

Finding Purpose Through Altruism

The potential of
'doing for others'
during asylum

Helen Claire Hart

(nee Smith)

Teesside University, UK.

h.c.hart@tees.ac.uk





Wide ranging need – everyday essentials to ‘higher needs’ (Burchett and Matheson, 2010; Stephenson et al. 2013).

Limited access to dignified and meaningful occupations (Bishop & Purcell, 2013; Huot et al. 2016)

Focus on low challenge occupations (Jonsson & Persson 2006; Kronenberg, 2011)

Multiple negative outcomes (Andersson, 2013; Farias & Asaba, 2013) including occupational deprivation (Morville & Erlandsson. 2013; Crawford et al. 2016; Mayne et al. 2016)

The right occupation has the potential to...

- Help manage transition, acculturation and liminality and precarity (Adrian, 2013; Murray, 2013)
- Maintain health, wellbeing and coping skills (Lunden, 2012; Mondaca and Josephsson, 2013)
- Preserve identity and skills (Werge-Olsen & Vik, 2012; Gupta & Sullivan, 2013; Huot et al. 2016)
- Promote human flourishing or 'eudemonia' (WFOT 2006; Hayward & Taylor, 2011; Royeen et al. 2017)





Participants in my study all sought occupations which they felt had a **higher purpose**.

They prized **altruistic** occupations, done for the benefit of others.

Despite their own challenges, they supporting others through voluntary work, charitable acts, mentorship and community support.

Altruism is defined as intrinsically motivated actions undertaken for the benefit of others (Draguns 2013)

Generated by feelings of **empathy** (Batson 2011) and notions of **kinship** (Madsen 2007).

Altruism is acknowledged as being beneficial to **well-being, social capital, life satisfaction** and **purpose** (Salvati, 2008; Wright, 2013).

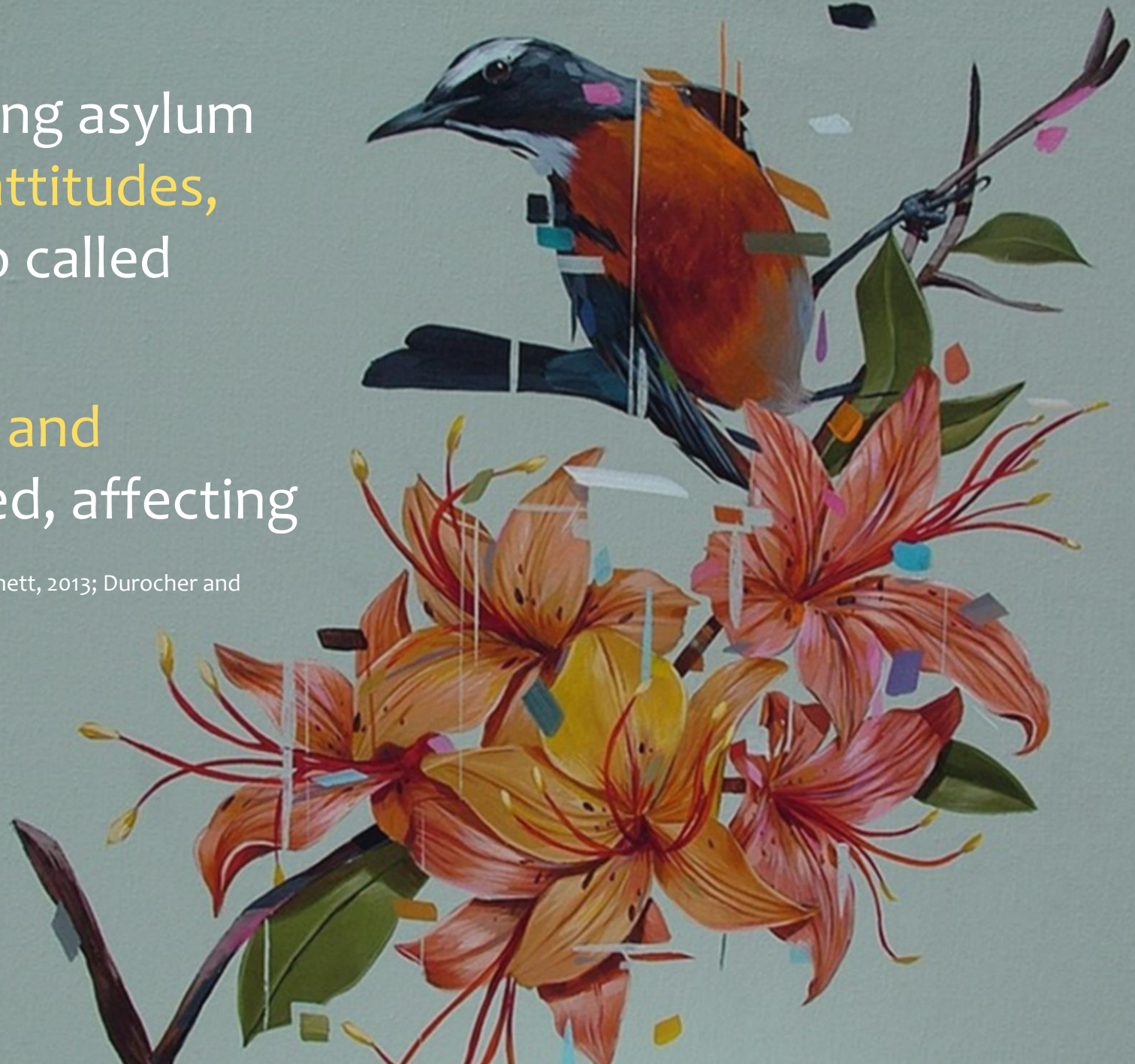
In this study the value lay in a sense of **human worth** at a time when they felt they had little other value.



Refugees and people seeking asylum are routinely **devalued** by **attitudes, policies and practicality** - so called **'hostipitality'** (Galvaan, 2014; McFadyen, 2016).

Their **personhood, identity and opportunity** are undermined, affecting their sense of **self worth** (Burnett, 2013; Durocher and Gibson, 2013).

The link between **devaluation** and **occupation** is possibly cyclical...





The less valued a person is, the less opportunities they are given (or the more barriers are placed in their way)

The fewer opportunities a person has, the fewer means they have of demonstrating their worth to others

The less occupationally engaged they are the lower their own perception of their worth and value

Altruistic, 'higher purpose' occupations can counter this process

The **deliberate exclusion** of refugees from occupations is common place – and is an act of wilful cruelty.

However, it also tells us how **powerful** occupation can be in embedding people into society and helping create a good life.

I would argue that this tells us that occupation, correctly harnessed, can push back against devaluation, allowing people to **rediscover their worth** and **express their best selves**.



If you would like to know more please
get in touch:

h.c.hart@tees.ac.uk

or read the article:

Smith. H.C. (2017) 'Finding purpose
through altruism: the potential of
'doing for others' during asylum',
Journal of Occupational Science, 25(1),
pp. 87-99.



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References and reading

All images by Frank Gonzales

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