Finding purpose through altruism: the potential of 'doing for others' during asylum

ABSTRACT

Refugees are increasingly acknowledged as facing significant occupational injustice and they experience multiple barriers to finding meaningful occupational opportunities. Occupation has enormous potential for enhancing the post migratory experience, but choice of occupation is important. People strive to move beyond simply 'keeping busy' to find occupations of real meaning which meet personal and cultural needs.

Altruism is the principle or practice of doing for others, and can be expressed through, or be a motivation for, a range of occupations. This paper asserts that 'doing of others' can be particularly meaningful, and may provide opportunities for personal, social and cultural rewards.

The findings presented here arose as part of a study exploring the occupational experiences of people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. This phenomenological study gathered data from ten participants through a series of in depth interviews. The study found that participants held a preference for altruistic occupations. Participants engaged with a number of altruistic occupations, prompted by kinship, empathy, learned behaviour and moral principles. The occupations appeared to promote connectivity, positive sense of self and a connection between past and present occupations, called here 'occupational constancy'.

In seeking occupations rich with meaning and purpose, the drive to 'do for others' could provide individuals with opportunities to live well in the here and now, and rise above the hardship and marginalisation of asylum and forced migration.

INTRODUCTION

The reasons behind peoples' occupational choices may be many and varied and this article aims to explore the role of altruism, defined as actions done for the benefit of others (Feigin, Owens and Goodyear-Smith, 2014) in determining occupational choice for a group of people who have sought asylum in the United Kingdom (UK).

Human displacement and forced migration are associated with wide ranging personal and social challenges, including occupation injustices. This article reflects the experiences of a small group of individuals whose displacement has led them to seek asylum in the UK. The findings used reflect the theme of altruism which arose as part of a wider study exploring the meaning of occupation to people seeking asylum in the UK. All participants in the study spoke about the difficulties they had finding suitable occupational opportunities. They talked about the value of not only 'keeping busy' but 'keeping busy with purpose' and repeatedly highlighted how the chance to 'do for others' was a powerful source of personal satisfaction. They indicated that they preferred altruistic occupations, perceiving them as providing meaning and purpose, fostering kinship and cultural norms, providing a valued identity and establishing occupational constancy.

This article will explore the occupational issues faced by refugees and introduce the principle of altruism, linked with occupational choice, to explore the potential of altruistic occupations to provide meaningful engagement for refugees and others facing major transitions.

BACKGROUND

Asylum and Occupation

Human displacement is at the highest levels ever recorded, with 65.3 million people living in exile (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2016). Nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution, often lacking access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement (UNHCR, 2016). Whilst forced migration creates multiple major crises, one strand of concern is the occupational injustice faced by displaced individuals (Mirza, 2012).

Context may differ, such as displacement to a neighbouring nations' refugee camps (AlHeresh, 2012), awaiting an asylum decision in a detention facility (Morville, 2014), or attempting to integrate after being granted refugee status (Whiteford and Suleman, 2013). In the context of this study, the individual participants had all claimed asylum1 in the UK. The principle of Asylum is established in Article 1 of the 1951 Refugee Convention which states that a refugee is a person who:

> *"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (UN General Assembly 1951).*

This includes people where the individual has applied for asylum and is awaiting a decision; people refused asylum, where applications have been refused and the legal process of making a claim is exhausted, and refugees, where the individual has been granted leave to remain in the UK on the basis of an upheld claim for asylum, humanitarian or other reasons (United Kingdom Visas and Immigration, 2016). Each of the three groups has distinct needs arising from their socio-legal status and varied levels

of access and support, all of which impact upon occupational opportunities and performance (H. C. Smith, 2015).

The implications of an individual's asylum status affects all aspects of daily living, and it is recognised that refugees face many occupational injustices due to their lack of access to meaningful and dignified occupations (Whiteford, 2000; Hammell and Iwama, 2012; WFOT, 2014). Injustices vary, and may include 'occupational apartheid' where marginalised groups are denied the right to participate, 'occupational deprivation' where there are lasting external forces preventing engagement, 'occupational marginalisation' which is the reduction or restriction placed upon occupational choice, 'occupational alienation' which is disengagement as a result of prolonged engagement with inappropriate or unrewarding occupations, and 'occupational imbalance', where individuals are under- or over-employed (Wilcock and Townsend, 2000, 2009; Townsend and Wilcock, A.A., 2004; Townsend and Whiteford, 2005;Townsend, Cockburn, Letts, Thibeault and Trentham, 2007; Hammell and Iwama, 2012).

The injustices faced by refugees may begin in their country of origin, as a result of war, political and social restrictions or limited personal opportunities. They then face the major transition of forced migration, which interrupts the individuals' occupational journey, often for lengthy periods. Individuals may then find their occupations inhibited by policies such as the denial of opportunities to work and study, or made more difficult to achieve through everyday practicalities such as language barriers (Burchett and Matheson, 2010; Gower, 2016; Grogan, 2016).

The impact of occupational injustice creates lasting negative outcomes for individuals, families and the host community (Bennett, Scornaiencki, Brzozowski, Denis and

Magalhaes, 2012; Gupta and Sullivan, 2013; Morville 2014). It is accepted that occupation fosters adjustment and integration during this transition (Huot, Rudman, Dodson, and Magalhães, 2013) maintaining health and promoting coping ability, even in extreme circumstances (Lunden, 2012; Mondaca and Josephsson, 2013). There is also a suggestion that occupation helps to preserve skills and identity – helping individuals to maintain a more consistent sense of self (Huot et al. 2013; Nayar and Sterling, 2013).

The challenge for many people during the asylum process is not only access to occupation, but finding suitably meaningful occupations. Individuals benefit most from occupations that are intense and infused with meaning, coherence and commitment (Jonsson, 2008). Instead, most individuals find themselves filling their days with 'low challenge experiences' which provide little satisfaction (Kronenberg, Pollard and Sakellariou, 2011).

This study raises both the challenge of, and value of, finding occupations that are attuned to individuals and provide meaning and purpose. It raises the particular value attached by the participants to occupations that they do for the benefit of others, as they identified altruistic actions as presenting the most meaningful opportunities

Understanding Altruism

Altruism is the principle of acting for the welfare of others. Altruistic behaviours include helping, comforting, sharing, cooperation, philanthropy, and community service (Batson, 2011) and as a result may form part of a range of daily occupations. The premise of altruism suggests actions undertaken by an individual for the benefit of a third party, without an expectation of reciprocity and usually with a cost to the individual (though the nature of the cost can vary, including financial, time, energy, skills etc) (Draguns, 2013).

There is a philosophical debate regarding altruism, as some question its existence and suggesting that altruists are ultimately acting for their own good (Feigin et al. 2015). Other authors focus on the multiple gains for the altruist and others as being of greater importance than the underpinning motivation (Batson at al., 2011). There are many who assert that 'true' altruism does not exist, as underpinning motivations may be selfish (Batson at al., 2011).

Few altruistic activities occur without some intrinsic gains, so it is suggested that the altruist is motivated towards rewards (Feigin et al. 2015). This is often described as 'doing good to feel good', endocentric, pseudo-altruistic, or egoistic (Karylowski, 1982; Van der Linden, 2011). The rewards highlighted include increased self-esteem and satisfaction, a desire for reciprocity or reward or the intention to promote their reputation (Van der Linden, 2011; Feigin et al. 2015). However, other researchers have found that rather than encouraging the altruist, attempts at reciprocation, payment etc. can be counterproductive, undermining the act and demotivating the altruist (Van der Linden, 2011).

In response to this debate Batson, one of the key authors on altruism, recognised four different motives for altruistic behaviour (Batson, 2011):

EGOISM ALTRUISM COLLECTIVISM PRINCIPLISM

Acting for the benefit of **oneself**

Acting for the benefit of **another person**

Acting for the benefit of a particular **community**

Acting in response to a **moral principle**.

Batson believed that if the primary goal of the action is the benefit of the other, regardless of motivation, is can still be considered altruistic, as distinct motives can co-occur (Batson, 2011).

There are many suggested drivers for altruistic behaviour, including kinship, empathy, learned behaviours and moral beliefs (Madsen et al. 2007; Batson, 2011; Draguns, 2013). The kinship connection suggests that people are more likely to act altruistically to someone they see as similar on the basis of a range of features, including physical appearance, name or shared membership of an 'in-group' (West, Gardner and Griffin, 2006; Madsen, 2007; Barcaly, 2011). People may also be encouraged to act by feelings of empathy or emotional concern (Eisenberg, Valiente and Champion, 2004; Penner, Dovidio, Schroeder and Piliavin, 2005; Madsen et al. 2007; Batson, 2011). An empathic response may also cause the altruist to reduce their awareness of their own distress and negative emotions as they elevate their concern for, and awareness of, the needs of others (Madsen et al. 2007).

Other reasons for the development of an altruistic attitude are suggested as arising from social learning, where people are socialised into helping behaviours and influenced by parental and social norms (Lerner, 1980; Dovidio and Penner, 2004; Penner et al. 2005). It is also believed that altruism may be a personality trait, as altruists are believed to exhibit higher standards regarding justice, social responsibility, moral reasoning and empathy (Rushton, 1981, Penner et al. 2005).

Whilst the philosophical debate regarding altruism focusses on questions of true selflessness there are many sources which focus positively on the gains for the altruist, concerning themselves more with outcomes for all, rather than motivating factors. Altruism is acknowledged as having multiple benefits, these include increasing social

interaction and generating valuable social capital (Salvati, 2008). Altruistic activities such as volunteering are associated with significant and long lasting benefits to physical health, mental health and longevity (Post, 2005; Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui and Fredrickson, 2006; Brown,

Brown, House and Smith, 2008; Wright, 2013). Altruism is also seen as fostering life satisfaction, subjective happiness and a sense of purpose (Muzick and Wilson, 2003; Keonig, McGue, Krueger and Bouchard, 2007; Wright, 2013).

Altruism has received little attention within occupational therapy, beyond its role as a professional value (Kanny, 1993; Taussig 2006; Thrash, 2008). However, it appears that altruism may have many occupational components, as it is both expressed through occupation, and may be a motivator for occupations. Few studies have considering altruism as part of occupational choice. Hatter and Nelson (1987) considered altruism and occupation in older people, and there have been studies exploring the meaning of specific altruistic activities such as care giving (Taylor, 2015) or volunteering (Black and Living, 2004; Schnell and Hoof, 2012). Making the connection between altruism and occupational choice is in line with recent calls to focus more on meaning than purpose when considering occupation (Reed, Hocking and Smythe, 2010, 2011; Taylor, 2015) as this is an important step forward in understanding the occupational choices people make (Ellerin, 2015; Taylor, 2015).

THE STUDY

The study from which these findings have been drawn is an exploration of the meaning of occupation to people seeking asylum in the UK. The study is phenomenological, and as such, aims to capture the ambiguity, poignancy, complexity and richness of experience;

this focus makes phenomenology an appropriate methodology for gleaning an occupational focus (Clarke, 2008; Cronin Davis, Butler and Mayers, 2009, Finlay, 2009; 2011; Park Lala and Kinsella, 2011).

The research was ethically approved by Teesside University School of Health and Social Care Ethics Committee, and funded by the United Kingdom Occupational Therapy Research Foundation. Participants were accessed via local refugee support agencies where any person was invited to express their interest, provided they were over the age of 18 and had sought asylum within the past five years. Data was gathered through a series of up to three informal conversational interviews, of up to an hour and half each. This allowed participants to engage at a slower pace, develop trust and explore at depth (Siedman, 2013). The decision on how many sessions to attend lay with the participant. Whilst the study was open to speakers of other languages, five participants spoke English as a first language, three others spoke English with varying degrees of fluency and only one elected to use an interpreter. Advice was taken from refugee support agencies to ensure study design was appropriate to participants needs, and a staged support process was put into place to meet any issues arising during the interview process.

The data was analysed using the adapted Stevick-Colliazzi-Keen method, which is a staged process designed to maintain the authenticity of the data and capture the meaning and essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1990). The stages include epoche to acknowledge and set aside researcher perspectives, phenomenological reduction where data is considered openly, from different perspectives, horizontalising which aims to give all data equal consideration. The researcher then employs imaginative variation to elicit

themes and then synthesise material from the earlier stages to generate a rich, textural

description (Moustakas, 1990; 1994)

The participants

Ten participants were involved in the study, and the table below shows their profiles,

asylum status and occupational background. At the time of the interviews they had lived

in the UK for between 1 and 8 years (with a mean of 5.6 years), and their asylum status

differed; two had refugee status, four were seeking asylum and four had been refused

asylum.

Pseudonym	Demographics	Asylum status	Occupational background
ALICE Attended 3 interviews	Female Mid 30s Sierra Leone	Arrived 2007. Recent refugee status.	Alice had a high status job in TV and media, and was a women's rights activist.
OLIVER Attended 1 interview	Male Early 30s South Africa	Arrived 2006. Refused asylum – no support, destitute.	Oliver was a fisherman but also ran a small business buying and selling.
SHAHIN Attended 1 interview	Male Early 30s Iran	Arrived 2008. Refused asylum – emergency support	Shahin was a University student.
FREEMAN Attended 3 interviews	Male Late 30s Guinea	Arrived 2008. Awaiting decision.	Freeman worked in travel and tourism.
GOZIEM Attended 3 interviews	Male Mid 40s Nigeria	Arrived 2006. Awaiting decision.	Goziem was a social worker.
OLA Attended 2 interviews	Female Early 40s Nigeria	Arrived 2010. Awaiting decision.	Ola ran her own business, buying and selling.
TETE Attended 3 interviews	Female Late 20s Guinea	Arrived 2013. Failed claim, supported during fresh claim.	Tete worked for local government in administration.
TENDEI Attended 2 interviews	Female Mid 30s Zimbabwe	Arrived 2013. Failed claim – no support.	Tendei worked as a cleaner/housemaid.
SAM Attended 2 interviews	Male Late 20s Eritrea	Arrived in 2009. Refugee status.	Sam was a University student.
ALI Attended 3 interviews	Male Early 30s Iraq	Arrived 2008. Failed claim – receives emergency support.	Ali was a farmer then joined the army.

THE FINDINGS

Occupational opportunities

All participants spoke about their desire to be active, using the specific phrase *'keeping busy'* repeatedly; *'there's no use sitting down, the problems will still be there…I just 'get up and do''* (Ola). They linked this principle of keeping busy with the search for meaningful occupations. They reflected upon occupations which they felt had limited meaning, such as housework and watching television; *'if I'm at home I just sit down watching the TV …I think maybe I try to clean up, but by the time it's clean, what's left to clean?'* (Ola). There was a sense from all participants that these occupations were used to fill time, rather than provide satisfaction.

This sense of under-occupation or low challenge occupation was perceived as systemic, with the asylum system preventing them from easily finding more meaningful outlets; 'you have so many things you want to do, so many ideas, but the system won't let you' (Freeman). All participants described feeling frustrated and 'handicapped' by their lack of suitable occupations; 'I have no opportunity to do what I should be doing… do what I am trained to be – what I love' (Goziem). All spoke about the impact of time passing and the waste of valuable years; 'I've wasted six years of my life…because I've not done much, not achieved much' (Ali); 'it's a waste of opportunity…just a waste of skill and time. You begin to regret the time' (Goziem). They demonstrated the drive to undertake more and actively sought out opportunities; 'we are willing to do more, if we have the opportunity' (Freeman).

Finding Meaning Through Altruism

Eight of the ten participants identified their most purposeful occupations as ones which they did for the benefit of others. The nature of the activities varied and included such things as volunteering in refugee agencies, mentoring young people in education, working to raise awareness in higher education, supporting research projects and undertaking charity work. Half of the participants engaged with two or more altruistic activities during their week. For example, Freeman worked collaboratively with several local universities, sharing experiences and raising awareness of asylum issues through classroom activities and research participation. He also mentored young people through education and into work. He was part of a local project to help orientate people seeking asylum who were newly arrived in the area, and also ran group activities for people to help them integrate and participate, including a community garden which was accessed by refugees and local people together. For Freeman, the single thread of meaning that he identified throughout these occupations was the opportunity to do for others; *'just see if I can help people, you know, contribute to people - that makes me more happier than thinking about myself'* (Freeman).

The influence of altruism for these individuals seems to have been present in many ways before, during and after their flight, suggesting that their drive to help others was not particular to their current circumstances. Altruistic behaviours have formed part of their lives at many stages, as an embedded feature of their occupational choice.

Some participants provided examples of altruistic activities they had undertaken from their earliest years, including Sam whose faith encouraged him to volunteer whilst he was growing up; 'I always like volunteering, since when I was young… in places where they are under-privileged people…they brought us up like that, try doing something for people' (Sam), and Tendei who forfeited her education from an early age to work and

provide for her family 'my sisters, they go to school, because I have to stand for them to work as a house helper to pay school fees for them, so at least they've gone to school' (Tendei). As adults Ali chose to join his nation's army, despite the risks, in order to protect his family and homeland, and Goziem volunteered in psychiatric and prison services where he identified an unmet need; 'nobody's going to pay for that, I see a need, I volunteer' (Goziem).

Following arrival, despite multiple challenges and limited resources the participants have all sought ways to use their skills to the benefit of their families, networks or community. This included the ongoing need to financially support others from home, through what are described as 'returns'. This includes family and people within the wider community who are in need; 'So you have… responsibility for your family, but at the same time there are some friends, neighbours and stuff, who are struggling to live' (Goziem). Even in the financial hardship of asylum people try to send money home whenever possible; 'So sometimes it's beyond your ability or you can't afford to help them - even if you can't afford – can't say no, you have to starve (Goziem).

Where participants were able to find some commonality between what they had done before and what they did now they stated they felt it provided a degree of continuity and allowed them to connect their past lives in some way with the present. 'That's what I'm doing now again you see, so that's the same' (Goziem); 'I had so much satisfaction to think that this is the job that I love, this is what I was doing back home when I had to flee and come to this country' (Alice). Seven of the participants had found some continuity between past and present, for example, Alice had an extremely prestigious job in her country of origin, but for many years during her asylum claim her occupations were limited to home and childcare.

She describes herself as depressed and suicidal in that time 'I just spent all my days in my house doing absolutely nothing, becoming very frustrated, and just basically wanting to end my life' (Alice). She began to volunteer in a local women's health charity, campaigning against Female Genital Mutilation (as she had done at home) and felt she reconnected with her sense of her 'old self'. She has become an active full-time volunteer, and with the recent success of her asylum claim she is making work and study plans.

However, the more profound the gap, the more difficult the individuals lives appear to be. This was reflected in the only participants not actively doing for others in the present time. Oliver and Shahin had been occupationally active at earlier stages in the asylum process, and had examples of doing for others. Their earlier involvement in activities had faded and they had lost stamina for continued engagement; 'Five years, six years, four years more?...do again, do again, how many times? I'm tired you know, I'm tired' (Shahin). For those who felt more able to look ahead the focus lay in 'making a difference' through their occupations, making a meaningful life here in the UK or returning home to do good for their own damaged homeland; "I want to go back home, to be honest, and do something that can help the people"(Sam).

Drivers for altruism

Participants were able to give a clear rational for engaging in altruism, and these reflected the typical motivations of kinship, empathy, learned behaviours and moral beliefs highlighted within the literature (Madsen et al. 2007; Batson, 2011; Draguns, 2013).

Kinship. The general connection between occupation and connectedness to others was described by all participants. Eight out of the ten arrived alone, and one other arrived with only her young child, and everyone mentioned the pain of being separated from

parents, spouses or children. They reflected that relationships fostered a sense of belonging; *'it is a powerful thing, being part of a community, part of a family'* (Sam), and particularly the pseudo-kinship 'sister' and 'brother' relationships which they identified as typical of their home cultures. They also described a sense of commonality with other 'foreigners', *'we've got different nationalities, yes, but there, even if you're not from my place, we're still the same…I might not get a language but we have the same reasoning'* (Ola).

They acknowledged the value of support from others and mutually beneficial relationships, but there was particular appreciation for relationships which allowed them to focus on the needs of a third party. They particularly appreciated being needed and valued by others; *'if I'd been these eight years without a wife and kids, then I would say I've lived a wasted life - that's our joy, you know, every other thing doesn't make us happy'* (Goziem).

The opportunity to engage in altruism enabled connectivity and belonging in all cases. The very nature of altruistic activities meant they were directly engaged in a meaningful way with other individuals or groups. Amongst the participants those who had been in the UK for the longest, and whose claims had failed, there was far less connectivity with others and no contact with family at home. They felt they had less to offer to others, and less energy to bring to activities involving others; *'I'm not well…I feel so horrible, no, I don't want to go out anymore…I don't want people to see my horrible face'* (Shahin).

Empathy and emotion. In part the desire to do for others was borne out of empathy, appreciating the challenges others had faced and wanting to help them to avoid isolation and hardship. This encouraged actions such as Freeman, volunteering for an orientation project to help individuals new to the area and Ali, helping at the service supporting

people who are destitute; *'those who arrive recently, we show them around, make them comfortable, so they can feel free to settle'* (Freeman).

Their empathic response meant that they not only wanted to support others, but also minimised their own needs. They all highlighted instances of others facing greater difficulties than they, themselves; *'lots of people are feeling worse things than I'm even feeling… you hear some other things that are more horrible than mine, you hear a lot of things from people, people are facing'* (Tete). Several found that this gave them strength to help others – putting on a smile to cover their distress, helping others in order to distract them from their own fears; *'you look at their situation, you are like, oh my God, I'm even better off, why do I have to worry so much?'* (Goziem). By choosing to focus on the needs of others it became easier for them to identify as the 'helper' rather than the person needing to be helped; *'I mostly forget my own problems when I started listening to other people, their stories'* (Tete).

A cultural imperative. The participants all linked their desire to act for others with early learned behaviour generated by family, faith and culture. They described parents and other key figures who they admired for providing for others within their community, supporting extended family and worked charitably. Nine participants stated that their altruism linked with cultural norms from their country of origin, as they described themselves as being from cultures that are; *'always there for one another… like a giving culture* [where] *everybody is willing or probably hungry to share everything you have'* (Sam). They noted differences in values between their home nation and the UK, recognising the UK as individualistic, with excellent statutory support but limited support between members of society. Five of the individuals also made a connection between

altruism and their spiritual or religious beliefs; *'[God] will not come down but he can also send somebody, touch somebody's heart, Oh, let me aid this person'* (Ola).

Moral beliefs. These influences became embedded as part of their own moral values, encouraging them to put others before themselves; *'I think some of the things that I do is just for my conscience… that's for my inner conscience'* (Sam); *'It's not just all about what will I gain? What also can I contribute?'* (Ola). Goziem, a trained social worker, described 'helping' occupations as 'real work', where he could see himself making a difference, giving others hope and changing lives; *'When you see people at the end of the day smiling away, in thanks, you know, in appreciation. You visit them… you now see changes in them, happiness in the home'* (Goziem). There were also reflections from all participants on the importance of being good and doing good. This sometimes arose out of a sense of what is 'morally right'; *'I do whatever is asked, do what is right. I do give, you know, I give to people'* (Freeman), and sometimes out of desire to *'give something back'* (Ali), recognising the role of kindness and support they, themselves, had received; *'once you've been supported and helped like that… you're expected to do your best and… do something back'* (Sam).

Intrinsic gains. Individuals were able to describe multiple gains from engaging with altruistic activities. At a very simple level these occupations provided them with valuable structure in their weeks or days, and a reason to get up and leave the house; *'It's a relief to me in a way because I'm doing something other than staying in the house doing nothing'* (Tendei)'; *'I don't like sitting there, I always leave my house at 9am, always out until late'* (Freeman).

There was a general sense of having purpose and making progress; *'I believe by still doing, I would definitely get there one day'* (Ola); *'I just keep going, moving, moving,*

moving, yes, but I know it helps me, it helps me, it helps a lot' (Tete). Other gains lay in opportunities to use existing skills, or develop new ones, to learn about UK culture or develop their English skills; *'not only being busy, but getting to know people, the culture and everything, so we can't do that sitting at home'* (Sam).

All participants spoke of times when their physical or mental health had been adversely affected by the asylum experience and the limited opportunities it presents; *'it's very unhelpful to be with loads and loads of time on your hands - it is the Devil's Workshop'* (Goziem). They made strong links between the experience of keeping busy and their physical health; '[we are] *not just* sitting… getting fat and depressed' (Goziem) and psychological well-being; 'while you are thinking about that [work] you are not thinking about other things' (Tete).

The opportunity to do for others allowed them to see themselves as *'more than an asylum seeker'* (Tete). The activities and roles they undertook allowed them to rise above their legal status, demonstrate their worth and reconnect with elements of their old self. Ali presents an example. During the interviews he became particularly animated when talking about cooking at a church-run support group for destitute failed claimants. He began by attending when his own claim failed but was drawn to helping out and preparing food for the group. The activity provides him with positive feedback and praise from others, allowing him to see himself as having skills of value; *'they were happy the way I was cooking the food - everybody is happy and enjoying, this is about my cooking'* (Ali). This combination of feeling productive and receiving feedback that what he does has value allows him to see his worth in a way no other regular activity provides. It also enables him to give something back to the church, as he has found them very supportive; *'I try my best to do even a little in return, cooking, cleaning, servicing and helping people*

and like providing some food for people' (Ali). In addition, he describes an element of continuity in this activity, as he learnt to cook from his mother, with whom he was extremely close. As a result, the experience of cooking for others connects him with his past, his family and his culture.

There were instances where the chance to act for others allowed individuals to show they are 'the right kind of person', demonstrate their worth to the community and set a path for others by being a positive role model; *'So they've seen those traits in me and the right things, I don't smoke, I don't drink... and every time they're having an activity you'll see me there' (Goziem); 'you should be a role model to [your children]' (Tete).* Two of the men had received significant external recognition for their efforts, in terms of social standing and local awards, and whilst they were proud of this the external gains appeared to be secondary to the other benefits of the experience.

Being the Recipient

An unexpected element of exploring altruism arose when participants spoke about the challenge of receiving support from others. There was gratitude expressed by all participants for those who had helped them at various stages in their process; *'I would never ever forget* [my therapist], *she has always been there, and helped me a lot, I still remember every single time I would come along... I can't think of anybody else who has been so helpful in my life'* (Ali). However, there was also a reluctance to be seen as 'in need', and several participants identified the challenge of being open to kindnesses shown by others. This ranged from a relief not to need help through to an active reluctance to take help, with individuals preferring to focus on helping others than needing help themselves; *'deep inside, you know, you feel less like as a man, it's where I come from - because I have to look after you, not be looked after'* (Freeman).

DISCUSSION

Occupation has enormous potential for enhancing the post migratory experience, but choice of occupation is important. People strive to move beyond simply 'keeping busy' to find occupations of real meaning which meet personal and cultural needs (Burchett and Matheson 2010; Heigl et al. 2011; Farias, 2013; H. C. Smith, 2015). Every participant was able to identify occupational injustices experienced since they arrived in the UK. They faced apartheid and marginalisation due to policies and practicalities which prevent access (Burnett and Chebe, 2009; Huot et al. 2013; Fleay, Hartley and Kenny, 2014; Hartley and Fleay, 2014). There was evidence of disruption in all cases, the length of which appeared to be influenced by the level of support they had to gain access to occupations, plus their spoken language. Individuals gave examples of the impact of occupational deprivation, which appeared to become more entrenched over time, due to declining personal resources and increased restrictions within the asylum system. Where people described satisfying occupations they had worked hard to ensure they has sufficient activity, though they acknowledge that this took energy and stamina (Lunden 2012; World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), 2014).

It is clear that any meaningful occupation has the potential to provide significant gains for people during and after the asylum process, but for the participants in this research the most meaningful occupations were ones they undertook for the benefit of others. There was clear evidence of Batson's strands of altruism (2011) as, despite having very little capital, individuals chose to prize actions done for the good of others above almost any other. They could use their energies towards a more selfish end, but identified something intrinsically valuable about doing for others which has made this a source of meaning. This raises the possibility that motivations for some occupations might be of as

much meaning to some individual as the activity itself (Taylor, 2015). The aspects of their chosen occupations which specifically made them valuable lay in their ability to connect with others, show their individual worth and maintain links between past and present. Altruism promoted connectivity within this marginalised and 'othered' group, who experience limited social capital (Grove and Zwi, 2005, Philo, Briant and Donald, 2011; Kamenova, 2014; British Attitudes Survey, 2015). Whilst altruism is not particular to any group or culture, it is actively fostered in collectivist cultures, and each of the participants comes from cultures which are considered significantly more collectivist than the UK (Ting- Toomey, 2012; Hostede 2010). Individuals were used to far higher levels of social capital and connectedness, and this is considered particularly important for people within a foreign culture and without familial connections (Y. Smith, 2013). Altruistic occupations may therefore be valuable as a tool for gaining support and establishing yourself when living in an unfamiliar place (Eisenberg *et al.* 2004; Salvati, 2008; Van der Linden, 2011).

During the passive, stagnant wait for an asylum decision (Rotter, 2015) altruistic occupations provided a means of retaining a sense of self. All participants had been adversely affected by asylum, either through the lack of personal agency, reduced opportunity, reliance on charity or the attitudes of people in the wider community (Bennett *et al.* 2012; Cheung and Phillimore, 2013; Morville, 2014; Gower, 2016). Altruism is said to help individuals to demonstrate core features of their identity when other measures of value (such as wealth or status) may not be present (Van der Linden, 2011). Altruism also fosters feelings of happiness and well-being, part of the virtuous cycle of helping others, doing good and subsequently feeling good that has been described as 'the helper's high' (Post, 2005; Otake et al. 2006; Van der Linden, 2011; Wright, 2013).

Maintaining a connection between past and present occupations could provide what could be called 'occupational constancy' during periods of transition, which is known to impact on occupational lives (Blair, 2000; Shaw and Rudman, 2009, Pettican and Prior, 2011; Dickie, Cutchin and Humphrey, 2006; Kercher, 2014). Occupational constancy could be described as the maintenance of, or return to, an existing occupational path during transitions such as forced migration. There was a determination to maintain links with previous occupations and a desire to feel they had some continuity between past and present. Those who were able to use transferable skills for something close to their previous occupation seemed the most satisfied, however, where people have skills to use and cannot there is significant frustration. Goziem, a social worker, talks of *'decay through disuse'* and the fear that his skills would gradually fade because he couldn't practice. He, like others, have tried to find activities which in some way reflect things of meaning from their past, but he remains aware that his current occupations are not his 'first choice'. These occupations may be close enough to provide some sense of continuity, but may also be distant enough to frustrate – like a ghost version of the occupation that the individual was previously driven to do. It is notable that, whilst altruistic and other meaningful occupations provided many positives, the hardships of forced migration and asylum are not removed and the occupations used do not necessarily negate occupational injustices.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this small scale study, and these findings are unlikely to be representative of any wider population. It is impossible to say whether this group of participants are reflective of a particular trend towards altruism amongst refugees, as altruistic people may be more likely engage with a project looking for volunteers.

Refugees are not a homogenous group and the wealth of experiences and backgrounds makes generalisability limited.

The research process may have been influenced by the 'presence' of the researcher, and though efforts have been taken to maintain authenticity in the data, bias cannot be entirely removed.

Implications for occupationally orientated research and practice

This study introduces the connection between altruism and occupational choice, which may be a useful means of understanding what makes occupations done for others particularly meaningful. It adds to the call for meaning to become a stronger focus of occupationally orientated enquiry. Future research could identify a wider sample for greater comparison, and also actively identify individuals who are not engaged in meaningful occupations to consider the barriers. There is potential to explore occupational constancy, and the desire to keep close to existing occupations. It would be valuable to consider the meaning of this to the individual, what draws people to occupations they have previously preferred, and how they feel about limited access to them.

For professionals interested in using occupation to meet the needs of refugees, this study supports the value of occupation, and the challenge of ongoing occupational injustice. Findings encourage the use of a targeted approach to find altruistic occupations which appear to have a particularly strong personal and cultural 'fit' to help to address many of the implications of forced migration. The finding may be applicable to other groups who face significant transition or marginalisation.

It was clear throughout the study that individuals placed significant value on occupation, particularly 'keeping busy with purpose'. Their occupational choices reflected a desire for

kinship and connectivity, an empathic connection with others and a cultural and moral underpinning. They sought occupations to maintain health and well-being and showed the desire to focus their attention away from their own needs. Meaningful occupations were ones which linked past present, and sometimes future, providing a sense of occupational constancy. They presented individuals with the chance to rise above their asylum status and be the 'helper' rather than the 'helped'.

Altruism is an immeasurably complex set of ideas and experiences (Batson, 2011) which continues to face debate, mostly focused on the *rationale* for an individual's actions, rather than the *meaning* it holds. It is questionable whether, from an occupational perspective, the underlying motivation for doing good is of particular importance, when the individuals express so many gains from the experience. However, understanding motivation in terms of *meaning* can help us see 'the call' of the occupation, the thing that drives the individual towards it and makes it meaningful (Reed *et al.* 2010, Kuo, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Forced migration is a growing worldwide issue and implications for individuals, families and host communities are immense (UNHCR, 2016). Amongst the many aspects of hardship faced by refugees, the impact of occupational injustice is increasingly acknowledged (Whiteford, 2000; Bennett *et al.* 2012; Hammell and Iwama, 2012; Cheung and Phillimore, 2013; Al Heresh, 2013; Durocher, Gibson and Rappolt, 2013; Morville, 2014; WFOT, 2014).

The overall study aimed to explore meaning behind occupational choices for participants, and in doing so raised the potential of altruism as an occupational vehicle to meet needs. The individual participants engaged with a number of altruistic occupations, demonstrating altruism, collectivism and principlism; prompted by kinship, empathy,

learned behaviour and moral principles (Batson, 2011). This article has recognised the known benefits of altruism, (Muzick and Wilson, 2003; Post, 2005; Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui and Fredrickson, 2006; Keonig, McGue, Krueger and Bouchard, 2007; Brown, Brown, House and Smith, 2008; Salvati, 2008; Wright, 2013), applying them to refugees and exploring the potential for altruism, as meaningful occupation, to promote successful resettlement (Colic-Peisker, 2009; Lunden, 2012; Mondaca and Josephsson, 2013; Mayblin, 2014; Nayar and Sterling, 2013; Suleman and Whiteford, 2013)

During asylum, when access to occupation is significantly restricted, people require enormous drive, resourcefulness and energy to engage. Occupation during asylum is linked to both social structures and personal characteristics, requiring researchers and practitioners to both challenge social structures (World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), 2006; 2014), and build on personal characteristics (Crawford et al. 2016). By directing drive towards occupations undertaken for the benefit of others, the individual may be able to make the most of limited resources, providing short term solutions and long term gains. Doing for others may be an effective antidote to the impact of transition and hardships of asylum, proving rich, diverse opportunities to foster occupational engagement and constancy.

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