches are not highly resonant – they do not have the direct experience or the cultural resonance the community has to offer assistance. A participant provides his perspective on culture and sharing stories:

*And everything that you hear from me, you need to take it seriously. You might say that I need a counsellor but that is Western culture. But in our culture, not everything like that needs a doctor. The doctors are the people who are around you and come together and talk about the problem. It is really safe.*  
(Participant 21)

These conclusions do not romanticise community, culture or traditional forms of

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<sup>61</sup> Furlong (2008) notes how the emphasis on the ‘therapeutic relationship’ can potentially render the client’s support systems (friends, family, community) invisible and highlights that social work professionals must critically engage their work and practice to evaluate what is in the best interest of the client system.

<sup>62</sup> It is necessary to acknowledge the growing number of Sudanese professionals (with Western training and otherwise) who are working within their community and outside it. ‘Professionals’ here primarily refers to people with Western-based training.

<sup>63</sup> This study is not suggesting that counsellors themselves or the profession would not work towards achieving practical outcomes. ‘Counsellors’ is the word that participants most often employ to describe the helping profession. The participants and numerous members of the community are often critical of counsellors that they have seen (whether in Africa or Australia) for using interventions that do not seem appropriate to them, and for failing to achieve the practical outcomes they identify that would help them to live their daily lives. This is a criticism of particular NGO practices, not of the counselling profession.

healing. It is necessary to think beyond the often reified depictions of them.<sup>64</sup> As highlighted earlier, community structures and cultural practices can be highly rigid and potentially oppressive. Wessells (2008) provides an important caution about both the disqualification and sanctification of the concept of ‘community’ when looking at healing, and Silove (2005: 37) cautions, “As in Western medicine, there are charlatans interspersed among the true shamans.”

The negative mental health implications associated with trauma can be very real. There are members within the Sudanese community who are traumatised and have conditions such as PTSD and depression. It is arguable that securing numerous practical outcomes, such as jobs and suitable housing, will bear little fruit if serious mental health concerns are not addressed simultaneously (whether psychological and/or medical). Thus, psychological outcomes cannot be discounted, although their primacy needs to be questioned (see Baila, 2005). There is a need to consider the value of both practical and psychological outcomes rather than choosing one over the other. In sum, this study maintains the following:

- It is not about discrediting the professional role of psychological work and therapies – rather it is about engaging with its primacy
- The importance of building a relationship with the community can help establish best practice with respect to practical and psychological outcomes
- Higher emphasis should be placed on practical outcomes such as accessing support with housing, language skill acquisition, children succeeding in schools, education/training and securing employment.
- The social, spiritual and agential responses highlight the participants’ multiple pathways of responding to trauma, and help them to ‘forget’ and move beyond traumas predicated in the past.
- In many respects, the community has its own tools for healing. However, the daily lived experience of poverty, unsuitable housing and community fragmentation can make it difficult to mobilise these resources.<sup>65</sup>

Once the practicalities of everyday living are accommodated, space opens to return to

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<sup>64</sup> Dowdney (2007) provides a helpful review of looking at both culturally-informed and bio-medical psychosocial interventions with refugee populations to highlight that both approaches warrant consideration and must be contextualised within each unique situation.

<sup>65</sup> The focus on structural influences will be covered in greater detail in Chapters Seven and Eight.

experiences of trauma if necessary. These conclusions are supported by Westoby (2006), who employs Bourdieu's (1977) concept of social suffering to maintain that Sudanese peoples' experiences of poverty and limited government support in resettlement contexts often require practical rather than expert-informed psychological interventions. Whilst the need to think further about practical outcomes is highlighted, this study does not endeavour to create a false dichotomy of one approach over another. Psychological approaches and talking with a professional outside the Sudanese community can play a key role in situations where it may not be possible to discuss traumas associated with particular taboos in community or even familial contexts.

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of how Sudanese participants primarily respond to trauma. By first maintaining that their responses in forced migration contexts are often the same responses used in resettlement, I have demonstrated how past responses provide a framework towards orienting how Sudanese people might respond in the present and future. The first part of the chapter shows that the Sudanese community has numerous pathways for responding to trauma, which highlight diverse individual and community knowledge about healing and recovery. In particular, social responses of engaging the community, family support and receiving advice from elders are used to mediate social expressions of trauma. These structures provide a workable synthesis of one's past contexts in the present realities of resettlement in culturally appropriate and resonant ways. To explain the 'absurdity' of the refugee experience, many participants used their spirituality or religion to transcend the suffering associated with conflict to find higher meanings. Finally, the agential domains of employment and education are identified as critical engagements that allow people to contribute to wellbeing on individual, familial and community levels. These three domains, while discussed separately, are shown to interact in complex and dynamic ways. Realisations of employment and education have provided pathways in which some of Australia's most recent citizens can contribute in meaningful ways, both within and outside their community. The participants' responses highlight the importance of considering multiple associated social, economic, cultural, spiritual and structural factors when conceptualising trauma in people's lives.

The second part of this chapter examined outside professional practices because the

Sudanese participants were often critical of them. This discussion examined professional practice beyond (but not discounting of) specialised psychological interventions and talk-based therapies to practically address participants' daily lived experiences. The mosaic of psychological interventions, coupled with addressing the practicalities of finding employment, pursuing an education and navigating the new social realities present a multitude of ways that professionals can work alongside this resettling community effectively and respectfully.

Having highlighted the study's primary empirical base of both the *conceptualisations of*, and the *participant's responses to*, trauma it is now possible to theorise what 'walking the line' represents in the participants' lives and professional social work practice. The following chapters employ this metaphor to discuss how both Sudanese people and professionals must embrace complexity beyond dichotomous thinking. The next chapter explores notions of hybridity in resettlement contexts. It highlights the agonistic and interstitial processes of resettlement.

# Chapter 7

## Walking the Line: Negotiating a Workable Synthesis between One's Past and Present

There's nothing more unsettling than the continual movement of something that seems fixed. (Deleuze, 1995: 157)

### Introduction

The previous chapters have shown how participants refocused a research question situated initially in the past to one that considers current resettlement realities more strongly. This chapter builds upon the last two chapters to theorise how the Sudanese participants use the 'walking the line' metaphor as a way of negotiating a workable synthesis between their past and present. The coalescence of the issues raised illustrates how life in Australia coincides with what is happening in Africa, linking the global to the local. Whilst the chapter's predominant focus is on resettlement, the perspective of how the past shapes the present retains relevance in the background. Unlike the previous two chapters, this chapter opens a wider space in which to consider extant theories and ideas. I now use theories that fit the participant narratives and community events to further explicate the theoretical and empirical terrain of this study.

There are three main parts to this chapter. Part one outlines the 'walking the line' metaphor for Sudanese lives in Australia. Rather than a line being drawn in the sand that one can follow passively, the Sudanese community often must walk the 'pointy' end of this line, which frequently lacks clear signposts and highlights the strategic present of diasporic lives. This geographic metaphor gains greater salience with movement as participants identify a series of waypoints (education, employment, participation in public life) amidst a number of contested landscapes they must navigate (political, economic, cultural and social). This perspective is grounded by introducing Benhabib's (2002) notion of culture forming a horizon that recedes every time one approaches it, Said's (1993) contrapuntal analysis and Bauman's (2005) discussion on contemporary liquid societies.

Part two draws upon this dynamic landscape to introduce Bhabha's (1994) critical theory on hybridity and the 'in-between' spaces of culture to examine what resettlement for the Sudanese community might entail. This discussion acknowledges that negotiating a workable synthesis between one's past and present is not just a nostalgic exercise but part of the necessity of living, which highlights the temporal and strategic domains of diasporic identity. This perspective provides a framework to return to the data and challenge a number of traditional binaries. Horizons are emphasised to illustrate that there are not just two vantage points such as us/them, centre/periphery or past/present. It is from this perspective that masculinity, gender roles and youth relations are explored within Australia.

Part three examines contested notions of integration and acculturation within resettlement contexts by discussing social capital theory and inter- and intra-community relationships.

Before moving to Part one of this chapter, it is worth summarising the previous three chapters to establish in greater depth the foundation upon which this analysis is grounded. Chapter 4 introduced the literature review to put forward the importance of looking beyond a medicalised perspective on trauma by critiquing how this approach can potentially victimise and pathologise people with refugee status. The discussion provided the intellectual rationale to acknowledge and dignify the adverse experiences associated with forced migration, and to document people's responses, which situates them as agents. This dual focus provided a critical framework to engage understandings of trauma.

Chapter 5 demonstrated how trauma is a familiar term to many participants as it was a form of recognition, even a currency, which provided access to certain resources, including entry into camps, refugee status determination and service provision in Australia. Strikingly, the predominant expressions of trauma with respect to most difficult and ongoing effects were very similar in forced migration and resettlement contexts. The participants identified that these effects were located most often within *social* considerations of separation from loved ones and in *situational* domains, as evidenced by unemployment, limited opportunities for education and the difficulties of negotiating a new social reality. In particular, this discussion helped shift past understandings of prior traumas from an individualised and medicalised focus to an

inquiry that looked to conceptualise the broader social, political and historical realities associated with exilic journeys (past and present).

Chapter 6 presented how Sudanese men respond to the associated expressions of trauma. In particular, the participants emphasise the importance of social connectedness within and outside the community, and how a spiritual frame of reference has helped incorporate meaning into experiences of profound suffering. Participants also identified the necessity of agential realisations, most notably through employment and education. The ethnographic fieldwork showed that, in many respects, the community has the tools for healing, but there can be serious impediments to accessing these resources when living a life characterised by poverty, unemployment and discriminatory experiences. The second part of Chapter 6 critically examined psychological and practical outcomes. Whilst recommending a greater emphasis upon practical solutions, it placed a call for engaging with complexity rather than in the false dichotomies of one or the other; that is, engaging with both the psychological and practical as a duality.

## **PART ONE: Locating Landscapes and Sudanese Resettlement**

Moving to a new part of the world often necessitates adapting to a new social reality while trying to maintain a coherent sense of the important histories, traditions and teachings that people carry with them. In this sense, migration embodies social change. Here I extend this discussion by theorising what ‘walking the line’ represents for Sudanese men; it is not a re-envisioning of the past or an adoption of the present. As Bhabha (1994: 309) would maintain, these refugees find themselves occupying an interstitial ‘third space’ or an in between-ness of culture that resides in what he refers as the ‘nervous temporality of the transitional’. Papastergiadis (2000: 192-3) interprets this space as a constant movement between the foreign and familiar, but is also quick to state that the space does not create a boundless horizon or some type of infinity in which limitless identities reside. Instead, he acknowledges that diasporic communities often are caught in a bind:

[The] experience of displacement is a testimony of loss and reconfiguration. To summon an identity of wholeness and continuity would be a denial of the violations and transformations that have led them to their present position, and yet to express the absences and contradictions of their identity would also

undermine their claim to be recognised in the present. (Papastergiadis 2000: 194)

The challenges of displacement become manifold because migration and integration are far more complex than a simple transition of moving from one culture or geographic locale to another. As people from different backgrounds interact, a dynamic interplay between multiple actors and institutions arises. Said's (1993: 36) concept of contrapuntality provides an interrogative framework of interpreting numerous perspectives together (some of which are often rendered invisible) and requires consideration here. It states that contrapuntality consists of:

Experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them co-existing and interacting with others.

The concept of contrapuntality is taken from Western classical music, in which it refers to the musical spaces in which the interdependent harmonics associated with the melody and counter-melodies are shared between different instruments, in some respects competing for the ear. To achieve this end, contrapuntality considers the context of multiple actors performing together rather than in isolation (a common result in establishing binary oppositions). Said (1993) employs this concept as a way of examining colonial texts/discourses to enable consideration of the coloniser and colonised perspectives together. As such, contrapuntality allows for a critical engagement with a number of dualities: past/present; us/them; insider/outsider; Orient/Occident; and north/south. This careful consideration acknowledges the important and dynamic interplay between such polarities and helps move beyond the 'Orientalist' perspectives that construct people from the Global South as 'others', tribal, primitive or exotic (Said, 2003). Thus, Orientalist designations often say more about 'European-Atlantic' powers than about the people from whom the discourses are constructed (Said, 2003: 6). Said (1993: 66-67) further maintains that contrapuntal reading necessitates an analysis of what is not stated in the text, which requires:

An understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England... the point is that contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it.

The former immigration minister Kevin Andrews' supposed concerns about Sudanese people not integrating into the fabric of Australian life, an ABC documentary on the 'Lost Boys' or Andrew Fraser's inflammatory claims about Africans having a low IQ<sup>66</sup> are open to a contrapuntal exploration that provides a critical approach towards establishing the dynamics within such commentary. This analysis includes what is not said explicitly in such statements and the Sudanese community's perspective of them. The powerful discourses around integration, trauma and refugees in general are predicated on a location and relationship with numerous players, and hence, the resettlement experience is far from a straightforward 'melody' or an apolitical process, as emphasised by one participant:

*We are still new, and we cannot adapt to the culture of Australia quickly – we must go slowly slowly. (Participant 5)*

This process of moving *slowly slowly* highlights the presence of discrepant agendas between multiple actors, the varying pace of negotiating new environments and various intra- and inter-community relationships and contestations. Such dynamics highlight the polysemic and multi-vocal reality of resettlement and exilic journeys. These perspectives provide an important backdrop for examining contemporary understandings of modern society.

### **Liquid societies**

Bauman (2005) argues that we now live in societies of 'liquid modernity' in which societies' understandings and values do not maintain characteristic shape for long periods and quickly lose recognisable form. The consequence of the unstable and shifting properties of liquid societies is, "The need ... to run with all one's strength just to stay in the same place and away from the rubbish bin where the hindmost are doomed to land" (Bauman 2005: 3). A result of such liquidity is wastage. When things that do not continually adapt to maintain value, they are discarded to an ever growing rubbish pile (Bauman, 2004). Castles (2003) similarly states that the processes of transnational social transformation and globalisation define a swiftly changing and contested landscape of mobile lives characterised by forced migration. Bauman (2005) argues

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Fraser is an associate professor of law at Macquarie University. In 2005 he claimed that the increasing black population was a 'sure fire way to increase crime' and that the average African had an IQ score of 70-75. These comments caused a firestorm of debate around racism, immigration policy and Australia as a multi-cultural oasis (see MacDonald 2005).

historically that the transition from solid to liquid modernity produces massive challenges for individuals and communities because social norms and institutions do not ‘solidify’, and as such, cannot serve as a reliable frame of reference for long-term life plans. This situation creates ‘fragmented lives’ (Bauman, 2007), whereby people have to be increasingly adaptable and flexible; a challenge already for the ‘included’ and increasingly (exponentially) so for those on the outside/periphery where refugee communities are often located. In liquid contexts, people must act and make plans under conditions often characterised by endemic uncertainty; a situation in which something takes shape only long enough for it to assume the shape of something different.

The Sudanese men in this study relate the need to adapt to these new and shifting contexts. Sometimes they would express themselves as a percentage within and outside their own culture, highlighting the strategic necessity of the present and future. Participants note some of the most salient challenges they experienced resettling as finding employment, mastery of the English language, child rearing practices, (re)establishing men’s and women’s roles, financial responsibilities and navigating numerous foreign social support systems. These changes necessitate an ability to negotiate new social spaces that are at times radically and ideologically different from the participants’ current perspective.

### **Agonistic horizons – cautions of monolithic concepts**

Migration is an event that can bring different groups of people together in an abrupt (and potentially antagonistic) encounter, which can disturb the host society’s underlying norms and values. A participant speaks about the centre/periphery and insider/outsider dualism in the public domain of Australian life that has ‘knocked’ his people back, and the inherent tension this dualism creates:

*I think there are times people don’t want to talk about their background in full detail simply because I think we are also sometimes compared between the primitive and the civilised world. And [Australian] people make sometimes unfair comparisons. And that sometimes I think –it knocks some people back.  
(Participant 14)*

Bhabha (1990) critiques colonial and essentialised understandings of culture by arguing that discourses of primitive and civilised peoples reinforce the West’s subordination of what is termed the ‘Third World’. He then argues an imperative to think beyond binary

oppositions such as centre/periphery, modern/undeveloped or first/third world, which construct overly simplified and inaccurate perspectives of complex concepts (Bhabha, 1994). Thus, being of a Dinka ethnic identity or Sudanese culture are not fixed or monolithic concepts. The same holds true for being an Australian or a Greek. Remaining mindful of the polysemic meanings and usage of the word culture,<sup>67</sup> Benhabib (2002: 5) critically engages this term, stating:

Any view of cultures as clearly delineable wholes is a view from the outside that generates coherence for the purposes of understanding and control. Participants in the culture, by contrast, experience their traditions through shared, albeit contested and contestable, narrative accounts. From within, a culture need not appear as a whole; rather, it forms a horizon that recedes each time one approaches it.

Recognising this horizon, one participant speaks of the strategic resettlement process whereby culture and identity must be understood within a present context of movement:

*Because they are so far away from their communities in Sudan – they find themselves like a family. They are reconstituting the family set-up and the solution mechanisms here. So, these things are happening right here in Adelaide and some of them successfully. But it is also true that some people have moved on and rightfully that is what makes sense to them. Because some people too, their culture has changed so much so that even going back to Dinka culture sometimes doesn't make sense. (Participant 13)*

This perspective aligns with the writings of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) who argues against developing essentialised notions of culture and stresses the necessity of recognising the dynamic and transitional realities of people living in a culture. A similar claim can be made for identity. Ghorashi (2004) provides an insightful analysis of Iranians living in the United States of America. She claims that this community must be considered within a de-territorialised and transnational perspective that acknowledges identity as neither static nor monolithic, but rather as a dynamic, complex and inter-related process. Whilst the particularities of culture or a person's identity may shift within the contexts of transnational movement and social transformation, there is strong historical evidence of people maintaining long traditions and an unwillingness to change

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<sup>67</sup> Raymond Williams (1983: 87) is quoted stating that culture is one of the most complex words in the English language. The introduction by Bennett and Frow (2008) on the discursive meanings of culture provides a helpful discussion on the multiple meanings associated with it.

beliefs, actions or perspectives:

*Why I keep these values is that they have helped me in my life. If I steal and I get caught, I get taken to the jail. If I follow my culture, I cannot get in trouble, I will be safe. So I follow my culture. (Participant 1)*

However, what does following one's culture in resettlement contexts entail? Does it require a strict adherence to life in Sudan? Is it flexible or is it something totally different? Many perspectives are employed to address these questions, yet numerous participants relate to the resettlement process as 'bridging culture', which includes learning English, integrating into Australian society and maintaining social relations back in Africa. They note having to adapt to the 'new rules of the game' that involve linguistic, social, cultural and political variations. Navigating this transition, however, also requires the recognition that the migrant does not always have the complete freedom to choose which parts of each world they want to embrace. Related to this process, several participants and community members speak of the resettlement experience as 'getting in the line' and 'being in the line':

*Yeah actually, the thing you need is that you need to **be in that line**. But you still can't forget your culture. And what you can just do, you can do things like the culture that the [Australian] system here allows you to. (Participant 7)*

Similar to the walking the line metaphor, 'getting in the line' actually speaks of an adaptive process that is more of an ultimatum than a choice: get in that line or you will fail. Having an awareness of the discursive and power-laden meanings associated with 'culture', Benhabib's (2002: 18) focus on the public manifestation of cultural identities within civic spaces provides a perspective to traverse beyond the dangers of reifying culture and developing a normative theory of 'cultural taxonomy'. Honig (1993: 15) argues that politics can never be reconciled to pure consensus or contestation, and offers a helpful definition when looking at agonistic processes:

To affirm the perpetuity of the contest is not to celebrate a world without points of stabilization; it is to affirm the reality of perpetual contest, even within an ordered setting, and to identify the affirmative dimension of contestation.

The former immigration minister Kevin Andrews' *antagonistic* comments reinforce the

sentiment of ‘getting in the line’, where he presents taxonomies on Sudanese culture and its incompatibility with ‘Australian values’. Such taxonomies create antagonistic polarities between different groups. However, shifting the focus to civic spaces and *agonism* highlights how the constructed identity of the ‘stranger’ can go beyond an antagonistic endeavour for purity (as defined by reified culture or through jingoistic and xenophobic ideology) to an agonistic process of contrapuntal identification and struggle (see Papastergiadis, 2000: 163). Whilst both terms involve a sense of contestation, agonism highlights the potential affirmative outcomes associated with transnational movement, living together and appreciating different points of view. Andrews’ comments raised concerns for me that the Sudanese community would be reluctant to engage with an ‘outside’ researcher after a powerful politician had targeted them in such a manner. It eventuated that Andrews’ comments created a context where Sudanese people were very interested to engage with the study. They wanted to address his comments and the impact these have had on their community, and how the community has responded to them. For most participants, the primary reason for participating in the research was to find a voice in resettlement contexts. As such, their reasons for participation were politically inspired.

The concept of contrapuntality gains salience in this contested context as it is possible to explore the perspectives of various stakeholders and the inevitable ensuing interplay. However, Chowdhry (2007: 105) cautions that contrapuntality is not about valorising plurality (where no voices are privileged and all are heard). Rather, it is about ‘worlding’ texts and actions through historicising them and recognising the power dynamics embedded within them. Thus, the Sudanese narratives provide a counterpoint to political commentary and media presentations about their community through numerous stories of difference and acts of resistance to such understandings. Stories of agency, contributing to Australian society, maintaining hope, following parent teachings and adapting to new social realities are just a few examples. Taken together, these different perspectives provide a ‘worlding’ to examine the Sudanese community within a historic and power-conscious focus that highlights Honig’s (1993) perpetual contest between actors, institutions and structures. It is also necessary to recognise antagonism; not all struggles can be seen within an affirmative dimension. Rendering the power dynamics of these statements more visible, Hall (1996: 5) speaks to the contested notions of identity, defining it as:

The meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us.

The Sudanese community being constructed as subjects by the media and political discourse highlights the primary reason why the Sudanese men chose to participate in my study – they had already been ‘spoken’ by others and wanted to address what they perceive as unjust misconceptions. However, they too find themselves in other powerful discourses about keeping their culture and what being a Sudanese person means. It is in this potentially agonistic environment that they must try to find a relationship between the past and present. Part two focuses upon this process by returning to the participant metaphor of ‘walking the line’.

## **PART TWO: Hybridity and Linking One’s Past with the Present**

Having identified the settings of the liquid modern, agonistic horizons of culture and multiple actors, I now theorise how Sudanese men negotiate life in resettlement through the concept of hybridity. Bhabha’s writings on hybridity are particular to this section. It is important first to emphasise that this discussion moves beyond dated and miscegenistic interpretations of hybrid as being something that is impure and hence undesirable. Rather, the notion of hybridity highlights the adaptability to situations often bordering upon endemic uncertainty, characterised by liquid societies, and the ingenuity to find a workable synthesis of one’s past with the present. Following Bhabha (1994: 2, 246-57), this study maintains that the liminal or interstitial spaces are the appropriate area of inquiry, which focuses upon the enunciatory present and performative acts of people’s lives. This focus is distinct from grander explorations into ontology, human nature and reified culture, which may be situated within an ‘exoticised’ past. Participants’ talk about resettlement and the process of taking a certain percentage of one’s past with the present emphasises the performative:

*Well now, like myself, I have a vision. Part of my vision is to establish myself here and behave like other people. So I have to get 50 percent of my previous life and 50 percent of what is here to keep me going. (Participant 11)*

And

*JM: So would you say that you are still living by your culture here in Adelaide?*

*Yes, but I would not say 100 percent. Because, I don't know, if I were to give it some kind of numbers, I would say up to 70 percent still is my cultural principle when I am trying to tackle my own challenges. (Participant 24)*

Numerous participants lament that Sudanese culture as it is traditionally understood is 'breaking'. However, most also stress that their culture needs to be somewhat flexible in different social and geographic settings. Again, a common expression was 'walking the line', which involves compromise, innovation and an awareness of one's resettlement reality. As stated in this chapter's introduction, the Sudanese community must walk the 'pointy' end of this line, which lacks clear signposts.<sup>68</sup> Bauman (2005: 31) maintains that hybridisation is a movement towards an unfixed (and unreachable) horizon in so much that all identity projects recede further as one approaches it. This discussion relates to Bhabha's (1994) dynamic in-between space of hybridity – something to which he refers as the 'third space' of culture. Characterising this interstitial space that defines the contested borderlands between life in Africa and resettlement in Adelaide, one participant states:

*You see like, because we were living in a different world altogether – one world in Africa and another one here. And what somebody like me tries to do is to bridge the two together and see what are the good core values from Africa that you can take and what are the things that you can leave. And the same thing applies for the Africans who come here that see the new culture and society – the good values here. The good ones they can take and the bad ones they can leave it. This is how we can bridge the two together and to integrate it. (Participant 3)*

In the next quote, a participant talks about not being rigidly Sudanese or Australian, but about something that occupies a third space:

*If you throw away 100 percent [of one's past] and try to take 100 percent of what is happening here you end up nowhere. But if you understand and you*

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<sup>68</sup> I presented this study to the Sudanese community in October 2009. In particular, the people attending related strongly to the idea of 'walking the line' and discussed what it represented for them in resettlement contexts. This discussion included negotiating cultural differences, family relations, public engagement and understandings of time.

*want to build up on the foundation that you have got that can be helpful. But if you start from nothing, then you still do not know your way because you do not have a foundation. You will lose your way.*

*JM: So you lose your foundation. And what would happen if you decided to keep 100 percent of back home and you did not want anything to do with Australia? What would happen then?*

*I don't think you can go anywhere. (Participant 21)*

This commentary illustrates that 'walking the line' and successful resettlement is not about strictly maintaining Sudanese culture, as this stance can limit opportunities for employment and participation in civil society. Nor is it about becoming a 'green and gold' Australian. It highlights how it is not possible to know where you are going if you do not know where you came from. In relation to incorporating these dynamics, Bhabha (1994: 2) writes of the ensuing interstitial spaces that result from the associated interplay between different cultural stances, past, present and future:

*It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?*

This critical analysis, which examines a person within a particular environment, consequently opens liminal spaces (potentially antagonistic, collaborative or incommensurable) that go beyond simple binary oppositions. Bhabha (1994: 2) concludes that these spaces are not reflections of who people/cultures are, but rather performative acts that establish the in-between spaces of cultural meaning. Hall (1992: 297) argues that 'modern nations are all cultural hybrids', and this perspective deterritorialises the perspective that identity or culture is situated within one's homeland or 'roots' (see also Malkki, 1992). Thus, identity and culture are social constructions influenced by the general public, cultural traditions, media and political debates (amongst others); all play a role in (re)defining an individual or community's

understandings of these concepts.

Returning to a contrapuntal perspective, the Sudanese community (as outsiders) often must struggle to find a currency that is recognised and valued within the contested and liquid landscapes that emerge. This community has had to critically (re)consider familiar perspectives such as gender roles, raising children, family relations and one's place in Australian society. What follows is that the discourses on resettlement and integration need consideration within the individual, community and wider social consciousness.

### **Negotiating masculinity and gender relations**

Becoming a refugee, by definition involves geographic displacement, but refugees undergo social displacement as well...even when refugee households remain intact, changes in human relationships almost always accompany the movement of people from one geographic location to another. (Bascom, 1998: 130)

Social interactions and transnational movement influence the phenomenology of masculinity, gender roles and youth relations. This is the topic of discussion here; a discussion that reinforces the 'line' that Sudanese men must walk (or even get into) to maintain their connection with their past and what is considered normative within Australian society.

*The culture here is different. In the Sudan, the labour is divided. In the morning, the responsibility of the mother and daughter is to prepare food. The tough job of the men and the boys is to look after the cattle and they go off for hunting... When they get back home, it will be the responsibility for the women to cook. But when they come to Australia, they will be doing the same jobs. [In Sudan] they have heard that the man is the breadwinner, but here, people are equal. So we are discovering with Centrelink that the wife and the husband are [viewed as] the same. And also concerning discipline to the children. In Africa, there is disciplining of children. It is [now] being forbidden. Those are some of the things that have changed. (Participant 21)*

Connell (1995) maintains that masculinity needs to be defined beyond a natural characteristic or norm, with the focus upon how men and women conduct gendered lives through processes and relationships. He goes further to cautiously define masculinity as "simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of this practise in bodily experience, personality and culture" (Connell, 1995: 71). This focus on masculinity as

processes and relationships is helpful as it brings into sharp relief the different social realities and interactions that influence its construction:

*Some people find it hard to compromise with their values. Some still want to be the man that they used to be, and now they have to compromise. Because they are a man and they might feel that they should not have to look after the children. But here, it is different. Your wife may have up to 8 or 10 children! How is it possible for one person to look after that many! [In Sudan] people look after your children but here we do not have that support. (Participant 20)*

And:

*In our culture back there Africa, man is the head of the family. The man speaks for the family. Especially for the community and the family... [Australia] is a different country and different cultures. So it takes a while to **get in that line** at least. (Participant 7)*

Again, men mention ‘getting in the line’ as they have to rethink and often renegotiate understandings of masculinity. As Jaji (2009) acknowledges in her work with refugee men from the Great Lakes region in Africa, the discourses on manhood and masculinity are intertwined. Connell (2000: 29) further notes that masculinity as a gendered practice is a social construction. Several participants and community members note that Dinka culture expects men to be tough and that life is composed of good and bad – a man must go through tough times to better endure times of hardship and maintain hope.<sup>69</sup> Correspondingly, having a degree of toughness and stoicism are values that numerous Dinka participants emphasise.<sup>70</sup>

*If you are a man, you have to endure difficulties in order to challenge what you will face in the future time. Because a man will have a lesson to learn. So this is where I really endured that because I do not rely on any person, so I have to stand and have hope. (Participant 8)*

Experiencing the hard work of resettlement is illustrated by one interview in which a participant said he did not like the word ‘difficulties’; he preferred to use the word

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<sup>69</sup> An elder informed me that this expectation is exemplified through the white and black bead necklaces that many people wear as a reminder that life is not always easy.

<sup>70</sup> Whilst acknowledging that ‘toughness’ was something that many Dinka people identify as being helpful to endure through difficult circumstances, it is not my intention to essentialise or reify this quality to men or masculinity. Counter to this individualistic stance was the recognition of the importance of talking with others and seeking help as pathways to recovery, as expressed in Chapter 6.

'challenges'. This participant emphasises that challenges represent something for him to face and overcome, whereas a difficulty remains just that – a difficulty. Whilst I observed a sense of stoicism within the community during challenging times, this approach is not always the case. Many of the participants emphasise that they try to compromise, communicate their concerns and adapt to new situations presented before them, as demonstrated in Chapter 6. Life in Australia introduces new challenges and shifting gender roles as women are working, men are looking after children and learning to cook, and families are interfacing with Australian perspectives of acceptable child rearing practices.

*But now, I think, even myself I can cook now for my wife and my children. But culture don't allow it... Man does not go into the kitchen. But here now, we are doing things differently. (Participant 6)*

A documentary by Mchawala (2007) entitled 'Ayen's cooking school for African men', aired on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), details a video in which a female Sudanese community worker tries to convince Sudanese males to attend cooking classes. She identifies two primary problems. The first is that the women often have incorporated new responsibilities in resettlement contexts and this additional burden makes it difficult for them to fulfil what might be considered 'typical' household roles such as childcare, preparing food and maintaining an orderly home. The second problem is that men may be living without any women and consequently are struggling to maintain a healthy diet. The video clearly evidences several social constructions around gender roles, but concludes that a significant number of men can come together and successfully cook for the women despite numerous obstacles and setbacks. Thus, masculinity in terms of relationships and processes illustrates how, in different contexts, it is possible to move beyond normative understandings of Sudanese masculinity and culture.

A focus on processes and relationships, however, does not suggest that culture, gender roles or masculinity are completely malleable concepts. Hall (2010: 29) writes about the 'entanglement' of transnational movements and draws upon Clifford (1997) to state that "every diaspora carries profound costs." As one participant acknowledges in the following transcript, social and cultural change cannot be adopted or accommodated flippantly:

*And problems can arise as there are now contradictions of cultures. And when people tend to take more of Australian values or culture and discuss what they previously have experienced and the other partner [husband or wife] would prefer and keep to use their own way of doing things this may be difficult to compromise. (Participant 17)*

Such differences run deep and people may be highly resistant to change. Nor is there necessarily an assumption that cultural practices and beliefs need to change. Yet these differences need to be critically acknowledged, and at times engaged, to avoid the slippery slope of ethnocentric ideology at one end and ethically relativist positionalities at the other. For example, whilst ethics approval (see Appendix for this study incorporated interviewing both men and women, it quickly became apparent that there were gendered physical spaces in both public and private spheres. This proved difficult for me to navigate. Women were often at opposite sides of the church and congregated in relatively separate places at social functions. Men and women occupied different physical spaces and rooms in their homes. There were exceptions to these experiences, but the segregation demonstrates that spaces are socially constructed and defined – often on unconscious levels.

Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, highlighting the interplay between the conscious strategic actions of people and the often unconscious elements that place powerful influence upon them, is particularly relevant here. This section highlights how constructions informing the terms 'culture' and 'identity' are often invisible to people, and how the subjective nature of people's actions becomes entwined with the objective structures that influence those actions (see also Calhoun, 1993: 78; Webb et al., 2002: 58).

### **Youth relations and raising children**

Numerous participants who have children acknowledge the different contexts in which the entire family finds itself, and this situation often means 'walking the line' or finding a flexibility of approaches for the parents to meet their children's needs. The children are thrust into powerful peer culture environments that may contradict their parents' teachings. The 'line' that both children and parents must traverse is not one they can passively follow, as they may find themselves in situations with few clear sign posts informing them where to go. Numerous people speak about how raising children was a

community responsibility in Africa, whereas in Adelaide, their community is dispersed. The fragmentation of living spaces and the fact that many Sudanese people do not know the names of their new neighbours highlight how childcare practices that work in one setting may not be as viable in another.<sup>71</sup> There are other considerations where parents must 'get in that line'. For example, child protection legislation potentially challenges traditional Sudanese child raising practices. Concerns about raising their children in culturally resonant ways, and how child protection services and the police have the power to separate their families, were evident at community events and in the men's narratives, as the following comment illustrates:

*What brings problems is when our children leave our culture because they leave responsibility. And if we leave these children because of Australian laws will bring more problems. (Participant 1)*

This concern becomes more relevant as participants account the trauma of being removed from their parents in Sudan, then relate their difficulties of trying to cope in a world without their parents' guidance (see Chapter 5). Separation is again noted as one of the most profound expressions of trauma. In several respects, the threat of separation for these Sudanese participants is potentially replicated (albeit under very different circumstances) in Australia. Trying to prevent this situation from happening again, the Sudanese community understandably has fears about how their children may be removed from their care, creating a context where they are distrustful and wary of outside services. This study finding echoes the conclusions of Chapter 6, which emphasise the necessity of building trusting relationships and bridging understandings. An interesting observation was that while there is clear distrust (or at least weariness) of child protection services generally, often participants do not lament the fact that they can no longer discipline their children physically. Rather, they express feeling disempowered because many of their traditional ways of parenting have been taken away and nothing substantial has been provided as an alternative.

This commentary provides a powerful focus for outside service delivery and support

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<sup>71</sup> This again speaks to the social constructions around family. I attended numerous funeral services for people whose 'mother' had died. Upon further discussions, it became apparent that the mother was actually an aunt or important person who took care of them growing up but not their biological mother. Similarly, neighbours can also be considered family members. These different (re)constructions around family, parents, discipline, raising children, education and many others illustrate the complexity of the interface between resettling communities and the host society.

around parenting in Australian contexts. It again points to Connell's (1995) call to understand masculinity as relationships and processes in order to be able more effectively engage with fatherhood, parenting and acceptable child raising practices.

One of the most common issues the community raises at social functions is about adolescents growing up in Australia. The associated intergenerational conflict between maintaining one's 'home' and 'host' cultures is well documented (Cox, 1989; Cox and Pawar, 2006; Papastergiadis, 2000). A potential tension can develop when there is contestation between being a Sudanese role model and being what Australia considers 'role model integration'. A number of participants expressed their concern about Sudanese youths not understanding the *so called freedom* of Australia and taking it to mean a free rein. Several participants maintain that many of their youths do not properly understand Sudanese or Australian culture. What follows is a difficult dilemma for youths – how is it that one can embody the ideals of one's culture and parent teachings with the realities of resettlement, youth peer culture and Australian notions of successful integration? There is a barrage of messages from all sides telling youths who they are and how they should live their lives. A readily accessible internet, sensationalised television programs and pervasive advertising arguably lessen the impact of elders as role models and other traditional acculturating influences. In numerous youths' rooms there were pictures of rap artists such as Tupac Skakur, Fifty Cent and Snoop Dog, illustrating how American popular culture maintains powerful sway. This polyphony of counter messages can directly challenge the age/experience structure that honours elders' wisdom and advice. These problems are well documented with first and second generation migrants, and highlight a necessity to look at such dynamics within historical, contemporary and social contexts (see Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997).

How the Sudanese men who participated in this study negotiate the multiple constructions of masculinity, gender relations and supporting their youths presents several critical considerations for themselves and those living around them. A participant makes the point that it is important to look beyond the new society's assumptions about Sudanese refugees:

*The basic assumption is yes, the Sudanese have been in war, they have experienced all these things – that it is a terrible country and that is it. So anybody from that background is seen as useless and that's what the*

*[Australian] people expect. But I think it is very superficial and I would like to go beyond that. There is much more that needs to be dug out. Until you dig out, you will not understand what these things are. (Participant 14)*

Echoing this man's call, we need to find ways to dig deeper into our understandings about refugee communities in sensitive, respectful and resonant ways. The monolithic assumptions about reified culture and 'African standard time'<sup>72</sup>, or that men refuse to cook are sometimes true, but they can also be challenged. A number of participants directly question the video aired on SBS about men being able to prepare food, as they exclaim, *But I have always cooked!* However, it is perilous to discount powerful discourses on masculinity and culture. Numerous participants lament a sincere loss and pain when having to forego traditions within which their parents raised them. Thus, there is a need for a dialogue rather than essentialised monologues. The latter maintain an antagonistic space of 'us' and 'them', while the former potentially opens contestable agonistic spaces that highlight the enunciatory present of masculine identities predicated upon processes and relationships.

### **PART THREE: Integration and Building Solidarity**

This section weaves this chapter into the rest of the study to examine what 'walking the line' represents for Sudanese men in resettlement contexts. Overall, there are clear markers to the importance of inter- and intra-community relationships. A man speaks about this complexity of 'having the concept' when navigating life in resettlement and integration:

*It may be simplistic for people you know to say, "It is not necessary to know the past." But I do believe strongly that if you don't really know where you are coming from, you will not know where you are going! Literally in a simple way, somebody who comes to the city but they don't know where they are coming from – they really are in trouble. It is always good if you know a little bit of your culture. It will enable you to even understand your new culture ... because [you will] **have the concept**. (Participant 14)*

Here, *having the concept* involves incorporating aspects of the old with the new. It is

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<sup>72</sup> 'African standard time' was an *in vivo* concept introduced in Chapter 2 to illustrate the different social constructions around time.

similar to a statement made earlier in the discussions about the interstitial spaces and hybridity. Not only do members of the Sudanese community have to rethink a number of familiar conceptions of family, work, gender relations and raising children as ‘newly strange’ (Bourdieu, 1988), they must also balance social relationships between continents, further highlighting their transnational gaze. Within these contexts, participants emphasise the importance, but difficulty, of developing inter-community-based relationships. These multiple relationships were identified in Chapter 6 and again show the necessity of carrying and contextualising one’s past in the present. The discussion now shifts to a brief commentary on integration and social capital theory to examine social solidarity in resettlement contexts across ethnic identities and other markers of diversity.

### **Social cohesion and ‘orientations’ of acculturation**

Numerous members of the Sudanese community reiterated that they do not want to remain a community on the periphery and would like to have stronger ties with the broader Australian society. However, these comments are far more complex than an individual simply deciding they want membership with another social grouping. Contested questions around integration, acculturation and how to better realise social cohesion need critical consideration. Zetter et al.’s (2006) study examining new migration, social cohesion and social policy within the UK argues that while government rhetoric is ‘generous’ in its *aims* of achieving social cohesion, its policies often *translate* more towards assimilationist intentions. Further, these authors assert that “while migrant communities remain in the spotlight, it is neither evident what it is they might be cohering to, nor clear who is, or should be, doing the cohering” (Zetter et al. 2006: 8). This ambiguity around cohering speaks to the contested understandings of acculturation.

Berry’s (1980, 1997) model of acculturation speaks about the process of migration in which individuals and groups can adopt four primary orientations in relation to the interplay between maintaining their heritage and interacting with the host culture: integration; assimilation; separation; and marginalisation. This model is based on the principles of *cultural maintenance* (the extent to which individuals value and wish to maintain their cultural identity) and *intercultural contact* (the extent to which individuals value and seek contact with those outside their own group and participate in

daily life of larger society). Dona and Berry (1999) acknowledge a continuum of answers between whether one should maintain intercultural contact or cultural maintenance. For conceptual purposes, this model can be presented in a dichotomous way of yes/no responses between these two principles. However, it is understood that resettlement and acculturation dynamics are more complex. The arrows in Table 7.1 are used to demonstrate a direction or tendency towards these orientations rather than as an absolute designation.

**Table 7.1: The four orientations of acculturation, adapted from Berry (1980)**

	Cultural Maintenance → YES	Cultural Maintenance → NO
Intercultural Contact → YES	Integration	Assimilation
Intercultural Contact → NO	Separation/Segregation	Marginalisation

There are clearly differences between individuals, however, almost without exception, the participants emphasise the importance of both *cultural maintenance* and *intercultural contact*, which places them most closely within the integration domain. Their concept of ‘walking the line’ and navigating a workable synthesis between their past and present also highlights their tendency towards integration . One of the most prevalent reasons participants gave for being part of this study was the hope of creating a better understanding of their community in broader contexts to foster inter-community social relations. Whilst most participants speak about the desire for integration in which it is possible to have intercultural contact and recognise their heritage, many express the difficulties in realising such aims. Thus, acculturation attitudes and strategies, compared with what is actually realised, can be very different things.

*Sometimes people can abuse you, and the things like Kevin Andrews says, what brought us here to Australia is not because we are looking for something to eat, it is war. That is what brought us here. We ran there because we wanted the freedom. That is why we came here. To be safe. So, it affects us and it is a new place for us here now, we are not settled. It is hard for me and my children.  
(Participant 12)*

The questions of integration, who does the integrating, what is non-negotiable and how this process should be facilitated are complex and involve numerous actors both within and outside the Sudanese community. Whilst I agree with Ryan et al. (2008) that Berry’s acculturation model presents an ‘over culturalised’ perspective which

diminishes other important factors outside inter-cultural engagement, it must be acknowledged that this model speaks powerfully to the data and a number of the challenges the Sudanese community encounter.<sup>73</sup> Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003: 339) emphasise the importance of an interactional perspective, maintaining that identity and acculturative processes are not only determined by the characteristics, aspirations and values of the migrants themselves but also by the responses of the host society.<sup>74</sup> This study concurs with Colic-Peisker and Walker (2003) that while Berry's model is a helpful conceptual tool, it does not go far enough to distinguish how much of these four typologies are 'chosen' or 'imposed', which again speaks to what participants speak about as *getting in that line*:

*It is funny when Australia states that it needs to deliver its services in a culturally appropriate way [starts laughing]... And you wonder which culture is that! They always say that one. But which culture is appropriate here, is it the Sudanese or do they mean the Australian one? So it becomes a little difficult. (Participant 19)*

Comments about the Sudanese community and culture being 'incompatible' with Australian values speak to the notion of assimilation within Berry's model. His conclusions, alongside commentary on Africans having low IQs, reinforce a marginalising monologue and position in society if such people coming to Australia do not 'get in the line'. The role of misrecognition is demarcated further in Chapter 8. As a precursor, it is important to again stress that acculturation strategies are not just about voluntary processes and relationships; broader forces and dynamics are at hand.

### **Integration and social capital – the 'bridgers' and the 'bonders'**

The emergence of social capital theory has been widely employed to examine how particular individuals and groups are able to mobilise resources within intra- and inter-community relationships. Arguably the most referenced theorist on social capital is

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<sup>73</sup> Ryan et al. (2008: 5) argue that it can be misleading to use 'acculturative stress' as a way of understanding migrant adaptation. Rather, they present a framework that considers access and constraints to resources in terms of needs, personal goals and demands. This research speaks to both models. The former shows how 'walking the line' is a delicate balancing act whereby failing to 'get in that line' can mean limited opportunities in resettlement contexts. These opportunities are entwined directly with resources (employment, education, housing, etc). Chapter 8 considers this latter focus in greater depth by turning to redistribution dynamics.

<sup>74</sup> This perspective is further deconstructed in Chapter 8 when Nancy Fraser's (2000) dual focus on recognition, redistribution and the potential role of the 'recognisers' is outlined further.

Robert Putnam (2002, 2000) who presents two primary typologies of bridging and bonding social capital, which he summarises thus:

Bonding capital is good for under-girding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity... Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion... Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40. (Putnam 2002: 22-3)

In particular, bonding capital often refers to when people who are 'similar' to each other work together. Bridging capital arises when people 'different' from each other interact together. Putnam (2002) maintains that bonding capital is good for 'getting by' and is characterised by strong relationships, whereas bridging is good for 'getting ahead', often through a network of weak ties.

The importance of bonding capital is unquestioned in the Sudanese community. Chapters 5 and 6 have provided a strong grounding with regard to the necessity of social relationships with friends, family and community. Correspondingly, many of the pathways to healing that have helped the community respond to challenges involve this sociological superglue. Putnam's (2002) statement also speaks to the role that outside professionals can play by creating community development initiatives to bring people together, whether social functions, group workshops or information sessions. Working towards these aims has strong potential to increase the skills set within the communities and build further capacities.

Bonding capital is not all good, however. It can also have negative implications through tight and rigid local power structures that reinforce oppressive practices; something Putnam (2002: 350) calls the 'dark side' of social capital (see also Allen, 2009; Portes, 1998; Portes and Landholdt, 1996). These authors caution that highly dense bonding capital without bridging dynamics can create situations of greater isolation from the broader society. Often in direct response to this isolating effect, the Sudanese community stresses many times that it does not just want bonding capital. Whilst this type of 'glue' remains an important part of their social existence in Adelaide, as evidenced in Chapter 6, they also express a strong interest in bridging dynamics.

This chapter's discussion on integration, acculturation and negotiating a third space in

resettlement emphasises that these processes are not just voluntary choices. Such outcomes involve numerous other players. Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge the need for bridging capital. Often, the power of weak ties (Putnam, 2000) that can connect the Sudanese community to other people is not achieved. This highlights that the resettlement experience often places CALD communities at a disadvantage, as they do not possess the cultural and economic capital that many native-born Australians take for granted.<sup>75</sup> This situation was impressed on me through personal experiences. A number of Sudanese people listed me as a reference when they were seeking employment or access to services, largely because I am white, and hence a socially constructed, reliable referee. There have been times that people from the Sudanese community have not been able to access services related to housing or assistance for their children in schools. I was able to organise appointments *on their behalf*, usually on my first attempt. This dynamic shows that bridging capital relates to a larger game whereby the Sudanese community are not always on an equal playing field; some players enjoy greater power and privilege than others. Thus, the relationship between the Sudanese community and the broader Australian society is complex and power-laden, and must be recognised as such.

As discussed previously, the Sudanese community is a highly politicised and mediatised group (Gale, 2004; Robins, 2003; Windle, 2008). Resettlement policies can be influenced by a back and forth relationship between government agendas and anti-immigration electoral pressures. In relation to these dynamics and trumped up ideas about bridging capital, Bauman (2001a: 148) cautions that community can mean ‘sameness’, which actually means the absence of the ‘other’. He argues that “The attraction of the community of communitarian dreams rests on the promise of simplification: brought to its logical limit, simplification means a lot of sameness and a bare minimum of variety.” The current debate around asylum seekers and the ensuing firestorm around border protection, welfare burdens, queue jumpers and ‘tidal waves’ of boat people highlight the difficulties of accomplishing bridging dynamics. If refugees and asylum seekers are presented in such ways it is hardly surprising that bridging capital resources, Putnam’s so called ‘sociological lubricant’, are in scarce supply.

Chapter 6 highlighted that the community has, in many respects, its own tools for

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<sup>75</sup> There are numerous social work theories that fit well with respect to mediating players and structures. See Dominelli (2002), Lee (1994), Schwartz (1976) and Shulman (2006).

healing and recovery. Experiences of discrimination and daily life characterised by unemployment and financial strain, however, can limit the ability to access these resources. The focus on bonding social glue cannot be used as a justification for the government to retract from the social realm by placing sole responsibility on supposedly independent communities (see Adams and Hess, 2001; Bryson and Mowbray, 2005). It is also maintained that bridging social capital initiatives involve more than host countries riding across the bridge and offering opportunities to the poor downtrodden. Rather, it is about a two-way exchange where both the Sudanese community and those outside it can view each other as peers in civil society (as further discussed in Chapter 8), enabling bridging capital to provide greater means for true participation and reciprocity. Such an exchange also means turning the mirror on ourselves to confront possible manifestations of racism and privilege at both explicit and tacit levels. Whilst mobilising social capital initiatives is a recommendation of this study (see Chapter 9), it must be understood that bridging resources are not the panacea to the refugee predicament. Such considerations need to move to the structural influences of powerful institutions and far reaching policies – a major focus of the next chapter.

## **Summary**

This chapter has critically examined one of the primary concepts that emerges from the grounded data – finding a workable synthesis of one’s past with the present. It has illustrated the contested notions of culture and, more specifically, how the participants’ lives can become hybrid through both strategic and unconscious actions. By focusing on Bhabha’s (1994) third or interstitial space of culture, it has been possible to understand the lives of the participating Sudanese men in resettlement contexts. The participants’ performative acts suggest that they are neither a copy of the past nor an embodiment of Australian values within an assimilationist designation. Rather, they find themselves ‘walking the line’ or even ‘getting into the line’ of interstitial spaces, which creates a new mosaic that melds their past and the contextual liquid dynamics of the present together. This shift eschews monolithic notions of culture. Rather, it recognises it as a horizon that recedes every time one approaches it. What follows is a call for more nuanced understandings of the dynamic cultural, social and political exchanges between multiple players as these horizons intersect. This chapter points to the following conclusions:

- Negotiating a workable synthesis of one's past with the present is not an endpoint but rather a horizon of constant negotiation by acknowledging historical, social and political domains that interact in complex ways
- The conditions of endemic uncertainty characterised by liquid modern societies highlight the strategic present of refugee lives and the difficulty of navigating a different social reality
- Understandings of hybridity are not simply a continuum between past and present – rather hybridity represents a new interstitial space that emphasises the enunciatory present and agonistic horizons of Sudanese culture and identity
- Maintaining a focus on public manifestation of cultural identities within civic spaces helps transcend the dangers of developing a normative theory around 'cultural taxonomy', which often reinforce Orientalist fantasies
- Social capital theory moves the understandings of integration from a perspective of individual acculturation to the dynamic of bonding and bridging interactions across the entire society.

This chapter has shown that negotiating a workable synthesis of the past and present is not just a nostalgic exercise but rather part of the necessity of living. The Sudanese community does have to 'walk the line', but it is often at the pointy end with few clear signposts. The discussion on social capital, integration and solidarity has illustrated how inter-community and broader structural dynamics play an influential role in the resettlement experience. The next chapter looks to broaden the horizons within which the immediacy of this research rests by extending the 'walking the line' metaphor to professional practice.

# Chapter 8

## Walking the Line: Understandings of Professional and Refugee Lives

Only the story ... can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story ... that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us. - (Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*, 1987: 124)

### Introduction

This two-part chapter theorises the ‘walking the line’ metaphor within the broader contexts of professional practice.<sup>76</sup> Chapter 7 concluded that a workable synthesis of one’s past with the present is not an endpoint but rather a horizon of constant negotiation by acknowledging multiple contestations associated with resettlement. Correspondingly, Part one of this chapter further develops this argument, critically engaging with trauma and how its associated discourses affect people’s resettlement experience. In particular, this perspective necessitates a return to, and an awareness of, *ordinary* and *extra-ordinary* stories as introduced in Chapter 1.<sup>77</sup> Part one examines what is at stake for people who have refugee status in resettlement contexts by highlighting the contested historical, cultural and political terrain that powerfully influences the lives of some of Australia’s most recent arrivals. This section employs Nancy Fraser’s (1997, 2000, 2001, 2003) political theory on recognition and redistribution as co-fundamental principles towards achieving justice in social work

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<sup>76</sup> This chapter will focus primarily upon social work practice. It is maintained that this professional identity can be interchanged with relevance to psychologists, psychiatrists and other allied health professionals. It is with this understanding that the study’s scope can be broadened.

<sup>77</sup> Briefly to summarise again, *extra-ordinary* understandings often revolve around traumatic experiences associated with forced migration and the experiences of the so called ‘Lost Boys’. Whilst acknowledging the value of the trauma story, this study maintains the importance of the *ordinary*, which often informs how people respond to traumatic events and speaks more to what people value and aspire to in their lives. Taking both stories into account helps to move beyond a singular, trauma focused and pathologised understanding of people who have refugee status.

practice.<sup>78</sup>

Part two theorises how movements towards social justice can address the common expression of recognising private pains as public troubles. The focus on these elements shifts the understandings of refugee lives from an emphasis upon micro-agency and interpersonal practice to macro-structuralist perspectives that include policy-level considerations and institutional power. This awareness provides a reflective lens through which to think about professional practice with resettling and emerging communities. It does this by concluding that we, too, have to ‘walk the line’ in the multiple domains of our work.<sup>79</sup>

## **PART ONE: Theorising What is at Stake**

The first part of this chapter uses social and political theories of recognition to examine what is at stake for resettling refugee populations as a result of trauma discourse.

### **Recognition theory**

Nineteenth-century German philosopher Hegel’s famous phrase ‘the struggle for recognition’ is applicable to resettling refugees, who can find themselves in a contested landscape in which they coincide, and at times collide with political, economic, social, cultural and media-driven forces. Drawing upon Fraser’s (1997, 2001) political theory of recognition and redistribution, it is possible to further envision the resettlement realities for emerging communities. This dual focus provides important scaffolding to enable movement beyond the trauma discourse and the *extra-ordinary* underpinnings frequently associated with the master status of being a refugee.

Fraser (2001: 24) notes that recognition is a question of social status that allows group members to participate as ‘full partners in social interactions’ through parity of participation. Often, the ideal of parity is not achieved with minority groups or those not enjoying privileged positions of power. Fraser (2003: 24) maintains that recognition

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<sup>78</sup> This chapter is informed by Marlowe (2010) – currently in press; not attached at this time.

<sup>79</sup> This chapter and the following one will use both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns. The word ‘we’ will refer to the professional bodies mentioned in the first footnote above. This personal writing style is consciously incorporated with the hope that it will stimulate greater self- and professional-reflection.

through misrecognition can cause social subordination because “institutionalized patterns of cultural value constitute actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible, hence as less than full partners in social interaction.” The discussions in Chapters 4 and 5 on the *a priori* assumptions that refugees are traumatised or in some way damaged have indicated how such assumptions can limit opportunities for partnership.

Whilst Fraser acknowledges the importance of recognition, she cautions that focusing on it exclusively can be at the expense of an equally important consideration: redistribution. Fraser (2003) maintains that concerns about both recognition and redistribution are involved when people experience injustices related to socio-economic inequalities that lead to marginalisation and exploitation. She introduces ‘perspectival dualism’, which situates recognition and redistribution as two conceptual domains that are co-fundamental to achieving justice. As such, both domains are not reducible or subsumable to the other but interact together in complex ways. To illustrate the struggle of perspectival dualism and the parity of participation, I include the following transcript from a Sudanese man who speaks about how he refused to participate in a previous research project that wanted to examine the level of trauma sustained by his resettling Sudanese community:

*I told him, “If you already know that [we] are traumatised, why do you have to do the research? You have already answered your question, so I do not think that I will participate. We do research because we do not know, in order to find. But if you already know what you are going to find, why do you do it? You are wasting your time.” As a refugee, we are concerned about how refugees are portrayed. One of these problems is that people assume that refugees are traumatised people. And actually this assumption has become one of the factors that has led to some of us not getting work because employers think – ‘Why should I employ people who are traumatised?’ (Participant 19)*

This man expresses concern not only about being labelled as a traumatised person but also about the parity of participation in employment. Recent studies in Australia indicate the presence of a segmented labour market in which African migrants are allocated low status jobs, if any, regardless of their prior skills and training (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2006, 2007a; Fozdar and Torezani, 2008). The latest 2006 Australian Census figures indicate a significant proportion of Sudanese people living in Australia experience multiple markers of socio-economic disadvantage (ABS, 2009).

This census shows that the average weekly income of a Sudanese-born individual was less than half that of an Australian-born person (see Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1: Median income by country of birth, adapted from DIAC (2009b) data**

<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Median individual weekly income (AUD)</b>
Somalia	214
Sudan	231
Liberia	324
Ethiopia	342
Sierra Leone	413
Australia	488
Total Australian population	466

The census data further evidence that the Sudanese-born community (a population of more than 5,000 residents) has the highest unemployment rate (28.7%) of any nationality. This figure is almost six times higher than the average of the overall population (ABS, 2009). Alongside Afghanis, the Sudanese community has the highest rate of housing over-utilisation (46%), which is defined as needing at least one more bedroom per the number of people residing there (ABS, 2009). These ABS findings acknowledge the few economic resources within the Sudanese community for affording suitable accommodation.<sup>80</sup> With the increasing focus on the word ‘resilience’ within the social work and psychological literature, what does this term mean in the context of the daily realities of poverty, arguable discrimination/racism and high levels of unemployment?

Whilst employment, income and access to suitable housing are just a few issues related directly to distribution dynamics, recognition is also an issue. The last participant quote acknowledges that if employers recognise the Sudanese as traumatised people, they will also see the Sudanese as high risk business ventures. This dynamic illustrates the close link between recognition and redistribution are how the two interact in complex ways. As Fraser (2000: 113) states:

<sup>80</sup> Being invited and warmly welcomed into numerous homes, I have seen the difficulties of having to accommodate large families in small housing flats. I have walked into homes and seen bills on the refrigerator with red overdue stamps and in other houses where the electricity had been cut off.

Misrecognition, accordingly, does not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity, but social subordination... To redress this injustice still requires a politics of recognition ... it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest.

Distinguishing between *extra-ordinary* and *ordinary* stories can be helpful in resolving misrecognition issues, as these perspectives, when brought together, do not diminish the difficulties often associated with the 'refugee experience'; they recognise people as agents who are capable of overcoming difficulties, of recovery and of contributing to society. Turton (2004) argues that when refugees are viewed more as 'ordinary people' beyond the category of passive victim, there is greater potential to see them more like us and consequently as members of their new wider community. Whilst it is more difficult to make a direct link to distribution dynamics from trauma-dominated perspectives, there is no mistaking the link between 'othering' process associated with refugee discourses and exclusionary practices related to education, employment, and other types of resources and social engagements. A number of studies poignantly demonstrate how government and media portrayals can create negative public sentiments towards asylum seekers in Australia (Gale, 2004; Klocker, 2004; Klocker and Dunn, 2003). In response, Pedersen et al. (2006) suggest that if such discursive practices of presenting asylum seekers and refugees as Others are challenged and changed, so too can the Australian society's conclusions about them. Responding to perceptions of how the Australian public has a predominant trauma focused understanding of the Sudanese community, one of the Adelaide participants states:

*Most of the people here [in Australia] depend on the media, and what the media always brings up is the poverty in Africa. When you are from Africa, they see you as what they see on the television. So, the only view they have is you as person coming from poverty... And they [Australians] just get a little view of us also from the actions that are done by a few of us like the young people having a fight. This is how they view us. But these people exist within the mainstream. They exist in every society. (Participant 23)*

A predominant focus upon the *extra-ordinary* privileges stories of trauma from forced migration over the *ordinary* considerations that could speak more to who these people are over time and what they inherently value. Returning to a critique of the edited book *Broken Spirits*, Drozdek and Wilson (2004: xxvii) state, "Broken spirits is a metaphor

for 40 million people worldwide who are victims of war, political oppression, and torture in all their insidious forms and humanly devised demonic variations.” The data gathered from participants in my study indicates that many of the ‘victims’ mentioned by Drozdek and Wilson (2004) would directly challenge the accuracy of this sensationalised metaphor, even though they have experienced hardship and adversity. The assumptions surrounding what is commonly referred to as ‘the refugee journey’, associated sequelae from trauma and fears about resettling communities can become the grounds for myopically rendering people visible only as refugees, traumatised and the ‘other’ – a potent combination that can foster unfounded stereotypes and fear.<sup>81</sup> Harrell-Bond (1999: 143) notes, “Rather than viewing themselves as heroes who have stood up to and escaped oppressive regimes, today many refugees are reluctant to admit their status.” This reluctance speaks about their awareness of pervasive discourses on refugees as traumatised individuals, dependents on social welfare and undue burdens on an ‘overly generous’ society. One Sudanese man expresses his frustration around (mis)recognition and automatic associations that ensue between Australian humanitarian entrants and trauma:

*There is a misperception about Sudanese, especially from trauma. People think or conceptualise that Sudanese are coming from the war torn country and that they are all traumatised. That they always respond to any situation with emotion because of the trauma that they have had back in their country. This though, is not that much true. (Participant 24)*

Malkki (1995) writes about how dominant discourses on refugees tend to focus narrowly on the person as a passive victim and further ensconce refugees within the purviews of trauma-centric understandings. Fraser (2003: 31) warns that victimised discourses can potentially make “externally manifest and publicly verifiable impediments to some people’s standings as full members of society.” Such experiences can create the maldistribution and misrecognition associated with economic and cultural injustices (Fraser, 1997, 2000). These impediments, when informed through trauma-dominated and ‘othering’ perspectives, weaken the parity of participation. Fraser’s (1997, 2000) work further highlights the importance of the *ordinary*, which provides scaffolding towards viewing resettling refugees as peers in social life who are capable

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<sup>81</sup> Malkki (1996) provides a compelling account of how media presentations that focus on the ‘broken spirits’ inform the humanitarian responses to them (i.e. – they need expert informed psychological healing because they have experienced atrocities).

of meaningful contributions. Pupavac (2008: 272) cites Arendt (1985), maintaining that when refugees are regarded as belonging to a political community their rights are more likely to be respected and acknowledged. If achieved, this wider community sentiment provides a more conducive environment for the bridging types of capital discussed in Chapter 7.

## **Recognising the misrecognisers**

There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like. Just as in corrupt, totalitarian regimes, those who exercise power over others can do anything. (Achebe, 2000)

Critiques of Fraser's works argue that it does not go far enough to locate the role of the misrecognisers and their associated powers (Markell, 2003; McNay, 2008; Zurn, 2008). Garrett (2009), while in many respects acknowledging the adeptness of Fraser's dual focus, maintains that her political theory does not adequately address the role of the state and the associated motives (economic, political) behind fostering or sustaining misrecognition. Markell (2003: 18) also argues that much recognition theory fails to acknowledge the misrecognisers and places too much emphasis on the 'misrecognisee', thereby "focussing on the consequences of suffering misrecognition rather than on the more fundamental question of what it means to commit it." For example, the former Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews' comments (just weeks before a Federal election) about Sudanese people failing to integrate, were never substantiated with hard evidence, yet it can be argued that they contributed to fostering fear and exclusionary practices. Almost every participant in my study mentioned Andrews' statements and spoke of increased experiences of racism that followed from this (mis)recognition.<sup>82</sup>

Andrews' commentary speaks to Pupavac's (2006: 7) criticism, which claims that policy makers are concerned increasingly with the 'refugee burden' rather than the possibilities around a refugee's fate. This burden is often informed through medicalised and individualised discourses of trauma as expressed through unemployment, adverse

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<sup>82</sup> A number of blogsites were visited during this time and the number of racist comments and anti-immigration sentiments were astonishing. Similar increased web activity was observed when a fifteen year old boy was allegedly stabbed and killed by another Sudanese youth in November 2009 and the death of the Sudanese youth Liep Gony in Melbourne in 2007. Major media installations such as the ABC removed the opportunity to publicly comment on its website within the related articles due to such racist and anti-refugee commentary. Other stories on the Sudanese community have required a moderator to ensure that xenophobic comments were not fuelling the flames of an already unfortunate discourse.

mental health outcomes, lawlessness and incompatibility in resettlement contexts; outcomes of war trauma. Fassin and D'Halluin (2005) acknowledge the historic shift away from viewing refugee lives from a political focus to viewing them from a medicalised one. They argue that the primary social currency in the 'terrain of truth' rests more with physical and psychological injuries associated with trauma than with people's testimonies and narratives. As evidenced through the participant s' narratives in this study, the 'trauma currency' provides powerful claims for recognition in forced migration contexts and access to services in Australia. Trauma as a currency, however, can create serious impediments to people's wider social status and ability to exercise agency as *participants in public life* as opposed to *victims living within it*. As Silove and Ekbal (2002) argue, if refugees are presented to host countries as psychologically damaged, then the debate of asylum can move from humanitarian responsibilities to the economic implications and fears associated with accepting refugees. Related to this critique, Zetter (2007: 188) demonstrates how bureaucratic powers can deconstruct and reinvent interpretations of the refugee label to legitimise state interests, arguing that, "Labels reveal the political in the apolitical." Using Said's (1993) contrapuntal analysis, which was introduced in the previous chapter, it is possible to see both the coloniser and colonised through such 'apolitical' processes. Andrews' comments are a prime example of politicising the issue of accepting refugees into Australia. He substantiated the political platforms of border security and maintaining 'Australian values' just prior to a major Federal election, an action that highlights Markell's (2003) call to critically examine how misrecognisers might benefit from (mis)recognition. Media reporting reinforces politicised misrecognition, which one participant expresses cynically as a way for the media to make money:

*You can say yes, the war of course has affected significantly the Sudanese, but the Sudanese have had their own coping mechanisms. And these coping mechanisms have of course helped them to manage their own emotions, their own response to violence, and you can not say that the only option available to Sudanese is to use violence. So, media is like any other profit making organisation. Their motive is to try to tell the public that we are doing this as way of creating a desire of the people to make a selling. So the people buy and then they read about Sudanese. And I think that is what rules their motives. And I think that is not really a very good motive. (Participant 24)*

Discourses of the nation-state and integration can influence the phenomenology of exile

in resettlement. Zetter (2007) notes how the refugee label is first *formed* under the contexts of globalisation, making the patterns of forced migration much more difficult to define. It is then *transformed* in response to this complexity and subsequently *politicised* to represent a wider discourse on restrictionist policies; policies intended to protect the Australian community from ‘outsiders’. Drawing upon Taylor’s (1992) seminal work, *The politics of recognition*, Ricoeur (2005) maintains that an individual’s identity is shaped partly by other people’s recognition, or lack of recognition, of them. In Australia, recognition the Sudanese community receives is based predominantly upon traumatic experiences associated with forced migration, and media stories that document isolated events of violence or illegal actions in resettlement contexts. This perspective, with its associated ‘othering’ dynamics and (mis)recognition, makes it difficult for the Sudanese community to interact with, and recognise the wider public. As Papastergiadis (2000: 14) states:

Today the stereotypical images of the stranger as asylum-seeker, gypsy or refugee often precede the arrival of migrants, proliferating on the screens of media networks, which in turn unsettle colonial poles of centre and periphery. The identity of the stranger is thus crucially affected by the media and its use of stereotypes. In this context the ambivalence that is projected against the stranger can take more extreme forms.

The consideration of wider social and political powers is important: “The label ‘refugee’ both stereotypes and institutionalizes a status” (Zetter 1988: 1). A predominant focus on the *extra-ordinary* gives further credence to perceptions where a tall black African walking down the streets of Adelaide can be (mis)recognised as a dangerous person. Unfortunately, the descriptors of poverty, conflict, chronic exposure to violence and destitution often become the public’s explicit and tacit understandings of refugee lives. Such perspectives are reinforced by media reporting that has overtones of racial profiling and sensationalism. For instance, a Melbourne-based newspaper story responded to a murder within the Sudanese community around the time Kevin Andrews made his commentary, stating: “Local [police] officers know that Sudanese men come from a warlike culture and arc up more quickly than most when in a group” (Bolt, 2007: 34). Words such as ‘arcing up’, ‘packs of youths’ and ‘tides of boat people’ used in media reports and Kevin Andrews’ statement about ‘boat people’, demonstrate an

underlying hegemony towards refugees and a voyeuristic fascination with trauma.<sup>83</sup> Lloyd-MacDonald (2007) headlines a newspaper article in reference to the death of the Sudanese youth Liep Gony in Melbourne: “MEN are slaughtered in front of their children, babies are ripped from their mothers’ arms and those who dodge the violence walk for days seeking sanctuary, shelter and ultimately peace.” Other examples of journalistic sensationalism are evident in Windle’s (2008) analysis of how the media presented the Sudanese community during the second civil war in Southern Sudan (see also ABC, 2009; Klocker, 2004; Klocker and Dunn, 2003; Macdonald, 2005; McKinnon, 2008; Perera, 2006; Robins, 2003). These readily disseminated forms of ‘knowledge’ provide powerful commentary about how Orientalist discourses on the Global South and associated ‘othering’ tactics dominate the public’s access to material about the Sudanese community. A participant challenges the automatic associated implications of being a Sudanese refugee and a traumatised person, stating:

*As I said before, trauma has two sides to me. And I am sure this is true for other people. One is that these experiences are teaching them to think, to think hard, and to know what life is and what are the possible ways of dealing with it. ... I know at the moment other people say [about refugees], “Oh, trauma, their mind is lost, their personality, they have lost a lot of things, they have nothing.” It is not completely horrible the way it was. Somebody will come up with the idea now, at least most Australians, that the Sudanese people are violent because of the war that they have been subjected. (Participant 23)*

Whilst examples of overt racism, blatant exclusionary policies and unfounded miscegenistic claims are relatively easy to recognise, the tacit and often well-intentioned forms of misrecognition can be much harder to pinpoint. An example of the good intentioned but somewhat misguided approach to assisting refugees is contextualised through my experience working with universities in South Australia. These universities have identified that a significant number of tertiary Sudanese students are struggling to pass their coursework in a number of faculties. In response to this situation, a university-based academic support service sent the following email correspondence asking if I would meet with them to discuss finding approaches to better meet the needs of the Sudanese student body:

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<sup>83</sup> Another powerful example of this is how Channel Nine ran a story about ‘tides’ of asylum seekers now living on welfare, based on data obtained from Centrelink in October 2009. An ABC program known as ‘Media Watch’ deconstructed these claims to show that the story was misleading and seriously flawed. To watch a short video clip of this program, see ABC (2009).

Hi Jay, a colleague gave me your name as a person I might speak to regarding Sudanese students. There have been some calls for extra support for Sudanese students who are struggling academically. We are trying to find out if there has been any research on the problems/progress of Sudanese students at university and how we might best support them. We are aware that there are many issues and that it is not only Sudanese students who have suffered atrocities and who are encountering some difficulties.

(personal correspondence)

This support service has good intentions to assist Sudanese students. However, the ‘atrocities’ experienced and the underlying assumptions of trauma show that the locus of inquiry is in significant part upon students as traumatised rather than on how university structures are not meeting the needs of increasingly diverse student bodies, or how an Australian education can unknowingly promote a predominant Western discourse and pedagogy. The misrecognition of students as traumatised obscures the important consideration of how university structures may unwittingly create learning spaces or academic policies that can be exclusionary and non-reflective. The universities see the problem as being about the students, not as being within the university structures. This focus informs the second part of this chapter, which will seek to locate reflective surfaces for critically engaging professional practice that ranges from interpersonal practice to policy-related work.

## **PART TWO: The Social Justice Line and Building Capacities**

Part two of this chapter discusses what social justice initiatives might look like and how these could be critically engaged within the multiple landscapes of social work practice. Again, ‘walking the line’ retains salience, as Margalit’s (1996) concept of a decent society provides a lens to see how easy it is to remain within the realms of interpersonal practice as opposed to addressing structural manifestations of oppression. This statement does not discount interpersonal practice; this remains an integral component of our (professional social workers) work, as does thinking about broader social and political dynamics. Rather, the statement highlights the necessity to work effectively within multiple professional domains. This emphasis on multiple domains provides key considerations for theorising not only how the Southern Sudanese participants cope with difficult experiences but also how host countries, practitioners and those involved in

policy respond to resettlement-related issues. I begin this section with a discussion of Margalit's (1996) concept of a decent society, looking at justice and injustice in particular.

### **A civilised, decent or just society?**

Margalit (1996, 2001a) claims that the *experiences of injustice* rather than the *endeavour for justice* is what brings an engagement with politics. He forwards the need for a 'decent' society (rather than a 'just' one) as a higher first priority, which addresses the manifestations of injustice. Margalit (1996: 9, 1997) makes a significant distinction between a civilised society and a decent one through the concept of 'humiliation', which he defines as a behaviour or condition resulting in damage or compromise to a person's self-respect. Margalit (1996: 1) elaborates upon these concepts, stating:

*A civilised society* is one whose *members* do not humiliate one another, while a *decent society* is one in which the *institutions* do not humiliate people. (emphasis added).

For Margalit, both behaviours (racism, threats, excluding actions) and human imposed conditions (poverty and exclusionary policies) can provide justifications for society's members to feel humiliated. The concept of humiliation provides a sound reason for why social work practice should remain critical and reflective in both the interpersonal and broader realms embodied by the profession.<sup>84</sup> Addressing humiliation within a civilised and decent society lays the foundation towards realising an increasingly just society (Margalit, 2001a: 255-6). I now look at each of these (civilised society and decent society) in the context of embracing both in social work practice. The former is addressed primarily at a micro-practice/interpersonal level and the latter within wider macro-structuralist realms.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> For this section, 'interpersonal' will refer to situations when working solely with the client system, whether it is individual, group or community-based. Addressing broader realms will refer to work that looks to address the expression of private pains from a particular client system to more structural considerations of policy, institutional power and the wider social consciousness.

<sup>85</sup> There could be a criticism of placing Fraser's political theory of recognition and Margalit's decent society in a sequential fashion. Margalit, in many respects, espouses the writings of Axel Honneth (see Honneth and Margalit, 2001; Margalit, 2001b). Honneth takes a more monistic approach to recognition theory, which creates a number of incompatibilities with Fraser's perspectival dualism of recognition and redistribution (see Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Margalit's emphasis on humiliation and the harm to a person's self respect fits well with Honneth's (1995; 2001; 2007) writings on disrespect in recognition theory. Thus, I have taken more of an extractive approach to Margalit's writings that present a helpful

## Civilised society: addressing interpersonal practice

This first section builds upon Margalit's (1996) discussion of a civilised society by first discussing the domain of interpersonal practice in which its members do not humiliate others. Whilst embracing non-humiliating practices is an uncontentious claim for social work practice, it is helpful to return to a critique from Chapters 4 and 6, in which it was argued that the profession is often mobilised and informed through experiences of trauma, highlighting the potential danger of entering into a victimised and pathologised world view of people's lives. This caution is not meant to discount interpersonal practice or clinically-informed interventions. Rather, it reinforces the call to look for pathways to agency within both recognition and redistribution dynamics.

I now return to the concept of double listening as an illustration of how professional practice can acknowledge and reinforce people as agents within their own lives.<sup>86</sup> This process is demonstrated through a study participant speaking to his experience of being detained and tortured:<sup>87</sup>

*Isaac: Look here [shows a scar on his arm], here I was tied like this [hands and feet bound together]. My legs could not move and they used a very hot stone, this part of mine is put on it [his chest] and they stand behind here while others hold the tight ropes. So here you feel something is burning you. It is something that I will never forget...*

*JM: What was it that got you through this awful time?*

*Isaac: Look, when I was tied down and somebody step on me – nothing come out from my mouth – just only word that I said which was “Jesus!” That’s all. So that word; it is my belief that it is what helped me because nobody is more powerful than Jesus.*

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way of looking at professional social work practice – in decent and civilised realms. Honneth was not used in the previous section due to a critique that his work has a tendency to focus too strongly on the psychologisation of misrecognition, thereby placing too much emphasis on what it means to experience misrecognition rather than what it might mean for the misrecognisers to commit it (see Bauman, 2001b; Garrett, 2009; Markell, 2003; McNay, 2008). Fraser (2008) engages misrecognition from the standpoint of status insubordination rather than harm to personal identity and provides a better fit to engage trauma on a broader level.

<sup>86</sup> To summarise briefly, the principle behind double listening is that it opens spaces for both the trauma story and the response to it to be told. This approach makes it possible to recognise, validate and dignify the trauma story whilst also opening spaces to acknowledge how people respond to such situations, thus highlighting people's agency. From this perspective, it is possible to further trace within a person's responses their associated transformative initiatives, special skills, values and beliefs that have strengthened their forms of resilience and resistance to the experiences of trauma itself.

<sup>87</sup> This participant is given a pseudonym for the purposes of the following discussion and ease of reading.

*JM: Nobody is more powerful than Jesus.*

*Isaac: So I believe that I come out from that detention because of that word. Because of the word, Jesus. So, I believe up to this day that Jesus is the mighty God that is always with me. I have a small piece of the Bible that I carry with me [points to his back pocket] –that is my gun. That is my weapon. Wherever I go, I have my weapon. It is like this word... Always have something good with me, I open and any page – I read it. (Participant 3)*

There are two distinct foci in this excerpt. One is the torture Isaac experienced, which embodies the *extra-ordinary* and captures the reader/researcher's attention. Whilst there is value in the trauma/torture story if approached cautiously, it is so potentially engaging that other important considerations may be obscured. The second perspective, however, looks into what has sustained and continues to assist Isaac through this experience – namely having Jesus and using the Bible as his weapon. This latter focus provides insight into what helped Isaac respond to this traumatic event. Rather than accepting the deleterious consequences of trauma, Isaac reveals himself as an agent, responding directly to the events that have transpired.

This line of enquiry made it possible to trace the history of Isaac's spirituality as informed through his parental teachings, community life, cultural practices and influential role models. Isaac noted that he had never been asked these questions before even though he had spoken of his forced migration journey to officials, embassies and health care providers many times over the last several years. Thus, it is about recognising and elevating the *ordinary* as extraordinary (as distinct from an *extra-ordinary* focus on trauma). These understandings can reside within or outside a person's refugee background, and provide powerful insights into a person's sources of healing, resistance and approaches to recovery.

Again, the value of knowing the trauma story is not disputed. Rather, it is that we, as researchers, practitioners and community members should consider more strongly the worth of the understandings situated outside the adverse challenges associated with forced migration. Looking at Isaac's account, it is evident that *ordinary* responses often lie within *extra-ordinary* experiences. This emphasises that we must be responsible and accountable for the questions we ask. If we ask about the trauma, we must also ask: why is this exploration being done? For whose benefit? What are the ramifications of this line of inquiry? What do these questions reinforce in this person's life (the experiences

of trauma or the responses to it)? The same questions can be asked of the responses. This sort of reflexive questioning builds upon Freire's (1990) concept of maintaining a 'critical curiosity' whereby we are curious not only about the lives and actions of others, but also of our own.

### **Elevating the ordinary and embracing alternative perspectives**

Participants often offered to speak more deeply about their experiences of forced migration without being prompted when I entered conversation with them via an exploration of their responses to trauma. Ghorashi (2008: 117) notes that "in order to capture refugees' experiences and narratives it is necessary to create space within research to be able to notice the untold within the interviews." This space was created in my research through a prolonged engagement with the Sudanese community, which allowed participants to express a preferred story about their lives by tracing the history, intentions and values of their responses. This inquiry has the potential to open another discussion that goes beyond the level of damage a person has sustained as a refugee to what they actually want in their lives. In this way it provides a stark contrast to the deleterious impact of traumatic experiences.

It is important to note that the process of double listening, which was used in this study, is not seen as a technical set of interventions; rather, it represents a view that people are experts in their own lives.<sup>88</sup> This assumption enables people to offer many important insights and ideas about how to proceed and make meaning in their own lives (White and Epston, 1990). If practitioners work from this focus, they will recognise potential 'clients' as agents of their own lives; a recognition that may lessen the tremendous pressure (possibly burden) on practitioners to blaze pathways to healing, reconciliation and recovery.

White (2006b: 88) discusses his work with people who have experienced trauma as trying to move the person out of the trauma river to the bank; another territory of identity where one would literally not be swept away. When Isaac, who spoke of having Jesus and using the Bible as his weapon, read his interview transcript, he asked for multiple copies because he said that it was proof of his story. He said it acknowledges the importance of his spirituality, education and parents' teachings throughout his life,

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<sup>88</sup> This focus on strengths and people as experts is supported in much of the social work literature. See Briskman (2007), Dominelli (2002), Lee (1994), McQuaide and Ehrenreich (1997), Saleeby (1996) and Shulman (2006).

and that he intended to share this document with his children when they were older. It is important to note that Isaac did not offer to speak of the trauma story until he had firmly established values and responses outside the events associated with detainment and torture. Other Sudanese participants also asked for multiple copies and audio CD recordings of their interviews for reasons similar to those Isaac expressed; it gave recognition beyond the 'event worthy' circumstances underpinned by trauma. It was further observed that establishing the responses to trauma with many other participants seemed to provide them a safer place to stand, when and if appropriate, to discuss the trauma story. Asking participants to speak further about their *ordinary* stories of sustenance and survival, as informed through their parent teachings, culture, spirituality and other forms of identity, meant they became much more enthusiastic as the interview continued. Rather than asking for a single-sided focus of trauma, as detailed in experiences of torture, forced marches and other stories of despair, privileging the person's response to such forms of adversity provided additional scaffolding towards understanding what confers sustenance and strength in this person's past, present and into the future.

### **The value of simultaneous documentation of the *extra-ordinary* and the *ordinary***

The *extra-ordinary* stories of refugee lives are characterised, and can be sensationalised, through experiences of hardship and adversity. However, the *ordinary* stories go beyond what makes a person a refugee and attest to what sustained them through difficult situations. Whilst not attempting to create any meta-theories about resettling and emerging communities, this approach of simultaneous documentation of people's responses and the trauma story provides a critical framework that addresses the following:

- (1) Finding ways of capturing people's lived experience that reduce the likelihood of re-traumatisation by moving outside the trauma story
- (2) Whilst work with refugees can capture trauma narratives when receiving testimonies, life narratives and even in truth/reconciliation commissions, it is also possible to acknowledge a person's responses to trauma. This emphasis can acknowledge people's preferred sentiments of living as opposed to an exclusive focus on the impact of trauma
- (3) With respect to supporting refugees in resettlement contexts, an awareness of both *ordinary* and *extra-ordinary* stories can illuminate further perspectives of how people voice their responses to traumatic experience,

which moves the locus of ‘woundings’ predicated in the past to an engagement of their lives entwined with the past, present and future

- (4) Can inform better practice that acknowledges clients or research participants as agents rather than victims or pathological conditions.

There is value in knowing about the *extra-ordinary*, as illuminating the stories of oppression and injustice can elevate the voices of those most marginalised to the world stage. There remains, however, significant scope into understanding the *ordinary* stories of people’s lives. We all have such stories and they are often grounded within our history, culture, parental teachings, morals, traditions and folklore. Inquiring into people’s lives outside the refugee journey can provide critical insights about the effects of trauma and how people have responded directly to such experiences. Such a shift is arguably a key step in recognising refugees as agents in their own lives who are capable of making meaningful contributions to society. The next section looks at social justice, refugee lives and resettlement on broader, non-interpersonal levels.

### **Decent society: addressing practice in broader realms**

This study now considers manifestations of humiliation and professional practice on broader levels. Margalit’s (1996: 11) concept of a decent society in which its institutions do not humiliate others requires several essential components: respect; privacy; citizenship; employment; and avoiding the tendency to replace processes of just distribution with welfare and charity. Margalit (1996: 231-5) does not say we do not need charity. Rather, he argues that it has the potential to reinforce a sense of pity and may be provided at the expense of elevating marginalised groups to an equal footing in society. As discussed in Chapter 4, the historic shift toward medicalising refugee lives (as often informed through an individualised trauma-dominated focus) can contribute to a refugee discourse on notions of damage, deficit and despair. This discourse results in construction of the Sudanese community as a risky enterprise for others to embrace (see Beck, 1992; Gale, 2004; Hage, 2003) and reinforces a sense of humiliation through a pitying and weariness of the ‘downtrodden’. These perspectives negate Fraser’s (2001) perspectival dualism of recognition and redistribution that enable refugee participation as peers in public life, as presented in Part one.

Returning to Margalit’s (2001a: 261) conception of humiliation, a number of powerful

institutions, such as the media and government, can humiliate their citizens: “Who gazes at whom and how depend on powerful relations.” This gaze highlights the need to think about macro-practice and structural domains of power. It necessitates social work professions to consider the different levels of government and policy; service provider practice and provision; and media representations. Esping-Anderson (1990: 159) takes this broader view, emphasising, “The welfare state is not just a mechanism that intervenes in, and possibly corrects, the structure of inequality; it is, in its own right, a system of stratification. It is an active force in the ordering of social relations.” Such a force misrecognises communities at an institutional level by ignoring or silencing their perspectives. The Sudanese community in this study expresses their perception of unjust practices and sensationalised *extra-ordinary* representations as the difference between ‘crocodiles and lizards’<sup>89</sup> – those with institutional power humiliate those without it. Engaging an important historic role of social work, Ignatieff (1994: 12) states, “Politics is not only the art of representing the needs of strangers; it is also the perilous business of speaking on behalf of needs, which strangers have had no chance to articulate on their own.” Speaking on behalf of the ‘needs of strangers,’ with a focus on how powerful institutions and structural forces impact people’s daily lives, represents a critical and much needed social work role. Doing so critically interfaces with humiliating conditions on broader levels.

### **Resettlement initiatives and addressing humiliating conditions**

In order to address humiliation on broader levels, it is necessary to identify the spaces within which it is remedied and others where it is embodied. As evidenced in Chapter 5, Sudanese men note that resettlement experiences can be as traumatising as those in forced migration contexts. One of the predominant expressions of trauma from forced migration was expressed similarly in resettlement contexts within the *situational domain* of limited opportunities for employment and education. Participants further identified that experiences of discrimination in both the camp and resettlement contexts reinforced a sense of humiliation and hopelessness. From this perspective, this study suggests that for many refugees, not just the Southern Sudanese living in diaspora, the exclusionary spaces characteristic of the camp can have a similar construction in

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<sup>89</sup> This reference refers back to the first quote introduced in Chapter 1, in which a participant said that the Sudanese community are relegated to ‘lizards’ that have limited or no voice in resettlement contexts, whereas powerful politicians such as Kevin Andrews and other institutional forces have the power of ‘crocodiles’ to discursively construct ‘lizards’ as they wish.

resettlement contexts.

It would be an extreme and unfair exaggeration to claim that resettlement in Australia recreates the camp and hence strips refugee communities of any participation in political life. It is important to recognise that the Australian government provides invaluable assistance to the Sudanese community and refugees more generally. A number of participants express a deep gratitude for receiving protection and citizenship under Australia's humanitarian auspices. Comparing the situation in Australia with life in the refugee camps provides a powerful reminder of, and perspective on the past and present:

*It is very different where I sleep now. Before, no clothes, no shelter no whatever. The rain can hit me and I walk on foot. So big, big difference. So that time I walk on foot in the night time. I don't know what danger can get me. To come here [Australia] is a big difference. (Participant 12)*

And:

*And this is really quite astonishing changes that have been brought upon us by catastrophic war that has resulted in almost two million people killed, 4.5 million people internally displaced and internationally, and yet out of this tragedy there come some opportunities [in Australia] that has never been there before. That had been opened to us by people who hardly knew us even a decade ago. (Participant 14)*

There are many examples of government initiatives offering newly arrived humanitarian entrants language tuition, pathways to job training, access to welfare services and scholarships for study. The four primary services provided under the Integrated Humanitarian Services Strategy (IHSS) funded under DIAC (2009c) include:

- Case Coordination, Information and Referrals;
- On Arrival Reception and Assistance;
- Accommodation Services; and
- Short-term Torture and Trauma Counselling

However, after six months most refugees are no longer eligible for these services under

the IHSS.<sup>90</sup> They are referred to the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) that provides more general assistance. This aims to make them become more “self reliant and participate more fully in Australian society” (DIAC, 2009a). However, there remains significant scope for longer-term outlooks and efforts to improve social inclusion, family wellbeing, promoting healthy lives, ensuring employable job skills training, welfare service provision and service responsiveness. Numerous people from the Sudanese community express how the first six months of resettlement is a ‘blur’ in which they find it almost impossible to incorporate massive amounts of information about life in Australia. For example, the Adult Migration English Program (AMEP) provides 510 hours of free English language tuition. Within this time frame, numerous participants and community members stress that it is incredibly difficult to develop the necessary linguistic skills to succeed in employment, inter-community interactions and educational contexts. Many of them state that because they do not know their neighbours in Australia, it can be difficult to practice their language skills with native speakers, highlighting the limited bridging opportunities discussed in Chapter 7.

This study’s findings echo several of the policy recommendations forwarded by Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2007b) in their report on refugees and employment in Western Australia, most particularly around:

- Coordinated employment assistance to provide training and work experience placements in areas of recognised skill shortages; and
- Anti-racism initiatives around political leadership, educating employers and ‘targeted’ employment opportunities for CALD minorities.

Other major studies of CALD communities have generated similar conclusions (Krahn et al., 2000; Zetter et al., 2006).

One of most important pathways to healing identified in Chapter 6 was through agential realisations, often situated as practical outcomes. Flanagan’s (2007) thirty-four recommendations within a report on refugee resettlement experiences in Tasmania (three quarters of participants were Sudanese) revolve predominantly around housing, employment, language acquisition, overcoming negative employer perceptions, support

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<sup>90</sup> Services under the IHSS after six months can be extended in extenuating circumstances, particularly if the person has experienced torture or other forms of significant trauma (see DIAC 2009a).

for family reunification and addressing social exclusion.<sup>91</sup> Such conclusions are paralleled in Canadian reports with resettling Sudanese refugees (Simich, 2004). Meaningful work, in particular, offers people both autonomy and economic citizenship (Margalit 1996: 249). This is also a major finding in this study. The opportunities for work clearly provide a pragmatic and resonant way of positively addressing humiliation where members of the Sudanese community can take charge of their own lives, support their communities (in Australia, Sudan and elsewhere) and feel they are making an important contribution to society.

It needs to be asked, in reference to Margalit: do government initiatives delivered through the IHSS, SHP and broader programs create the long-term conditions for realising a decent society? The latest census data, mentioned earlier in this chapter, provide evidence of humiliating conditions characterised by a segmented labour market, high unemployment, significantly less annual income and other markers of social inequality. Disparities can be explained in part by the fact that members of the Sudanese community are adjusting to a foreign resettlement reality. However, from an engaged interaction within the Sudanese community, my view is that these reported numbers do not speak to simple acculturation processes but relate in significant part to exclusionary spaces.

### **Exclusionary spaces**

In Chapter 5 I highlighted how participants emphasise that the resettlement experience can be as traumatising, if not more so, than the experience of forced migration. This conclusion is reached through the lived experience of being excluded in Adelaide, often embodied through manifestations of prejudice, discrimination, cultural racism and institutional racism. Byrne (2005: 172) notes that social exclusion is a difficult term to define and forwards a particular focus upon ‘excluded (and excluding) spaces’. The census data presented in Part one about employment, income and housing illustrate that the Sudanese community are relatively excluded within several spaces of Australian public life. Again, the provision of resources to enable access to these spaces needs to

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<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to note that most of Flanagan’s overarching recommendations relate to what this study defines as practical outcomes (housing, employment, children succeeding in schools, education, etc). However, the pervasive mention of trauma and traumatic memories arising primarily from forced migration experiences is mentioned more than forty times throughout Flanagan’s hundred-page report. Yet, none of her recommendations relate to traumatic memories. One refers to counselling but has a financial rather than therapeutic focus.

traverse beyond the charity solution. As Margalit (1996: 241) acknowledges, the provision of welfare services under the banner of a ‘charity society’ rather than a decent one can reinforce humiliating practices through which the Sudanese community is more likely to receive pity and disdain than true participation.

The frequency of participant referrals to Kevin Andrews suggests that he represents more than a person – he embodies a concept of exclusionary practices and values. Although Andrews’ commentary never actualised into preventing African migration because of an ‘inability’ to ‘integrate’, it reverberates to this day (even with a change of government). This process speaks to Bourdieu’s (1991) discussion on symbolic power whereby certain forces are able to name and categorise particular groups – in this case a community labelled as dangerous, different (hence deviant) and damaged. Andrews’ comments, as echoed sentiments of the state, are exclusionary in that they create an ‘othering’ dynamic (see Bhabha, 1994; Dona, 2007; Said, 1993). The previously discussed process of identifying a refugee as a traumatised person further limits Sudanese people’s parity of participation as peers in social life because of a supposed inability to integrate with Australian values (whatever these are). Margalit (1996: 158) refers to ‘symbolic citizenship’, which he defines as sharing society’s symbolic wealth, and in which particular groups are not relegated to a second-class citizenry. ‘Symbolic citizenship’ epitomizes how the rhetoric of equality, social cohesion and multicultural endeavours is far easier to disseminate than to realise or embrace.

### **The ‘twilight of knowing’ and imagination**

Haebich (2007: 21) introduces a type of public unawareness she terms the ‘twilight of knowing and not knowing’ in which “discriminatory treatment becomes normalised to the extent that it is rendered unremarkable and virtually invisible to the wider society.” She cautions that while the public might be aware of existing forms of oppression on some level, they generally remain unaware of unjust policies, one-sided media discourses and humiliating practices because these issues are interwoven into the fabric of society, often rendering them indiscernible.<sup>92</sup> In a similar analysis, Dominelli (2007:

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<sup>92</sup> This perspective is particularly relevant within a historical analysis of Australia’s policies towards migrants since Federation (see Jupp, 1992). The White Australia Policy in 1901 was designed to prevent non-European migration, and its focus on assimilation and restriction was not fully dismantled until 1972. In 1992, a policy on mandatory detention was introduced for all ‘unauthorised’ arrivals, with a 273-day limit. In 1994 this limit was made indefinite. Australia’s policies of mandatory detention meant that people who arrived on its shores by boat seeking asylum were placed in detention centres, sometimes for several years. The public’s awareness of these issues, I argue, was situated in this twilight of knowing and

7-8) draws upon Foucault to caution how the public can (often unconsciously) become agents of powerful institutions by passively accepting the status quo of coercive practices, policies and representations. These concerns necessitate that the social work profession not only situates itself within the ‘private troubles’ of people’s lives but also views them as public issues (Schwartz, 1969).

How do we see beyond the ‘twilight of knowing and not knowing’; to expand our view of people’s private troubles beyond the individual and interpersonal to the broader public and social justice sphere? Kirmayer (2007a: 378) acknowledges the importance of imagination as a vital tool for addressing ingrained oppressive manifestations:

The media do manage to fill our heads with ideas about the other, but the stereotypes we absorb are more likely to be obstacles than bridges to entering other worlds. ... The stories we find credible on a backdrop of narratives in constant circulation are controlled by interests that are not neutral and would have us imagine our world in a certain way. This is not the best of all possible worlds. And imagination is the only faculty we have that lets us see beyond the horizon of the convention.

Embracing an imagination that can help us move beyond understandings of oppressive practices situated within the twilight of knowing presents a very real and contemporary challenge in social work practice. Margalit’s (1996) concepts of a civilised society (where individuals do not humiliate one another) and a decent one (where society’s institutions do not humiliate its members) provide an important backdrop for examining social justice-oriented work. They relate to moving social justice concerns beyond the ‘twilight of knowing’ to what it might be possible to know/achieve in both the interpersonal and broader realms that encompass our roles as practitioners, researchers and fellow community members.

### **Negotiating the landscapes of social work practice**

Recognising and addressing the twilight of knowing is easier said than done. It is tempting to operate within the safer (for the professional and client system) domains of interpersonal practice, informed through clinically-based training, rather than addressing broader and more powerful structural inequalities. Addressing institutional humiliation

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not knowing. The documentary, “We Will Be Remembered for This” (D. Schmidt, 2007) provides a powerful insight into the experiences and abuses of asylum seekers and the perspectives of the general public, human rights lawyers and prominent politicians.

at broader levels has the potential to ignite a wider societal backlash or ostracise individuals within their community; a consideration that cannot be taken lightly. Often it means questioning powerful players: employers; elders; community leaders; funding providers; and those directly involved in creating policy. Questioning the status quo has inherent dangers.<sup>93</sup> Addressing institutional humiliation and going public represents a risk not only to the client; it can also threaten the social worker's standing within the agency and managers, and impact on future employment prospects. Awareness of these ramifications provides a sobering reminder that we, too, work within institutions and encounter powerful discourses about what is possible within our professional social work identities:

Unless social workers understand oppression and the dynamics that (re)produce it, they can oppress disadvantaged residents directly and indirectly when assisting their (re)integration into the broader society or helping them to assume more control over their lives. (Dominelli 2002: 8)

A commitment to social justice work highlights the necessity for the social work profession to embrace strong interpersonal practice coupled with an ability, awareness and desire to engage with associated concerns in more public realms. The sociological imagination forwarded by Mills (1959) provides the perspective from which to view personal experiences in relation to what is happening in the broader social arena. The wider focus is achieved by asking a number of historical, structural, critical and comparative questions in our work and daily lives. Such questions must be contextualised within the socio, political, economic and environmental considerations that surround the unique individual, group or community. 'Walking the line' provides a powerful metaphor for asking these questions. It illustrates the need for social work to be highly informed on a number of levels so it can address more appropriately the associated challenges of social justice and its necessity within our profession.

The principles and allure behind social capital (or 'community' or 'resilience') can only achieve success if the government and the community start on the same page. They must invest in it together rather than hiding economic and capitalistic interests in social policy by retracting state-funded social support programmes. The product focus so

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<sup>93</sup> Surwaski et al. (2008) discuss this issue in part by reporting upon advocates' experiences of resisting oppressive refugee policies in Australia.

evident in economic models proposed by contemporary neo-liberal agendas of outsourcing, privatisation, mutual obligation in welfare services and trust in market-based enterprise needs to further incorporate a system that embraces processes and relationships as an integral role of community development. In addition, Mortensen (2008: 273) argues that simplified conceptions of citizenship that look primarily to embrace cultural diversity cannot be divorced from considerations of economic and social inequalities. Kenny (1994) states that true community development is almost impossible, largely because of the inherent pervasiveness of economic interest in social policy (see also Mowbray, 2005). Thus, ‘walking the line’ in social work practice requires an engagement with recognition and redistribution dynamics on both interpersonal and broader levels.

It can be a relatively small step to envision social justice within the microcosms of interpersonal practice, as necessitated by a civilised society; but to consider and address macro-level issues of unjust policies and institutional abuse, as is needed for a decent society within the purviews of day-to-day professional practice, remains far more difficult to realise. As has been discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, understandings of trauma were most often situated within social and situational domains in forced migration *and* resettlement contexts. These expressions direct us to the importance of acknowledging the present and the manifestations of exclusionary spaces – often reinforced and often originated from institutional domains.

## **Summary**

This chapter has theorised what the Sudanese men’s narratives and ethnographic fieldwork represent in broader contexts. Recognising that the primary reason for participants choosing to take part in my study was for political reasons, Fraser (1997, 2000, 2001, 2003) and Markell’s (2003) theories on recognition proved highly salient for examining what is at stake for emerging communities. The first part of the chapter has highlighted that the contested landscape of resettlement needs to consider both recognition and redistribution dynamics. This perspective provides not only a return to focusing on critical engagement with understandings of trauma, but also casts the locus of inquiry much broader to examine misrecognisers at explicit and tacit levels. A return to Chapter 1 furthers the discussion of *ordinary* and *extra-ordinary* stories. It is not meant to be a quick fix for these issues, but presents a framework for critical reflection

on the tendency to view people from refugee backgrounds solely as that: refugees who have been provided protection by Australia. The necessity to think about redistribution/recognition dynamics and how marginalised groups can contribute and participate as peers in civil society reinforces the need to turn the mirror on ourselves and the broader structural forces at hand.

The second part of this chapter employed Margalit's (1996) notions of a civilised and decent society to examine what social justice-oriented work might look like with the Sudanese community by heeding a call to embrace and move beyond a critically-informed interpersonal practice. This led to discussions about addressing justice-oriented work at broader levels through considering exclusionary spaces and practices; considerations that can help move towards a more inclusive civil society. The discussion in Part two of the chapter has highlighted how work with refugee communities incorporates the question of where each professional is situated on a non-linear continuum from clinically-based interpersonal practice to policy implementation. It has also stressed the need for practitioners to avoid the dichotomy between private/public domains, civilised/decent societies or interpersonal/institutional dynamics, showing that our work is not about embracing one or the other. Rather, it calls for more coordinated ways of working together so that the 'big step' of social justice is informed on the ground and supported from above.

The lived experience of humiliation on both interpersonal and institutional levels has also been discussed. The conclusion from this discussion is that addressing this issue necessitates a further engagement with networks (both bonding and bridging), critical self-reflective practices and an ability to shift our perspective between the smaller and bigger pictures. A reflective and critical lens, beyond notions of charity and helping the 'victims' of war trauma, is required if the warm and woolly sentiments expressed in government policy, agency protocols and institutional mandates are to trickle down to those they are supposed to support. This chapter has demonstrated that while rhetoric espouses a decent society, actual practice and policy related decisions can fall short of such endeavours.

As evidenced in the participants' transcripts and the broader literature, the Sudanese and other refugee communities do not choose to be welfare dependent, unemployed or isolated from Australian society. They speak about the importance of jobs, education,

securing a better life for their children and a sincere desire to contribute to public life. They iterate the importance of having relationships and how they would embrace opportunities to participate as peers in civil society. This chapter has highlighted how both the Sudanese community and its individual members, and the government and wider society that live around them, play a strong part in their destiny. It is evident that institutional humiliation and the ‘twilight of knowing’ impact on self-determination.

Realising the decent society of which Margalit (1996) writes requires more than just building the Sudanese community’s capacities. We too, as practitioners, researchers, service providers, those implementing policy and fellow community members need further capacity – it is not a one-way interaction. The discourse about supporting people coming from refugee backgrounds needs a more profound conceptualisation so that it is not just about helping ‘them’; it needs to be about a mutual exercise of working together and acknowledging the need to reflect critically upon our own assumptions and practices.

The conclusion to this thesis, presented in the next chapter, draws the threads of each individual chapter together to articulate the study’s overarching narrative about how the participants from the Sudanese community in Adelaide, South Australia, engage critically with understandings of trauma and their responses to it. It also comments on the study’s relevance to the social work and other allied health professions.

# Chapter 9

## Conclusion and the Mosaic of Social Work Practice

The world is big. Some people are unable to comprehend that simple fact. They want the world on their own terms, its peoples just like them and their friends, its places like the manicured little patch on which they live. But this is a foolish and blind wish. Diversity is not an abnormality but the very reality of our planet. The human world manifests the same reality and will not seek our permission to celebrate itself in the magnificence of its endless varieties. Civility is a sensible attribute in this kind of world we have; narrowness of heart and mind is not. (Achebe 1996)

### Introduction

As stated at the end of Chapter 8, this final chapter comments on this study's relevance to social work and associated fields of practice by drawing the threads of the previous chapters together. It makes final remarks about the importance of acknowledging people's responses to trauma and 'walking the line' in professional practice.

### Weaving the Threads Together

This study provides a grounded substantive theory about how Sudanese men both conceptualise and respond to trauma in forced migration and resettlement contexts. My professional practice as a social worker directed a critical engagement with numerous representations of the Sudanese community as traumatised people and the primacy placed upon trauma stories predicated in the past. This critical engagement provided a justification for using a framework that documented not only the impact of trauma in people's lives but also how they respond to such experiences. Whilst there is little argument that refugees often experience very difficult and traumatic events, it does not necessarily follow that they are indelibly damaged people.

The critique (rather than discrediting) of biomedical research on trauma developed the intellectual rationale to argue that understanding how Sudanese men themselves conceptualise trauma and respond to it is of paramount importance. It emerged that trauma is a word that is highly familiar to participants as it establishes claims for recognition (entry into camps, refugee determination and accessing services in Australia). When asking about the most difficult and ongoing effects of trauma,

however, participants' expressions were not elaborated primarily through forced marches, death or torture predicated in the past. Rather, participants emphasised the immediacy of the present and the absolute necessity to consider resettlement realities. Their conceptualisations of trauma were identified most often within the social and situational domains of people's lives; domains in which there were limited opportunities for participants to contribute to their own communities' wellbeing and that of the greater society.

Overall, the extended engagement with the Sudanese participants and their community over a period of several years highlights that they have the tools and knowledge to respond to profound difficulties and locate appropriate social, spiritual and agential pathways to healing. It is argued, however, that the exclusionary experiences of poverty, unemployment and racism can limit this community's ability to access such resources. The 'walking the line' metaphor illustrates the Sudanese participants' experiences of negotiating a workable synthesis between their past and present. It highlights the associated challenges of navigating a new social reality in resettlement contexts. This discussion acknowledges that the incorporation of Sudanese lives, past-present, is not merely a nostalgic exercise; it is part of the necessity of living.

'Walking the line' also offers a helpful conceptual framework for examining professional social work practice. Throughout my research and connection with the Sudanese community in Adelaide over several years, I have come to appreciate Guerin and Guerin's (2007: 150) experience of working with the Somali community in New Zealand, and begun to understand their statement that: "Many times we felt like our research was going around in a circle, but more often, we found that the research was on a spiral, still going around in circles, but progressing for the better." Visualising the processes of both practice and research beyond the perspective of a two-dimensional circle to three dimensions shows the complex layering and journey towards further understanding resettling populations. Whilst this spiralling process continues, it becomes apparent that 'walking the line' is moving towards a horizon that recedes every time one approaches it. Embracing complexity within the pointy end of this line is a challenge that needs to be met in social work practice.

## **Social Work Practice: Locating the Pointy End of the Line**

The social work profession is well placed to recognise and address both the concerns and wellbeing of people who are oppressed, vulnerable and marginalised within society. It is within this landscape that people's private pains can be seen as public issues (Mills, 1959); an idea that gained prominence in the social work discipline (Schwartz, 1969). By thinking outside the domain of personal expressions of pain and trauma, it becomes possible to consider larger social, political and economic structures that impact upon people's daily lives. Turton (2003: 8) calls on us to embrace critical perspectives and reflexivity that:

Require us to consider issues of membership, citizenship and democratic liberalism... They require us, in other words, to consider who we are – what is or should be our moral community and, ultimately, what it means to be human.

Turning the mirror on ourselves is an important exercise. It highlights that work with refugees is not about understanding 'them'; it necessitates self-reflection. Overall, this study echoes the voices of other scholars who also call for embracing complexity and moving beyond dichotomous thinking by recognising that we, too, need to 'walk the line' in our work (Briskman and Fiske, 2009; Dominelli, 2002; Wessells, 2007). Considering the numerous binaries presented throughout this study, it is worth looking at them as a conglomerate to illustrate further the contested domains of refugee lives and professional practice. 'Walking the line' as a critical interaction with multiple polarities is now summarised. First, I summarise the domains individually, in isolation, in the following order:

- Practical/psychological outcomes
- Responses/effects to trauma
- Past/present realities
- Insider/outsider focal points
- Ordinary/extra-ordinary stories
- Agency/structure; micro/macro level debates
- Being/doing positionalities

Second, I summarise them operationalised together. ‘Walking the line’ places an imperative of not choosing one or the other, or just finding a perfect middle point between the two. Rather, it is about looking at the merits of a particular situation to find the pointy end of the line. It requires a thoughtful encounter with spectral endpoints to locate interstitial spaces that foster a deep respect for people’s lives and the broader considerations that surround them.

### **Practical/psychological outcomes**

Participants noted consistently that professionals outside their community could provide a great service by working with them collaboratively to realise outcomes that address the practicalities of everyday living, such as employment, housing, education and their children succeeding in school. On the other hand, there are situations where people have been traumatised from difficult experiences associated with forced migration and psychological and/or medical interventions may need consideration before assistance is rendered with the practical outcomes of suitable housing, employment and education. Creating safe spaces in which to work through experiences associated with the ‘refugee journey’ can be highly validating and dignifying in situations where disclosure could be stigmatising or ostracising in community-based settings. This study maintains, however, that if the horizons of refugee lives and professional practice are broadened, it becomes clear that the Sudanese community already has multiple forms of healing and responses to trauma. This argument is not about throwing Western psychology away; it is about bringing the mosaic of practical and psychological outcomes to the table and considering the practice situation in context.

### **Responses/effects of trauma**

Research into understanding the effects of trauma is needed for locating important protective factors associated with a person’s wellbeing. Such research can provide powerful justifications for advancing social policies and funding programs to help with the resettlement process. However, there is also a call to examine people’s lives beyond the purviews of trauma-dominated perspectives. This shifted focus helps render other important considerations visible in resettlement contexts. Such considerations recognise people as agents and the community’s multiple forms of healing and resistance to the experiences of trauma. Placed together, these two foci provide a conceptual framework for navigating the complexities of the how, when and why of sharing people’s

narratives and backgrounds.

### **Past/present realities**

The participants' stories of lived experience are inherently imperfect because a person's narrative must elevate and amplify certain events, moments and memories at the expense of others. Resettlement from Africa to Australia is often a journey between two worlds, where one must forge a workable synthesis of the past with the present. Following where the data led, this study had to broaden the scope from forced migration to include resettlement as often both contexts were entwined. In many respects, the past becomes the present and vice versa. When people are employed, studying and seeing their children live better lives – these positive outcomes can help reconcile the transgressions of the past. However, failing to acknowledge a person's past can make understanding the present a potentially myopic exercise. We would do well to listen to people's narratives, concerns and aspirations. If we do not, refugee voices and their associated stories can be further marginalised or worse, silenced all together.

### **Insider/outsider dichotomies**

This study maintains that if people with refugee status are presented as outsiders, they will remain precisely that – outsiders relegated to the peripheries of civil society. The study highlights the need to recognise people's diverse histories and backgrounds while remaining mindful that the politics of difference does not descend into an environment that justifies intolerance and 'othering' dynamics. Conversely, simply claiming that we are all insiders through a shared bond of humanity fails to acknowledge important markers of diversity and the social, political and historical realities of people's lives with refugee status. The need here is to locate both people's unique histories, and our common solidarity and commitment to social justice, to embrace an agonistic encounter with some of Australia's most recent arrivals.

### **Ordinary/extra-ordinary stories**

As several chapters consistently maintain, both *ordinary* and *extra-ordinary* stories have value. Dignifying and validating refugees' stories, and providing space to work through the experiences of trauma can have tremendous healing value. Creating a safe place to share such stories can develop a broader awareness, within which it is possible to address manifestations of oppression that operate from micro- to macro-level realities. There is also a need to elevate the importance of the *ordinary* so that the power of the

trauma story does not encompass a person within the purviews of a victimised and pathologised discourse. When elevated to extraordinary value, *ordinary stories* can help situate people beyond an ‘othering’ discourse in resettlement contexts and highlight them as agents capable of responding to trauma. As such understandings begin to emerge, it is possible that Sudanese people can participate in civil society more as peers than as victims living within it.

### **Agency/structure and micro/macro-level debates**

People are capable of exercising agency to realise their aspirations and values. Structures play both a visible and invisible role in influencing the lived experience of this agency. Fraser’s (2000) focus on recognition and redistribution highlights the need for the social work profession to engage critically with people’s lives on a number of levels that include the embodiments of both a civilised and decent society, as defined by Margalit (1996). The analytic focus is not about keeping the multiple pathways of inquiry and practice separate; rather, it is to see how they interact in complex ways.

### **Being/doing positionalities**

Finding pathways to capture people’s lived experiences and future aspirations in a sensitive and respectful way can make progress towards further realising the liberation and wellbeing of those who are beginning to create a new life far from home. It is argued here that more highly authentic information is derived from authentic relationships. The *being* element connects people to our common bond of humanity, and can help establish necessary relationships to gain entry to, and engage with, the rich descriptions of these peoples’ lives. The reciprocity of *doing* can help such communities address relevant resettlement concerns, speak for themselves and drive a better-informed research agenda. Embodying *being* and *doing* in the research process connects us to the ‘why’ and intentionality of our work. If we want to illuminate the depths of resettling people’s backgrounds and aspirations, embracing both these concepts can help open our eyes to relevant concerns.

### **Operationalising the domains together...**

Are these conclusions and engagements with binaries just the ‘good’ social science answer? That is, “it’s not one or the other but somewhere in between.” Perhaps yes. Some of the conclusions of this study speak (to me) of the obvious, such as we should not pathologise people within the trauma story but at the same time we need to

recognise the power and importance of it. It is recognised that there are many contestations and assumptions about refugees, forced migrants, IDPs, boat people, and documented and undocumented migrants. These debates occur within the fields of social work, medicine, psychiatry, public health, law, international relations and human rights. Politicians and their electorates influence social policies, sometimes in empowering ways and at other times in oppressive ways. When countries experience the inevitable ebbs and flows of economic prosperity and shifting public perceptions, resettled and resettling communities present an easy scapegoat in hard times. This study highlights the need for social work professionals to engage collaboratively with communities, service providers, policy makers and, most importantly, broader institutional forces in good times and bad. These conclusions return to the calls of Benhabib (2002), Papastergiadis (2000) and Honig (1993) to shift ‘antagonistic’ polemics to ‘agonistic’ interactions, where our ways of thinking are extended helpfully, and necessarily so.

### **Final reflection and a return to the beginning...**

This final reflection now returns to the Sudanese person introduced on the first page of Chapter 1, who stated that he had to prove he was ‘damaged goods’. This reflection gives further life to the ‘walking the line’ metaphor and illustrates that the above discussion is more than simply recognising binaries. By incorporating these different groupings together, it demonstrates how the associated dimensions interact in a three-dimensional space.<sup>94</sup>

My interactions as a social work grief counsellor with this Sudanese man provided the study’s sensitising questions, due largely to my initial failings when working with him. He was referred on the basis that he needed to work through the terrible experiences he had endured while a refugee in Kakuma. It eventuated that our work together was not about trying to resolve past traumas, which is what I had assumed initially. It was about navigating new social systems and a complicated bureaucracy that left him feeling hopeless towards the prospect of bringing his family to Australia. His family was living in dangerous conditions in Kenya. He redirected my focus by indicating that the source of his current distress was not from the past but situated very much in the present. Our work meant spending hours on the phone talking with lawyers and immigration staff,

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<sup>94</sup> This reflection reports on a real social work practice experience. Whilst remaining true to the nature of the work, key identifying information has been modified to protect the person’s identity.

writing statutory declarations and helping him to locate ways to mobilise the resources within his own community. This work was present-focused. It primarily revolved around how to get his application ready and build a strong case to bring his family into Australia on a family reunification visa. We never once spoke about his trauma story or the experiences of forced migration. Once he was able to lodge his application and sort out other practical issues such as employment and housing, his community provided the social and spiritual support to help resolve the experiences of the past.

Whilst not using any specialised therapeutic interventions as a grief counsellor, I had a critical role to play. In retrospect, the principles of *being* and *doing*, and recognising him as an agent rather than a victim of past traumas fostered a relationship, which developed ‘slowly slowly’ in resonant and respectful ways. Importantly, hearing his story and working with him individually was coupled with negotiating numerous government and social systems. It necessitated me undertaking a critical reflection upon my social work education and the perspective/interventions that were taught. It was an exciting proposition to think about carrying out specialised interventions that could help this man on the pathway to recovery. What eventuated, however, was that through the process of building a genuine relationship and engaging the practical problems that arose, he was able to locate the appropriate pathways to healing for himself.

Multiple binaries are only starting points to begin thinking about working with a particular group of people or acting upon a certain issue. A critically-informed social work practice ‘walks the line’ to embrace complexity and self-reflexivity. Placed together, the spiralling between numerous polarities provides an invitation to imagine what might be possible in our work.

This man’s family has now been reunited with him in Australia.

## **Conclusion**

Numerous actors are involved in refugee resettlement. This study’s primary focus is with English speaking Sudanese men in Adelaide, their community and professional social work practice. The Sudanese study participants have shown they have a number of pathways for responding to traumatic events. These pathways are social, spiritual and agential. Realising these responses requires an engagement with structural forces and social policies that can influence pathways of recovery both positively and negatively.

Thus, the study highlights the important role of considering the broader social and political contexts that impact on people's lives. Whilst Sudanese people must craft an existence that accommodates the realities of resettlement, it is often on the broader levels of policy and representation where their opportunities to participate as peers in civil society are decided.

This study is not meant to be representative of the Southern Sudanese community, but offers an important contribution to research into resettling populations that can be critically applied (rather than prescribed) with other populations. It places a call to consider not only the trauma story but also people's responses to it, and offers a promising approach to working with Sudanese people not represented in this study, namely women, community members who do not speak English and children. More broadly, the research design, which incorporated prolonged engagement with the participants and their community, could be used with other refugee populations living through experiences of loss and trauma.

Participants noted repeatedly how, in resettlement contexts, hope for a better future helped them work through, and move beyond, traumatic experiences. Returning to a previous quote, a participant speaks about hope and the associated importance of having people around him to negotiate difficult situations:

*What I think can help me is to have a relationship with other people. But I can't help by myself alone... Why? It is because one hand cannot clap, but two hands can clap themselves. What I mean by that is when we meet or do something, nothing difficult for two or three people to take this. (Participant 11)*

Sudanese hands are brought together in a multitude of ways. It follows that participants respond to social expressions of trauma through the important social functions and associated knowledge located within the community milieu. Others identify the role of spirituality and agential realisations as pathways that embody hope and offer resonant responses to trauma. Importantly, participants also recognise that professionals *within and outside* the Sudanese community can bring their hands together to play an integral role. By considering psychological interventions and also addressing the practical outcomes of finding employment, obtaining job skills, pursuing an education and navigating the different realities between Sudan and Australia, this thesis presents a rich mosaic of ways of working alongside this resettling Sudanese community.

Differentiating the effects of trauma from people's responses to it provides the scaffolding to think beyond pathologised and victimised perspectives while leaving space to honour experiences of profound suffering. It is in this flexible framework and invitation to engage with complexity through 'walking the line' that the conclusions of this study reside.

There is no neat and tidy answer to addressing the manifestations of trauma, difficulties in resettlement, discourses around healing and contested debates on integration. How could there be? Whilst there are important signposts and markers that remind us how we have travelled to the point at which we find ourselves, the line ahead is not established. It is there for us all to critically traverse.

# Appendices



## Appendix 2: Documents Provided to Participants for Informed Consent

### INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH INTO:

Sudanese understandings of what has been helpful after traumatic experiences associated with forced migration

This research is being carried out by Jay Marlowe who has undertaken to keep all information received from you CONFIDENTIAL. To ensure that accidental breach of confidentiality does not occur, your name will not appear on the information obtained from you. Instead, you will be allocated an identification number (ID number) that no one will have access to except Jay Marlowe. If the research produces useful information, the results will be widely publicised but your name will not be mentioned.

The main aim of this research is to understand how you have created meaning in your life and managed to cope after difficult experiences from forced migration.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without explanation. If there are any questions you do not understand please do not hesitate to ask for more information. If you become upset or do not wish to continue the interview, please let Jay Marlowe and the interview will be stopped. You will also be given a list of support services that you can access in the event that anything you discuss becomes distressing to you.

The interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed. After it has been transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review the document to make any changes you think are necessary. An interpreter will be organised for the interview if necessary. This interpreter will be professionally bound by the principles of confidentiality and privacy.

If you agree to with what is written above, please sign this form below and return it in the self addressed envelope to Jay Marlowe.

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I have read and understood the participant information letter as well as what is above, and on that basis I am willing to be interviewed.

Name of Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_ ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Jay Marlowe to Allocate)

Interviewee's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_(Mobile) \_\_\_\_\_(Home)

Signature of Researcher:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Potential Participant,

This letter is to introduce Jay Marlowe who is a doctoral student in the School of Social Work and Social Administration within the Social Sciences at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

He is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of Sudanese understandings of what has been helpful after traumatic experiences from forced migration.

He would be most grateful if you would volunteer to spare the time to assist in this project, by granting an interview which touches upon certain aspects of this topic. No more than 1-2 hours meeting on 2 occasions would be required of your time. Be assured that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Since he intends to make a tape recording of the interview, he will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed. It may be necessary to make the recording available to secretarial assistants for transcription, in which case you may be assured that such persons will be advised of the requirement that your name or identity not be revealed and that the confidentiality of the material is respected and maintained.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 8201 5040, fax 8201 3760 or e-mail: [lorna.hallahan@flinders.edu.au](mailto:lorna.hallahan@flinders.edu.au)

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

*Dr. Lorna Hallahan*

*Lecturer- School of Social Administration and Social Work  
Social Sciences, Flinders University*

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee. The Secretary of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 5962, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [sandy.huxtable@flinders.edu.au](mailto:sandy.huxtable@flinders.edu.au).*

## INFORMATION SHEET ABOUT THE STUDY

### **Research into Sudanese Understandings of what has been Helpful to Them after Traumatic Experience**

Dear Potential Participant,

The purpose of this letter is to explain my research project and ask for your participation in it. I would be most grateful if you would volunteer to spare the time to assist in this project. No more than 1-2 hours on 2 occasions would be required of your time.

My project aims to bring about a better understanding of Sudanese people living in Australia and to learn what has been helpful to your people after difficult experiences of forced migration. At the completion of my research, it is hoped that a much greater awareness and understanding of the Sudanese people and their culture within Australia will be achieved.

The things that I want to learn about you include: what has been helpful to you during and after traumatic experience, your culture, history, important/influential people in your life and your customs.

I believe that the best way to better understand these areas is to listen carefully to what the Sudanese people have to say. So, if you are willing to participate I am happy to organise a place to meet and a time that is agreeable to you. It is expected that the interview will last one to 1.5 hours. I want to understand as much as possible from your perspective; what your definitions and beliefs are and what you think has helped you to make meaning in your life after the difficult experiences associated with the conflict in Sudan.

Below are examples of the sort of questions that I would like to ask during my interview with you:

- What does your reason of deciding to tell your story say about what is important to you, about what you care about and value in life?
- Can you tell me about the trauma or difficult experiences from forced migration that you were subject to?
- What sustained you through these most awful times?
- Why is it important to you for other people to know about this?
- What were the effects of these forms of trauma in your life? What were the effects on you? On your relationships? On your family? On your community?
- At the beginning of this interview, you spoke about those things that are important to you in your life. How have you been able to keep in touch with

these values, these hopes for your life, despite the abuses that you were subjected to?

- Have there been ways in which you have been able to reduce the effects of the traumas in your life? If so, how have you done this? Are these ways of reducing the effects of trauma newly developed? Or have they been around for some time in your life?
- If someone else went through similar experiences to you, what suggestions would you offer them? What stories could you tell them that would convey some of the steps you have taken to reclaim your life from the effects of this trauma?

You may choose to participate by speaking English or if preferred, an interpreter will be organised at your request. This interpreter will be professionally bound by the principles of confidentiality.

So that I do not miss anything that you tell me, I will need to tape record the interview and make a written transcript. Since I intend to make a tape recording of the interview, I will seek your consent to: (1) record the interview and (2) to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on the condition that your name or identity is not revealed. It may be necessary to make the recording available to secretarial assistants for transcription, in which case you may be assured that such persons will be advised of the requirement that your name or identity not be revealed and that the confidentiality of the material is respected and maintained.

If my research produces useful information then the results will be widely publicised and your name will not be mentioned. In fact, any information obtained from you in connection with this research will be kept strictly confidential.

Your participation in and help with this research is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the project without explanation at any time. If you become upset or do not wish to continue with the interview, please let me know and the interview will be stopped. If you would like to participate please contact myself at 8201 3956 or by email: [jay.marlowe@flinders.edu.au](mailto:jay.marlowe@flinders.edu.au) or my supervisor, Dr. Lorna Hallahan at 8201 5040 or by email: [lorna.hallahan@flinders.edu.au](mailto:lorna.hallahan@flinders.edu.au).

Thank you for your consideration,

Jay Marlowe

## **Appendix 3: Interview Question (flexible format)**

### **Sample Interview Questions**

Below are examples of questions that could be asked in the semi-structured interview. Participants are free to disclose whatever they feel comfortable discussing, to not say anything at all, or stop the interview at any time. These questions will not be necessarily asked in this order. These questions are informed from Denborough (2006).

#### **Part One (Setting the Context)**

- Can you share with me some of your hopes sharing your story today? Why have you decided to do this?
- What does your reason of deciding to tell your story say about what is important to you, about what you care about and value in life?
- Have these things (whatever the person states) always been important to you? What is the history behind these values (who taught them, who or what was influential)?
- Who would be least surprised to know that you have decided to share your experiences today? Why? What do they know about you that would mean that they would not be surprised to see you here today?

#### **Part Two (Documenting the trauma and its effects)**

- Can you tell me about the trauma that you were subject to? Did these abuses take a different form?
- During the time when you were being subjected to this injustice, how did you try to endure this? What did you try to think about? Were there any memories you tried to hold onto? Any dreams?
- What sustained you through these most awful times?
- Were there different ways that you tried to endure the different forms of trauma?
- Why is it important to you for other people to know about this?
- What were the effects of these forms of trauma in your life? What were the effects on you? On your relationships? On your family? On your community?
- What were some of the most difficult effects for you? Why were these the most difficult?
- Are there any ongoing effects of this trauma in your life?

### **Part Three (Eliciting Stories of Survival/Resistance- The Responses to Trauma)**

- At the beginning of this interview, you spoke about those things that are important to you in your life (repeat whatever these were). How have you been able to keep in touch with these values, these hopes for your life, despite the abuses that you were subjected to?
- Have there been ways in which you have been able to reduce the effects of the traumas in your life? If so, how have you done this? Are these ways of reducing the effects of trauma newly developed? Or have they been around for some time in your life? What is their history?
- Have there been particular people who have made a difference in helping you to recover or survive? If so, what is it that they have done or said that has been significant to you? Why was this significant to you?
- If someone else went through similar experiences to you, what suggestions would you offer them? What stories could you tell them that would convey some of the steps you have taken to reclaim your life from the effects of this trauma?

## Appendix 4: Ethics Approval

**SBRE 3956**

24 August 2007

Mr Jay Marlowe  
School of Social Administration & Social Work

Dear Mr Marlowe

**Project 3956 Refugees and Mental Health: Understanding Sudanese People's Responses to Trauma from Forced Migration**

At its meeting on 20 August 2007 the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee considered the application you submitted in respect of the above project.

I am pleased to inform you that the proposed project has been approved, for the period of time requested or three years, whichever is the least, on the basis of the information contained in the application and its attachments.

Please include a sentence in the Interview Consent Form advising potential participants that "TOTALLY CONFIDENTIAL" does not mean nothing will be published and provide a copy to the Committee.

In accordance with the undertaking you provided in the application, please inform the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, giving reasons, if the research project is discontinued before the expected date of completion and report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval of the protocol. Such matters include:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants;
- proposed changes in the protocol; and
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

May I draw to your attention that, in order to comply with monitoring requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research an annual progress and/or final report must be submitted. A copy of the report pro forma is available from the SBREC website <http://www.flinders.edu.au/research/Office/ethics/socialbehavioural.html>.

Yours sincerely



Sandy Huxtable  
Secretary  
Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee

cc: Dr Loma Hallahan, School of Social Administration & Social Work  
Dr Carol Irizarry, Social Administration and Social Work

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## **Attachment: Marlowe's Peer Reviewed Publications**