



VOICE NOTES

Culture and Mental Health: Refugees

Sarah Jackson sarah7.jackson@Northumbria.ac.uk Leah Gayer leah@compasscollect.com I'm about to submit my settlement application, but before I do, there are a couple things I need to tell you. (Olja)

Your face is the sun. Your hands, like land for planting flowers, are filled with kindness. (Hamida)

That's where I found a place for girls like me: girls who dream of wrapping their arms around other girls, of touching knees with other girls, of having not only a moment from a kiss but a kiss itself.... (Tania)







Compass Collective is an award winning charity that assists unaccompanied minor refugees and young people seeking asylum to build resilience and integrate into the UK.

We achieve this through creative English classes, theatre, music, and film projects, and arts-led professional development programmes. Through the arts, we address wider social issues and equip young people with the platforms, confidence and skills needed to speak out and become the creative and social leaders of the future

'Creative writing gives a voice to marginal groups in society, allowing them tell their stories.'

- F. Gonçalves et al, 'You're the Voice' in *Proceedings of the 2015 ACM SIGCH Conference on Creativity and Cognition* (June 2015), pp.63-72

'Participants reported increased confidence and an increased sense of hope. [...] Professionally-led creative writing groups may be effective in enabling people to help come to terms with past experiences and find ways of coping for the future.'

- T. Stickley et al, '"Write Here, Sanctuary": Creative Writing for refugees and people seeking asylum', *Arts & Health* 11.3 (2019), 246-263

'Another theme which emerged from the data was the idea that one ought to, as participant 4 noted, 'make it [the writing] more English'. There were several elements to this, including both a sense in which the writing should be understandable to an English reader and a feeling on the part of the participants that they should strive for grammatical accuracy and technical correctness, but also sometimes a sense of making the writing more culturally English.'

- M. Chaplin, 'Refugee authors' views of language in their creative writing', *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 18:1 (2018), 74-89

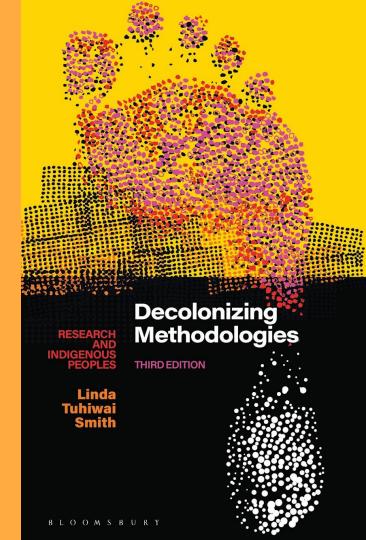


'Speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise.'

- Linda Alcoff, 'The Problem of Speaking for Others', Cultural Critique 20 (1991), 5-32

'From the vantage point of the colonised...the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself 'research' is possibly one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary.'

- Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies. 3rd edition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021)=, p.1. 1999, p.1)





WHAT WE DO

- We deliver a variety of creative programmes to help the young people to improve communication and transferable life skills, build confidence, and move towards future opportunities in further education/training/employment.
- We are consistent and progressive.
- We are youth-led, with a leadership development programme.
- We are process driven and put our young people at the heart of our programmes







Compass Methodology

At Compass Collective, the ethos of participation is at the heart of what we do.

For many young people who have been uprooted from everything and everyone they know, a sense of **connection** and a **feeling of family**, even if just for a couple of hours, brings **comfort**; and with comfort comes the possibility to learn, grow, gain confidence, and develop skills.





Creating Brave Spaces:

The space we create at Compass Collective is one of ease, comfort and, above all, fun. Recently, increased trauma awareness and training has raised debates surrounding the appropriateness of the commonly used term 'safe space' on the basis that spaces may never feel entirely safe for everyone involved.

In response to this, some practitioners challenge the term and call for the use of 'brave space' in its place. Compass Collective aims to create a space that was safe in the literal sense, while exemplifying the concept of a 'brave space' in practice.

Trauma informed approach

Realise that trauma can affect individuals, groups and communities

Trauma-informed practice is an approach to health and care interventions which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development.

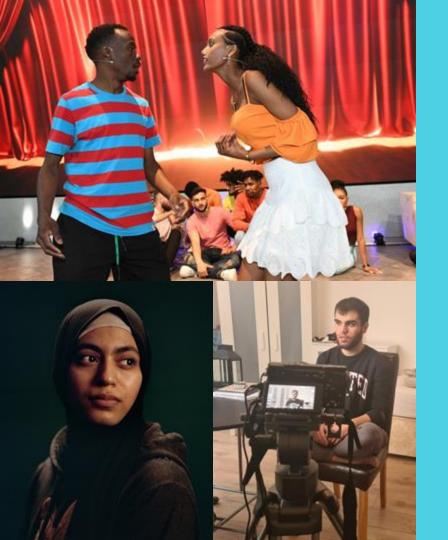
What we do:

- Create safe spaces
- Avoid triggering topics
- Accessibility to projects
- Accommodating
- Communication and understanding
- Welfare support





- Compass facilitators advocated for confidence, 'putting yourself out there', making mistakes and being brave within our workshops.
- The Compass facilitators make all forms of participation into achievements, clapping the first person to go out during games, and asking groups to be brave and go first when sharing work.
- The space created by the company encourages, not simply a lack of judgement, but a celebration of involvement of any kind. This, in turn, boosts feelings of confidence and minimised feelings of embarrassment among the young people we work with.
- Participants have let us that they have "a feeling of being in a safe environment where I am able to let go and learnt that it is ok to let go"



"Nothing with us, without us"

Compass Ambassadors

- Our graduate Ambassadors have stayed connected with our organisation, and continue to assist and lead projects and have become part of the support network for others.
- Frank and Yordanos have both assisted on multiple projects and workshops, and written a film screened at Somerset House.
- Frank has performed original pieces of poetry and writing at Theatre 503 and Beck Theatre.
- Shanzay has given speeches at BAFTA and the Southbank Centre.

Compass Youth Board



'There is emerging evidence that mobile phones became essential tools for accessing information and resources that can help refugees navigate their migration journeys [...] and the complexities of life during resettlement [...].'

- Amanda Alencar, 'Mobile communication and refugees: An analytical review of academic literature', *Sociology Compass* 14.8 (2020), 1-13

'[The phone] connects me with others who can support me; it contains vital evidence and documents that are essential for my asylum case with the Home Office. It stores records of my life experiences. It represents so much more than communication; it symbolises hope, a chance for a better future, and the possibility of rebuilding my life again.'

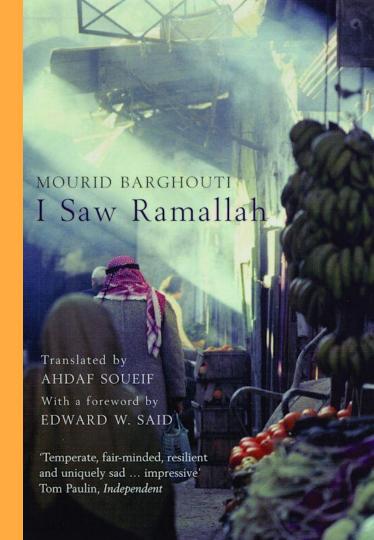
- Ahed, Voice Notes participant (2024)



'The telephone, now that the era of letters is over, is the sacred tie between Palestinians'.

The telephone never stops ringing in the night of faroff countries. Someone woken from sleep picks up
the receiver and hears a hesitant voice at the other
end telling them of the death of a loved one or a
relative or a friend or comrade in the homeland or in
some other country – in Rome, Athens, Tunis, Cyprus,
London, Paris, the United States, and on every bit of
land we have been carried to, until death becomes
like lettuce in the market, plentiful and cheap.'

- Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*, trans. Ahdaf Soueif (Anchor Books, 1997)



CALLING ACROSS BORDERS

















'The call, intimate, affective, yet also desperate, random in the search for emergency help, connection, comes to speak more, and ethically, of response, responsibility, the urgency of hearing and responding to the calls of the living and the dying. Listening, hearing, answering, all take on a live charge'.

- Emma Wilson, 'Telephone Calls in Gianfranco Rosi's Fire at Sea (Fuocoammare, 2016)', *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 17 (2019), 12–23

The Telephone Book

TECHNOLOGY, SCHIZOPHRENIA, ELECTRIC SPEECH

•

Avital Ronell

'Your picking [the telephone] up means the call has come through. It means more: you're its beneficiary, rising to meet its demand, to pay a debt. You don't know who's calling or what you are going to be called upon to do, and still, you are lending your ear, giving something up, receiving an order. It is a question of answerability.'

- Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989)

DISPOSSESSION: THE PERFORMATIVE IN THE POLITICAL

Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou



The question might be whether there can be a way to answer the call of the dispossessed without further dispossessing them. Perhaps there is no way to answer the call without interpellating the caller and without being interpellated by her/him, without appropriating her/him and without letting ourselves take the risk of being appropriated by her/him.

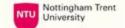
- Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 106



- Foreground the role of active listening in workshops and outputs
- Enable a multilingual approach, allowing participants to work in a language of their choice
- Foster an inclusive and participatory learning space in which knowledge is collectively shared and co-produced
- Develop a 'creative coalition' (Sullivan 2019)
 across national, cultural and ideological
 boundaries







COUNTERPOINTS.























An international creative writing & sound arts initiative working with displaced communities in Nottingham and Sulaymaninyah.





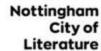




Arts and **Humanities Research Council**



















COUNTERPOINTS.

BEGINNINGS



JOIN US FOR 'VOICE NOTES' - A WRITING AND DRAMA PROJECT CELEBRATING CREATIVITY AND BUILDING **LINKS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED FORCED DISPLACEMENT**

IT IS A CHANCE TO HAVE FUN. LEARN NEW SKILLS & **PRACTISE YOUR ENGLISH**

SHARE YOUR STORY IN AN INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION. **INCLUDING A SHOW AT NEW ART EXCHANGE IN NOTTINGHAM**

WORKSHOPS WILL TAKE PLACE AT NEW ART EXCHANGE AND AT ATTENBOROUGH NATURE RESERVE ON:

> **SATURDAY 25TH NOVEMBER** SATURDAY 2ND DECEMBER

SATURDAY 9TH DECEMBER

- NO PREVIOUS SKILLS REQUIRED
 - FREE AND OPEN TO ALL
- HOT LUNCH AND TRANSPORT PROVIDED
- WORK WITH AWARD-WINNING WRITERS, MUSICIANS AND **ACTORS**









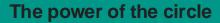












We start and end our sessions in a circle where possible This creates an equal space where all young people can be seen and heard.



GAMES GAMES!

Getting to know you:

- Three facts
- The Sun Shines of Me When...

Energising games:

- Bucket ball
- Zip Zap Boing
- Seven Up
- Keepiuppy
- In the pond, out the pond
- Bippity bop

Focusing Games

- Court to 21
- Look down look up
- Pick up the bottle
- Trust exercising





KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Project Manager

- Recruiting participants
- Communicating with young people
- Safeguarding the participants
- Welfare support
- Signposting and referrals
- Sharing external opportunities
- Support Letters
- Needs Assessments
- Access to other Compass projects
 - e.g. online English classes

The Welfare Team (in house at Compass)

- Case work
- Signposting and referrals:
- Legal support
- Housing and accommodation
- Education
- Mental health and therapy

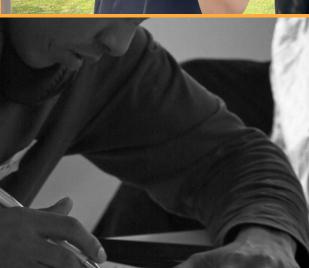














Olja Mladjenovic Associate Artist

Olja is an actor, writer and visual artist living and working in London.

Born in Bosnia, Olja grew up in Canada, and later moved to the UK to obtain an MSc in Archaeological Conservation. She worked as a conservator and researcher before retraining at the Actor's Temple in London. She has since worked in London on stage and film, performance art and as a producer and writer. In 2020 she co-founded Studio Imposters, a creative studio exploring a range of media through installation art and set design. In 2022 Olja won the Creative Future's Writing Award.

As a Bosnian refugee her work explores themes of belonging, identity and lost relationships. Olja's acting, writing and visual art has been featured in the London Literature Festival - Southbank Centre, Wallpaper*, Summerhall, The BBC, ArtMag, Entertainment LA and My Theatre Mates.

Voice Notes - Led by Nottingham Trent University in partnership with Compass Collective



























Anan Tello Associate Artist

Anan is a journalist, artist and writer with over ten years of experience, six of which were spent in Damascus, Syria.

Her creative practice is focused primarily on Syrian experiences, as well as human displacement and migration. She wrote the immersive audio adventure Secret Summer in collaboration with SBC Theatre, the UK's leading theatre company of sanctuary, for whom she has been an Associate Artist since 2022.

She holds two master's degrees from the University of Leeds in international journalism and writing for performance, and her theses explored media representations of refugees.

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COUNTERPOINTS.













Ganna Belcheva Associate Digital Artist

Ganna has always had a huge passion for graphic design. From 17 she has been developing her skills in the field, with a masters degree and a PhD in Information Technology.

Her journey began, when she landed her first job as a Prepress Engineer in a printing packaging house, learning skills and eventually embarking on her own artistic career. As an artist, Ganna worked with an advertising agency, publishing houses and IT companies and after feeling like she'd developed the ability to share her knowledge and ideas she started her education career alongside her design work.

Ganna's creative journey spans various domains, from crafting logos and branding materials to layouts for reports, presentations, complex books, accessories, product design, and more. She even ventured into UX design for iOS apps and web projects, working closely with developers.

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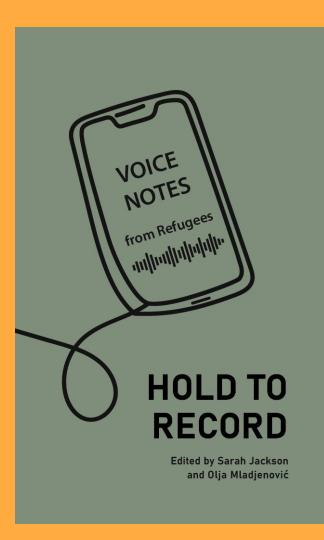








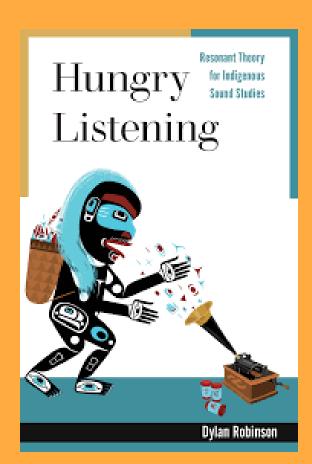












As part of our listening positionality, we each carry listening privilege, listening biases, and listening ability that are never wholly positive or negative' by becoming aware of normative listening habits and abilities, we are better able to listen otherwise.

Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 10-11

Thanks to all those who have shared their stories, or who have contributed to the project in other ways: Aila Alsakka, Aisha, Aya Muhmad Sharef, Barfin Majed Khlil, Darsin Mahmoud, Delacky Katjikuru, Elena Sophya Gryshchenko, Fawwaz Oubari, Fouad Jmo, Gehan, Hamida Khoder, Hanin Shexo, Janwar, Jwan, Kwizera, Laoya, Leylan Oje, M. T. Abouzaid, Malva Kawa Hsan, Mustafa, Mykyta, Naseraldeen Ahmad, Noor Anwar Mhammad, Raz Hadi, Roaa, Ronaz Abd, Safia Zead Mohammad, Sara Pashtiwan Hussein, Vian Mohammed, Vinicius Morfer, Yafet Amanuel, Yasmin, Yousef, Yuxi Hou, Zainab Mahmoud, Zegeju Bahanagess and Zekrullah Rafiee.

We would also like to acknowledge the many artists and contributors who have chosen to remain anonymous. This project is created by and belongs to all those who have taken part.

Special thanks also goes to our associate artists, writers and translators Ganna Bielcheva, Solin Isa, Olja Mladjenovic, and Anan Tello, without whom this project would not be possible.

For more information, please visit www.crossedlines.co.uk/voice-notes or contact sarah7.jackson@Northumbria.ac.uk

Photography: EmptyBlue (2024); Tom Platninum Morley (2024); Ernst Marechal (2024)



















