



Race, Crime and Justice in the North East:

WOMEN'S LIVES, WELL-BEING AND COMMUNITY

Conducted in participation with Regional Refugee Forum
North East and Purple Rose Stockton

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Introduction

This arts based research project was undertaken in partnership with the Regional Refugee Forum North East and Purple Rose Stockton. We sought to explore ways of seeing women's lived experiences, well-being and sense of community in the context of their lives in the Teesside. The research builds upon previous collaborative work on 'Race, Crime and Justice' in the North East that was funded by the Ministry of Justice, Durham University, Northumbria and Teesside Universities.

This arts based research used walking, storytelling and visual/photographic methods to help make visible women's lived experiences of living in Middlesbrough, Stockton and Hartlepool and what community and community safety mean to them. Participatory arts (PA) and participatory action research (PAR) methods were used to conduct a critical recovery of women's lives and experiences. Story walks helped to create individual and collective narratives about what it is like to be a new arrival, an asylum seeker or refugee and for some women a refused asylum seeker.

Women were asked to draw a map from their home in Teesside to a special place marking along the way places and spaces that were important to them. We talked about the maps and places and agreed upon a collective walk that we would undertake together, taking photographs and recording the voices of the women about the places they took us too. We then met with the photographs in a workshop to discuss the photographs and choose the images for exhibition.

The principles underpinning PAR and PA are:

- inclusion,
- participation,
- valuing all local voices,
- Community driven and sustainable outcomes.

Community co-researchers worked with two academics a sociologist and a psychologist from Durham University, one of whom was a Fulbright Scholar, to conduct the research and support the creation of visual representations of women's lives, well-being and 'community'. This research was supported by the Regional Refugee Forum North East, Purple Rose Stockton and the Race, Crime and Justice Consortium.

We set out to document and share the stories of women seeking asylum in visual form and also how their stories could be woven together to tell a collective tale of the search for sanctuary.

The stories of the women were varied, with some fleeing persecution from their governments and others from kinship-based violence, whether forced marriage, female circumcision, or domestic abuse. Some came into political opposition with the government, while others suffered persecution in their local communities. They were journalists, nurses, teachers and mothers from Africa, South Asia and the Middle East. Many left children behind when they fled, while others took young ones in tow. Still others were single women without family support of any kind.

Lacking the papers or the documentation required by officials, asylum seekers rely on their storytelling capacities. Even with fragments of documentation, asylum seekers rely on the power of the stories to move official listeners.

“Finding a solicitor to take your case and move it forward is very important. Women represented a particular challenge since they often had little official paper work to document their case.”

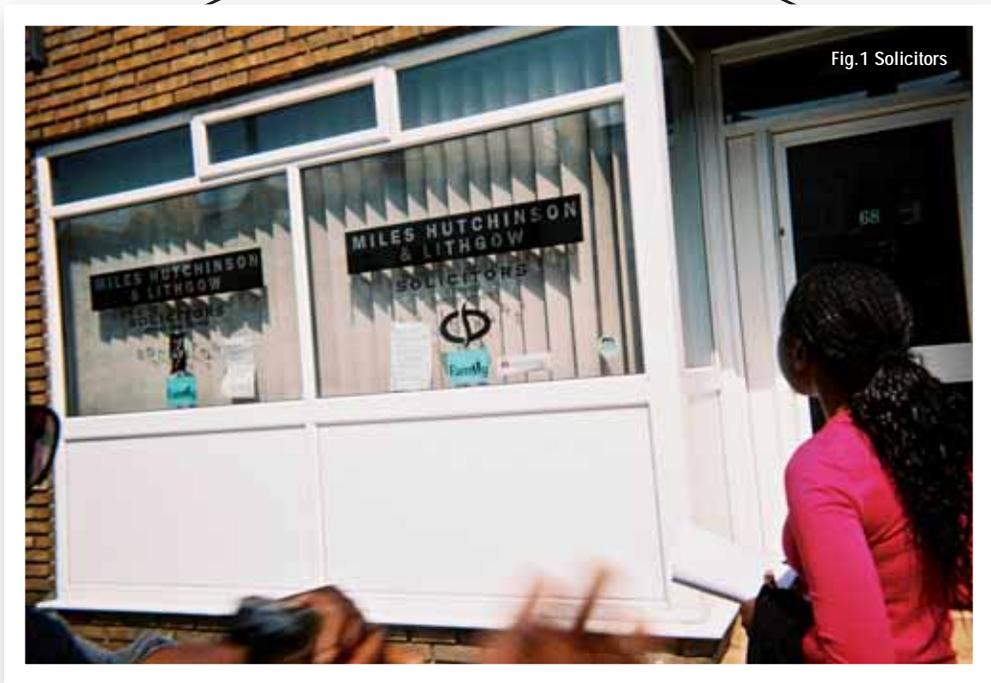


Fig.1 Solicitors

This is very important for without a solicitor your asylum claim will not go anywhere. I remember when I first came to Stockton and my asylum claim was refused and my solicitor was very supportive. When you have one who is supportive it helps a lot when I was refused I was very depressed and she talked to me like a friend, giving me assurance and support. That meant a lot.

Solicitors are like doctors, some can make you better and some cannot

Home Office annoyed us with letters. They send a lot of nonsense letters, un useful, and we do not understand the meaning but I now understand when we receive a letter from Home Office we should put on my hand if it is heavy it is very bad news and if it is not heavy it is good news.

Search for freedom

Fig.2



This is Freedom for us, the falling water is like freedom, it is the same for all of us, and we sit here and get a better feeling.

I go there to the park, I take a magazine and relax and make myself a little bit free to relax and I enjoy feeling free, we need places that make you feel free and at home.

Public places often offer more protection than domestic spaces, with reports of housing provider representatives often entering the homes of women without notice.



Fig.3

“When you are an asylum seeker, life is everywhere with the least facilities. We just want to be alive.”

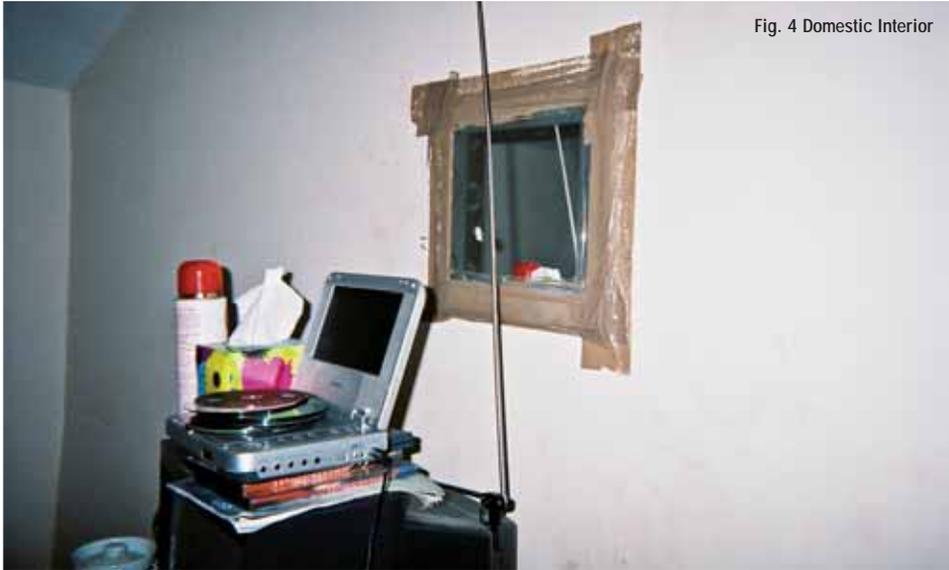


Fig. 4 Domestic Interior

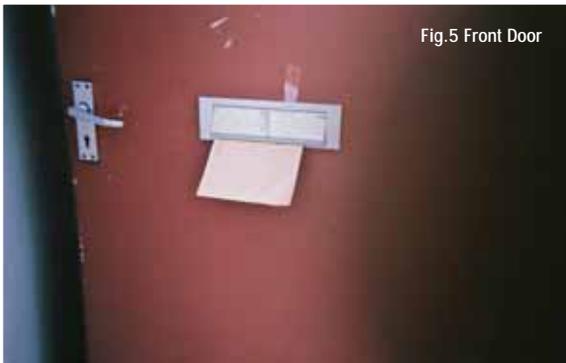


Fig.5 Front Door

A broken red door, like our life. Sometimes you will feel you are alone then the main place you go to is your home, your house. We are homeless we have been given a house, this is given by Jomast, this is not mine. We are alone, we have lost everything



“The realities of the asylum system are captured in this image of a barrier, a wall.”

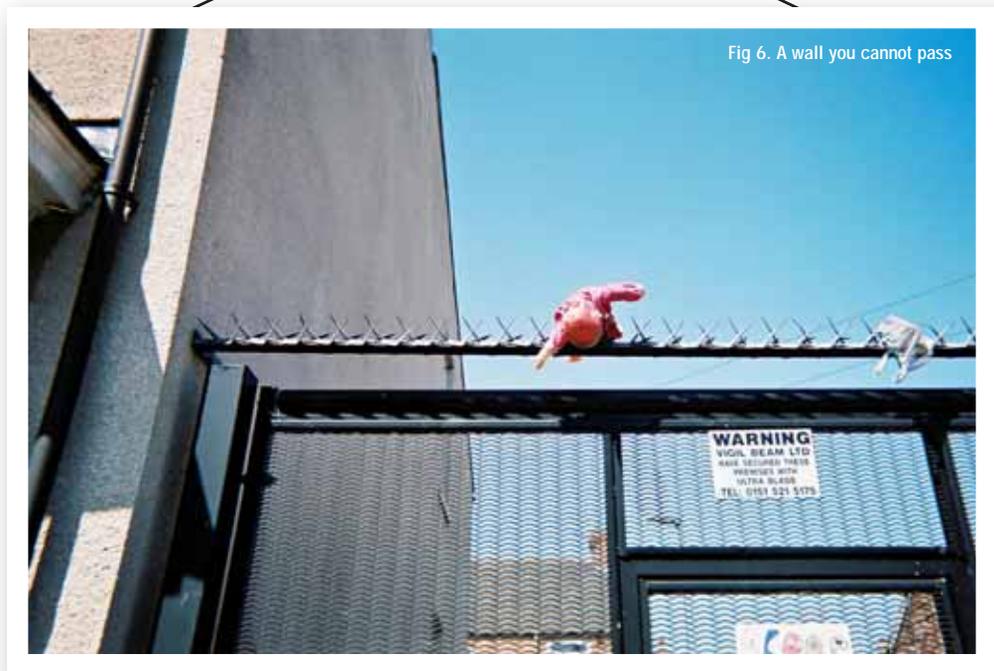
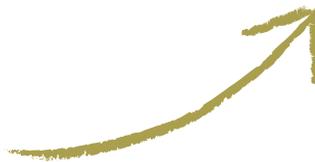


Fig 6. A wall you cannot pass

There is a wall here so she cannot pass from here she has to pass from this fence this dangerous fence. This is a symbol of many people who cannot stay in their country and they have to go to another country and they are damaged they were damaged from moving. All of we understand what is damaged because we all experience. Some of the people they have too many of these experiences.





“Parks and libraries were places of sanctuary on these maps of the community, places where women of different backgrounds, including destitute women, could gather and feel part of the community.”



We are re building our life here. I love the library, I love it, and my children love it. Is celebrating 100 years I love to spend time here I feel so relaxed and I feel hospitality and welcome. I sit in the park and feel free.



Sometimes I go to the park and sometimes I also go to the library. I go to use the computer and see the newspaper, listen to music and listen to books; the library is very good for my studies.



“Friends and relationships are crucial for a sense of belonging offering support and solidarity.”



Fig.9 Women's Group



Fig.10 Friends



Fig.11 Friend

This is my friend I see her in church and she is also an artist. I like her paintings and drawing she is my best friend and I like her very much.



Fig.12 Reporting at the Police Station

“The asylum process is fraught with stress and strain.”

Every month, I check in to the police station to sign in. If you don't sign in, you can be taken to prison.

I signed today and all night I did not sleep all night, I feel sick, I did not know what would happen to me.

Every asylum seeker relates to the police station. Most of us here have never been to police station in our home country, so for me to go to police station I could not believe it on top of everything else you are going through you have to go to police station to sign. For me because of my journalistic background

I was probing saying why, why the police station just to put my signature down. I go there and they say are you living at the same address. And we sign for our support. It does not make sense I do not like to go there I really dislike it. But we comply it does not make any sense, I hate and dislike it but then I have no choice.

I hate this place it is the worst place in this town. It is the police station. Any asylum seeker will not like this any time you go every 2 weeks I don't sleep if I go to sign, this stress I have it is too much for me, it is 50/50 they may detain you.

“Support services that offer material and emotional support are very important.”



Fig.13. Open Door

I feel that I belong here, when I am not getting any support, here I feel good. Open Door is 100% different to housing provider.

They look after me when my support was cut off, they give me somewhere to stay, food, milk, and money and Refugee Council give me £5 every week.

Sylvan House is very good place supporting us to communicate with housing and support. They really helped and supported me when my husband and I were living apart and trying to get the authorities to acknowledge that we could live together. We met here as asylum seekers, fell in love and wanted to live together. The Home Office said no we had to be married, so we married in a church, they said no it has to be in a registry office so we had to marry twice. In the meantime Sylvan House supported us and arranged for my husband to sleep somewhere else as he wasn't allowed to live in the house with me and our daughter.



Fig.14 Sylvan House



Fig.15 Teesside University



Fig.16 Teesside University

Education organisations that enabled women to sustain reinforce and develop skills in the hope of future employment and regaining the roles and professions they had before flight were important landmarks on the maps.

Teesside University is Very close to my house I feel that I am living when I see the University. When I was 22 I studied for four years, then I became an assistant lecturer and then a lecturer and senior lecturer I feel like my life is the University.



Fig.17 Teesside University

“This picture of the main gate - the concept of the University is very important and no-one can kill that.”

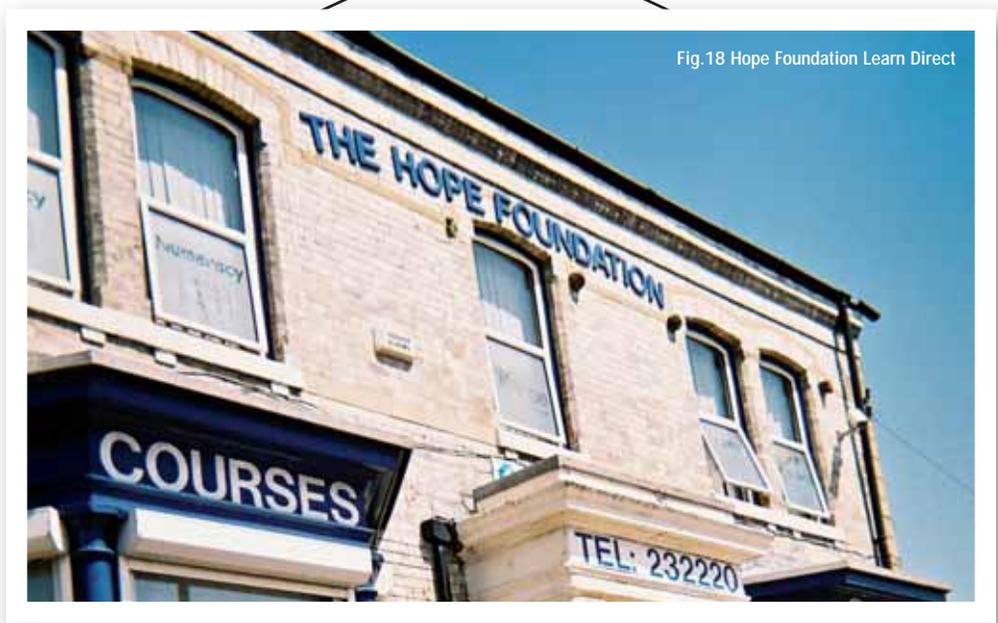


Fig.18 Hope Foundation Learn Direct

This is a happy, happy place for everyone. Here I can take English Language exam and can get access to Teesside University where I can study for 3 years. But I am missing my mum, we are suffering from this. It is very hard to say that I cannot take a picture of this loss, just have to say that I have to deal with it. I have not seen my family in 9 years not even when my Dad died.

Here I can look for courses that keep me going when my support stopped.



Fig.19 Hope Foundation Courses

“This place is very good for us. I like studying here. I am studying level 3 computer skills. It is very important for us.”



Fig.20 Hope Foundation Courses

“The GP and Medical Support is also an important place for women.”

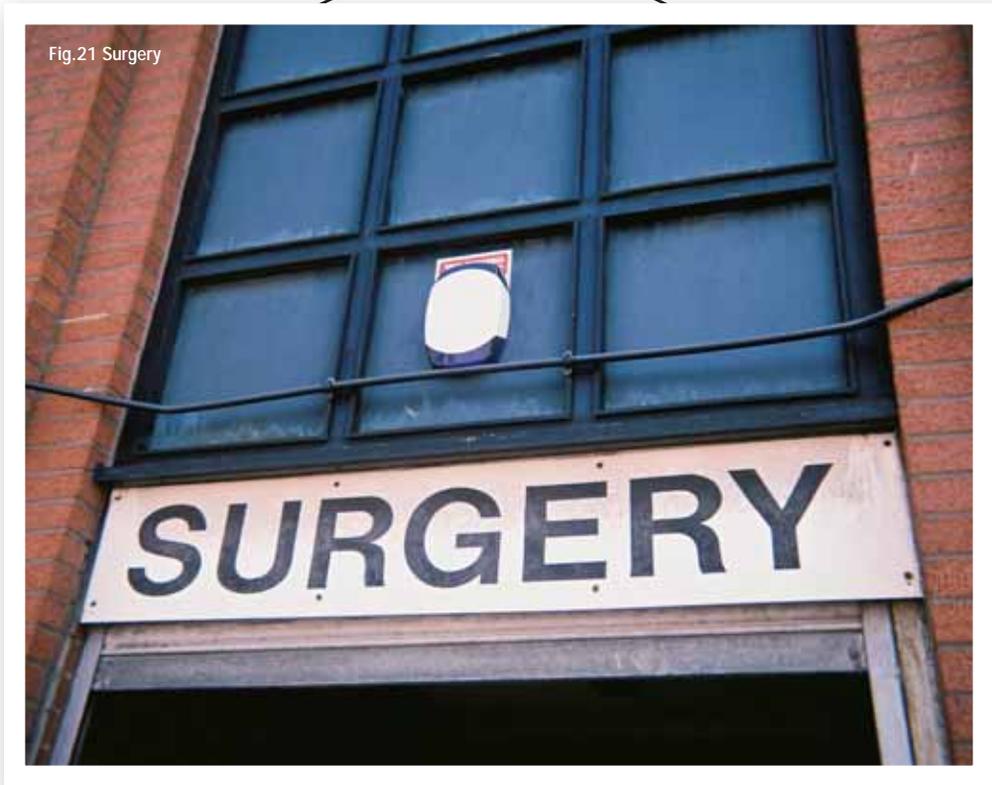
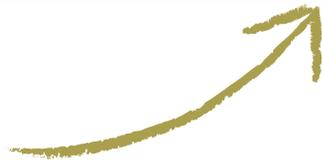


Fig.21 Surgery

I trained as a nurse.
When in Liverpool the GP was sending me
for tests because my liver is not functioning.
Here I am given paracetamol, there is no hope.



What happens when women's cases are refused?



Fig. 22 Stop Sign

After a long time my first solicitor cut me off as they said I had only fifty per cent case. Refugee Council were very good they supported me, treated me normally not as an asylum seeker.... Linda's Place, Open Door and the Church help a lot. When I did not sleep the whole night I go and I feel good there, Linda helps a lot and makes you feel ok.

It is very hard for us and this is a very important symbol. Many things are not allowed for us. We have not got driving licence, internet, telephone, bank account and other things.

We are people like British people but our children cannot use internet. I can understand the rule of UK and it doesn't help me to be happy I am not happy because I am human I am a part of human.

My husband went to Teesside University for interview the tutor he agreed my husband could go to study masters on basis of his very good CV but unfortunately he cannot go to University because we are asylum.

I am really lucky when I came here and meet new friends and heard about their life I realise that I am very lucky because I have a family, I love my family and when we are together we are very happy because I have a son I have a very kind husband. There are many problems for people who are single who live with others and share kitchen and toilet and other things and it can be a problem when they are alone.

Crushed flower - this is a symbolic picture about asylum people I think it is very clear. Freedom is the best thing in the whole world I need freedom more than food and oxygen. We do not have freedom in my country.

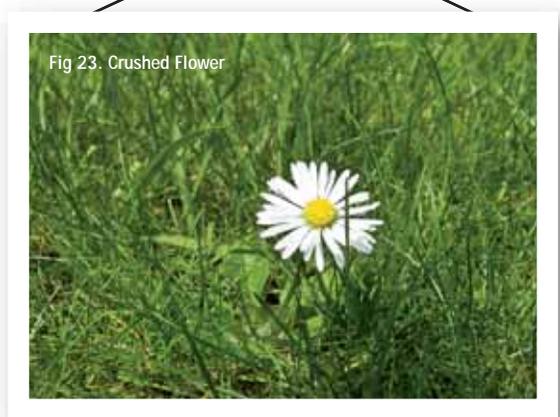
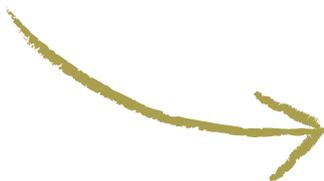


Fig 23. Crushed Flower

“The process of flight and arrival can be dangerous, faced with barriers and feelings of displacement and loneliness. Freedom, safety, hope, friendship and belonging are the building blocks of a new life.”



The process of flight and arrival can be dangerous, faced with barriers and feelings of displacement and loneliness. Freedom, safety, hope, friendship and belonging are the building blocks of a new life.

Organisations like Linda's Place, Open Door and the Church help a lot. When I did not sleep the whole night I go and I feel good there. Linda helps a lot and makes you feel ok, supports, is sympathetic and with all the negatives it is important that there are people like that.

Lots of organisations are working hard to support asylum seekers and destitute people who have nowhere to go. The 'still human still here' campaign is working hard on our behalf and like this project the stories and images help to raise awareness, so there is hope, we feel hopeful and there is light at the end of the tunnel.



Durham
University

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JESSOPS

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Every effort has been made to ensure that all information is accurate at the time of going to press in October 2012. However, changes may occur and Durham University reserves the right to amend or change any information contained in this leaflet at any time.

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