



Dalit feminist author Kalyani Thakur Charal, who made her first UK appearance at the Changing Wor(l)ds Network Launch and Translating Activism workshop. Image copyright: Satwik Paul.



Members of the PAMOJA Women Together Group at Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum producing work for the Palewell Press anthology, The World Is for Everyone. Unless otherwise stated, all image copyright for PAMOJA photography courtesy of Margaret Ravenscroft.

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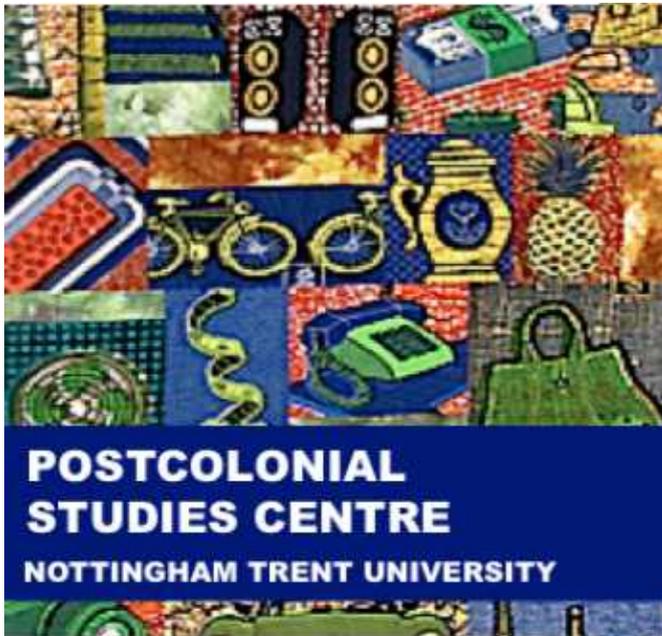
Authors: Anna Ball, Sarah Newport, Jenni Ramone and Nicole Thiara. 2nd April 2020.



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About Changing Wor(l)ds

Changing Wor(l)ds is a cultural partnership developed, designed and run collaboratively between researchers based at Nottingham Trent University's Postcolonial Studies Centre (PSC), marginalised cultural groups in varied transcultural locations, and an international network of cultural bodies, publishers and writers collectively dedicated to facilitating self-representation for those experiencing forms of sociocultural marginalisation.

The partnership emerged from PSC researchers' ongoing scholarly investigations into the significance of cultural voices that challenge the 'mainstream' channels of cultural production dominated by the Global North, and its associated legacies of imperial and colonial power. In a postcolonial world, PSC researchers argue, it is time to reassess the axes of power that privilege certain acts of self-representation over others, and to seek space for alternative voices to emerge: those of communities and individuals who have typically been marginalised according to their national, racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual, class-based, caste-based or economic positionalities - which often intersect, and silence, in complex ways.

These recognitions have led in particular to focussed research projects conducted by PSC staff on radically neglected, socially disenfranchised cultural voices - including those of Dalit (formerly 'Untouchable') authors in South Asia (Dr Nicole Thiara); and the emergent transnational body of writing by and about forced migrant women (Dr Anna Ball). Yet the PSC recognises that its own existence within structures of cultural, institutional and discursive privilege risks reinforcing the very hierarchies that have marginalised many of those communities whose voices struggle to be heard. How, then, to change the structures of a world in which, as Marx once famously wrote, 'they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented'?

The PSC's answer has been to turn to words themselves - written, spoken and heard - as tools through which members of marginalised communities are able to represent themselves - and in so doing, to challenge stereotype, raise awareness, forge support networks, claim new platforms and begin to overturn the sociocultural structures that have marginalised them. This work is not without complexities - but it is driven by the abiding belief that words can, and do, change the world.

The project has developed through several stages:

'Through the project, I've realised that creativity can be a platform for politics...the project allowed women to have a voice.' - **Salani Mutseyami, PAMOJA member.**

2014: PSC researcher Nicole Thiara founds the Dalit Literary Network with Judith Misrahi-Barak. This AHRC-funded project enables her to create transnational platforms for those radically disenfranchised by caste status to speak to an international audience.

2016: PSC researcher Anna Ball begins the 'Moving Women' project, exploring the place of forced migrant women's own voices in the proliferation of cultural texts produced about them. This project is advanced through Leverhulme funding in 2017, and her work with Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum.

2018: The PSC collectively launches the Changing Wor(l)ds Network, drawing together local, national and international cultural bodies mutually committed to countering social marginalisation through literature. This network forges connections between the Dalit Writers Network and Moving Women project.

2018 onwards: PSC researchers Anna Ball, Nicole Thiara, Sarah Newport and Jenni Ramone advance a series of projects forged out of collaborations between Changing Wor(l)ds Network members and Dalit / forced migrant communities - including writing workshops, publications, exhibitions, public speaking and media projects.

2019: Changing Wor(l)ds Festival of Literary and Cultural Activism is launched by Nicole Thiara and Sarah Newport at the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham and creates collaborative platforms for the network members.

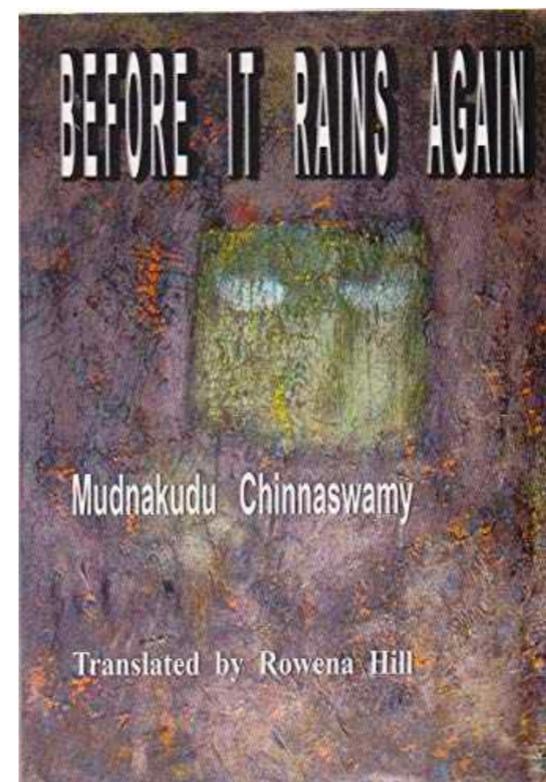
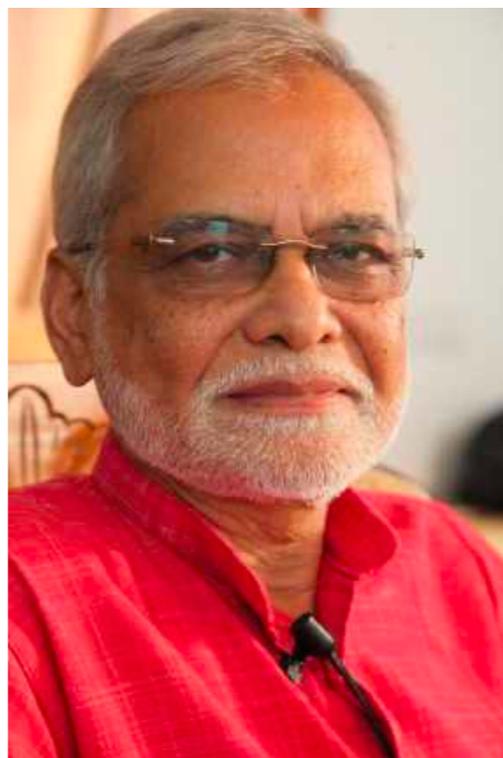
2020 onwards: Insights from the Changing Wor(l)ds project continue to generate activities among Network members, expanding into new national and international locations. This work is further facilitated by an AHRC Follow-On Funding grant obtained by Nicole Thiara and new connections established with National Refugee Week festival.

Working with Dalit Writers

The PSC's Dr Nicole Thiara has established a world-leading research network in collaboration with Dr Judith Misrahi-Barak (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier-3, France) designed to create international space for Dalit literary voices to be heard.

Dalits, formerly referred to as Untouchables, are at the bottom of India's caste system. Writing by the Dalit community and its representation and assertion of marginalised cultures is the most significant development in Indian literature in the last three decades. Dalit literature is often highly innovative in its form, narrative perspective and use of language but it has not yet received the international recognition it deserves because there has been very little research which allows non-experts to engage with these unique texts.

The project aims to create a research network which puts Dalit literary texts into context and makes them accessible to a wider audience. As part of its Research Network series 'Translating Cultures', the AHRC has funded a series of conferences, workshops and other events that are exclusively dedicated to the analysis of this previously almost 'invisible' literature outside of India. Establishing an international dialogue between key researchers in the area of Dalit literature, the project has fostered a close



Mudnakudu Chinnaswamy, one of the Dalit authors who participated in Thiara's network, whose collection 'Before it Rains' was published by Errbacce following showcasing of his work at an event in Norwich. Image copyright: Mahaaprasaad / CC BY-SA; Errbacce Press; Yoda Press.

'Many opportunities have opened up for me in India now because of the English edition of my work... I'm now a poet who has many poems in the university textbooks... It is difficult for a Dalit writer in India to flourish... I'm known to many people now; your network has really helped'. - Mudakudu Chinnaswamy.

collaboration between academics working in the field of literary and cultural studies, as well as cultivating contacts with authors, translators and publishers of Dalit literature.

The project has achieved multiple positive impacts on the international visibility of Dalit writing, including the

creation of international speaking opportunities for authors; the publication of new texts such as Chinnaswamy's 'When It Rains Again' by Errbacce Press, subsequently republished in English translation by Yoda Press; and the creation of a YouTube channel, 'Dalit Voice and Vision'.

In turn, the model of Dalit literature has provided a source of inspiration to Changing Wor(!)ds audiences and network members, generating work through writing workshops with Kalyani Thakur Charal, and launching the Changing Wor(!)ds Network.

Visit <https://dalitliterature.wordpress.com/> for further information.

Working with PAMOJA Women Together

PAMOJA Women Together is a group of refugee, asylum-seeking and irregular migrant women who meet at Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum. The group consists of around 40 women at any given time, and has become a site of referral for women from across Nottinghamshire who are facing difficulties in their lives as asylum-seekers or refugees. The group operates as a 'safe space' for women to receive support, make friends, learn new skills and simply enjoy life.

PSC member Anna Ball's research into the cultural politics of refugee women's cultural representation has led her to engage extensively with Nottingham's refugee support community - and in particular, with PAMOJA Women Together. Through the insights obtained from her Leverhulme-funded book project, *Forced Migration in the Feminist Imagination: Transcultural Movements*, Anna engaged with the group according to transcultural feminist principles designed to imbue the women in the group with agency and capacities for self-representation.

Over the course of two years, Anna and the PAMOJA Women Together Group co-designed a number of projects that reflected their interests, gave them skills that they desired, and resulted in tangible outputs of material, psychological and social benefit to the group. Woman-led and woman-centred in their delivery, these projects were highly collaborative, and pooled the expertise of many other creative practitioners and organisations in order to deliver high-quality outcomes. The key projects and outcomes to date are:

- **Writing, photography and film project in response to Maya Angelou's work**, hosted at Nottingham Contemporary, resulting in a touring exhibition of photography, film and poetry for Refugee Week 2018, audience c. 1000 (Nottingham Refugee Week Evaluation Report, 2018). The exhibition has since been used by the group as a promotional tool,
- **Creative projects in the community, creating visibility for the group in areas of Nottingham where they might not otherwise be visible or be able to access.** This included a 'River walking' project generating sound poetry, written poetry and conversation at Attenborough Nature Reserve, and a bread-making project at Sneinton Windmill, Nottingham,
- **The creation of an anthology** of writing, reflections, recipes and photography, in collaboration with Palewell Press, and editor Camilla Reeve of Palewell. The anthology was accompanied by public launch speaking opportunities for the group at the National Galleries of Justice, and Five Leaves Bookshop, Nottingham. According to group leader Hannah Ziolk (Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum) the anthology have so far generated over £600 income for the PAMOJA group through book sales, and continues to be sold as a fundraising mechanism.

“The project was a brilliant opportunity for women to express themselves as they see themselves, rather than have a third party represent them.” - Vivianne Bizimana, NNRF.

Left to right: 'On a Journey' (pseudonym) performing her poetry at the National Galleries of Justice; Ghidey and friends on the 'river walk' along the River Trent that generated poetry and sound art; group members selling their anthology at the New Art Exchange Makers' Fair in 2019.



Changing Wor(l)ds Network Launch

“I am founding member of the Changing Wor(l)ds Network. I see its principal aim as using literature to make positive changes to the world. It does so most effectively by providing contacts, events and ideas that stimulate collaboration between other organisations and individuals who share the Changing Wor(l)ds aim.” - Palewell Press editor Camilla Reeve.

The Network Launch in May 2018 brought together eighteen ‘Founder Members’

representing key literary publishers, publications, cultural and educational bodies, industry professionals and cultural activist organisations collectively dedicated to creating spaces for marginalised voices to be heard.

‘This network will help more minority literature into the mainstream and break down barriers’. - Launch participant feedback.

Attendees at the launch included publishers Tilted Axis, CareOf Publishing, Palewell Press and HopeRoad; publication Wasafiri; literary organisations Exiled Writers Ink, Gay Authors Workshop, UNESCO Nottingham City of Literature, Writing East Midlands and activist organisation Poets Against Racism.

Through a series of workshops and roundtables led by different participants, the Network Launch established a set of key priorities in their approach: **collaborative working; mentoring and facilitating work within marginalised communities; seeking social justice through democratic cultural practices.**

True to to the Network’s aim of creating spaces for the self-representation of marginalised cultural voices, the launch pivoted on the presence of **Dalit feminist poet Kalyani Thakur Charal, who made her first UK appearance at the event**, with translator Sipra Mukherjee. Thakur read from her work and delivered an hour-long discussion session exploring the issues that marginalise Dalit poets, and responding to questions from the audience. The exceptional nature of this event was foregrounded in its reporting in the Times Higher Education supplement in May 2018, and in an interview that Thakur and Mukherjee conducted for BBC radio [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p063hryj#play=1h14m59s>].

The Network Launch also **facilitated collaborative, multi-directional working by offering network members the chance to participate in a workshop on ‘translating activism’ with Thakur**, which invited participants to consider how Thakur’s poetry might inspire their own expressions of cultural activism through writing.

Held at Nottingham Contemporary, the event generated lively discussion and produced work speaking to a diverse range of social issues, including LGBTQ+ identifications, black British identity and Arab activism. Work was published in a feature for LeftLion: a Midlands-based cultural magazine [https://www.leftlion.co.uk/read/2018/may/translating_activism/].



Times Higher Education article, 3rd May 2018, reporting on the Changing Wor(l)ds Network Launch

‘I learnt much from the conversation between the two poets about negotiating differences and inequalities.’ - Translating Activism participant.

Festival of Cultural Activism 2019

The first Changing Wor(l)ds Festival of Cultural Activism (www.changingworldsfestival.wordpress.com) took place from 24th-27th May 2019. Consolidating the partnerships forged through Changing Wor(l)ds, the festival created platforms through which partners could design, realise and showcase opportunities for representation - either of themselves, as members of marginalised communities, or of others, themselves experiencing forms of marginalisation.

The festival showcased the activities of six core partners: PAMOJA Women Together; Palewell Press; Poets Against Racism; Nottingham Black Archive; Exiled Writers Ink; Writing Proud. The festival opened with a Keynote Address from Booker Prizewinning novelist Bernardine Evaristo, supported by Nottingham-based poet Panya Banjoko.

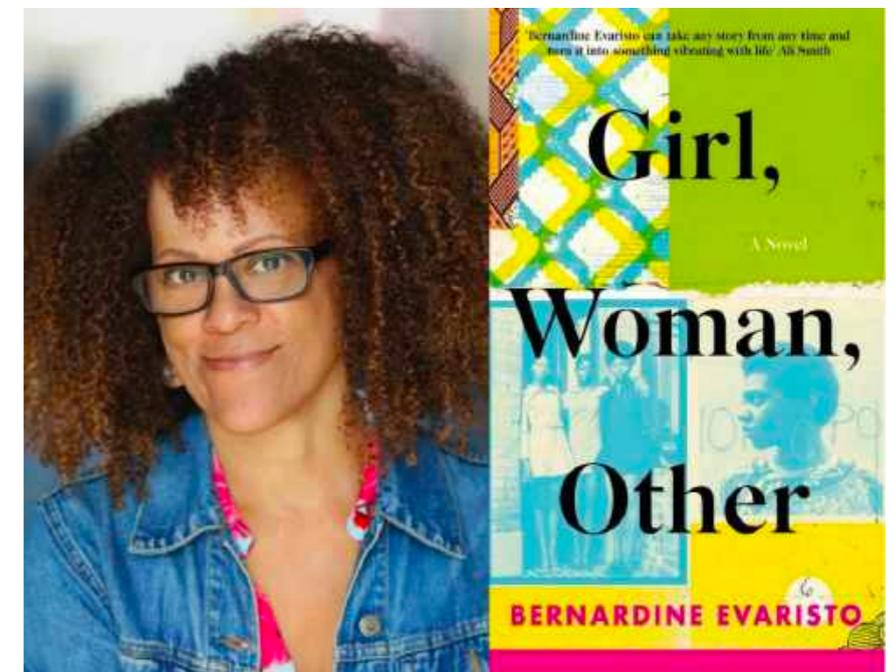
Feedback from the Changing Wor(l)ds partners indicates the many ways in which the festival presented opportunities for self-representation, and enabled them to debate, discuss, develop strategies for and ultimately facilitate self-representation of those who engaged in the sessions.

Leanne Moden, who co-facilitated the 'Rhyme and Rebellion' session with Poets Against Racism, commented: **"Alongside Manjit Sahota from Poets Against Racism and the Nottingham Writers' Studio, I facilitated a two-hour creative writing workshop, centred around poetry as a form of protest. We spent some time discussing the nature of protest, and the role that poetry can play in catalysing political and social change, then we used a series of activities and**

writing exercises to write our own protest poems. The atmosphere in the session was politically and socially aware and engaged. The participants were keen to learn new techniques for writing about the issues that were important to them, and there was lots of good discussion around the merits of speaking up, ally-ship and ideas about who is allowed to talk about topics like racism, sexism and LGBT+ issues. It was a really open and fruitful discussion, and one that yielded a range of viewpoints, all discussed in a respectful way."

The workshop leader for 'Writing Proud' also commented that the festival enabled them to develop positive opportunities for LGBTQI+ authors to create empowering modes of self-representation: **"As the workshop was around writing about identity and celebrating ourselves as individuals, the exercises were geared towards this"**; while author Panya Banjoko, also Director of Nottingham Black Archive, focussed on resilience as a key facet of self-development for writers: **"the subject choice came about because resilience is something that is pertinent to black writers/artists and it is important that there is a dialogue around how to respond to racism"**.

Palewell Press editor Camilla Reeve, meanwhile, chose to explore the politics of working with and facilitating voice for marginalised communities, addressing controversial topics such as cultural appropriation: **"When writing about vulnerable people, we're warned not to assume we understand but to request their personal viewpoint . Yet we also have to be careful that in writing about them and asking them for their**



Bernardine Evaristo, author of Booker Prizewinning novel 'Girl, Woman, Other', who performed as Keynote Speaker for the opening festival event. Image copyright:

recollections of painful or threatening situations we don't make their situation even worse. From the start of the session, we encouraged attendees to ask questions and share their own methods and experiences. The atmosphere was excellent with lots of cross-table discussion between attendees rather than them just talking to the presenters. I was impressed by the diversity of people who attended and by the fact they had come with urgent questions to raise."

The festival yielded a number of important outcomes, including future collaborations and events. Exiled Writers Ink, who trialled a workshop model co-led by Jewish and Muslim authors, will roll their plans out nationally in collaboration with Changing Wor(l)ds following the success of the event through their 'Towards an Open Land' project: <https://www.exiledwriters.co.uk/activities-exiled/>.

Ongoing Activities

Changing Wor(l)ds continues to expand its partnership activities.

Outreach work with Dalit communities has taken an important turn thanks to AHRC Follow-On Funding obtained by Nicole Thiara and Judith Misrahi-Barak, to facilitate a series of festival events to be organised that focus on Dalit and Adivasi literatures and the performing arts in India, France and the UK. The festivals will enable the sustainable development of marginalised Dalit and Adivasi arts by raising their prestige and international profile through performances in well-connected venues in India where, in the spheres of politics and culture, the continued existence of caste discrimination is still largely denied and Dalit and Adivasi artistic production is sometimes appropriated but nurtured or funded only rarely. The festivals will create new audiences for neglected genres of Dalit and Adivasi artistic production, notably poetry and drama, by hosting performances in a range of prestigious international venues, to stimulate the commercial viability of Dalit and Adivasi performance arts, both in India and internationally. Events in Paris have already provided new public platforms for Dalit authors Jacinta Kerketta and Jameela Nishat.

Following her involvement in outreach work with PAMOJA, **Eve Makis has been appointed as Writer-In-Residence at the Postcolonial Studies Centre.** While her residency coincided with the Covid-19 crisis, this presented an opportunity for her to expand the activities of Changing Wor(l)ds into the online arena, where she created online resources designed to engage a wide range of communities. Her podcast, 'The World Is for Everyone', showcased the Changing Wor(l)ds project with PAMOJA and



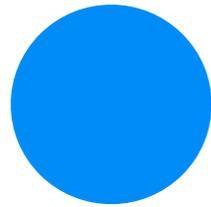
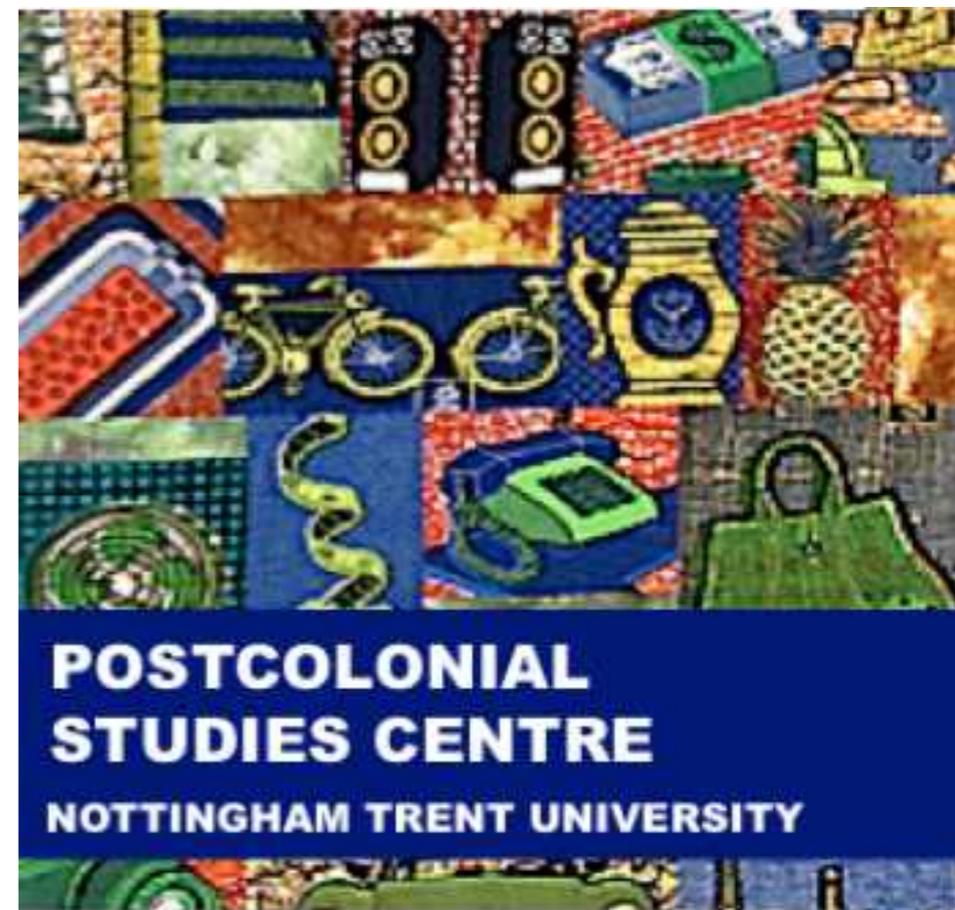
Changing Wor(l)ds Writer-in-Residence Eve Makis, who will be expanding the reach of the PAMOJA project into the online arena. Image copyright: Margaret Ravenscroft.

reached an international audience via Refugee Week's online programme for 2020 (nottinghamrefugeeweek.org), as did her podcast with prizewinning author Christy Lefteri, author of 'The Beekeeper of Aleppo'. Eve also ran online life-writing workshops for Nottingham Refugee Week - and she is now exploring ways to engage young people aged 14-25, including communities of young asylum-seekers in Nottingham, in creating 'letters of solidarity' via a project led by Nottingham UNESCO City of Literature.

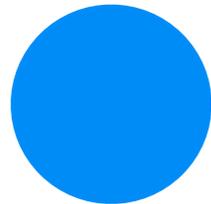
Changing Wor(l)ds has also consolidated its partnership with the National Refugee Week Festival. Now elected as Chair of Nottingham Refugee Week, Anna Ball participates in a nationally led consortium of festival programmers from across the country in order to advise on cultural programme development that foregrounds refugee involvement.

Exiled Writers Ink, meanwhile, continues to expand access to its hugely successful model of intercultural dialogue trialled during the Changing Wor(l)ds Festival, and has further intercultural events planned for locations around the country.

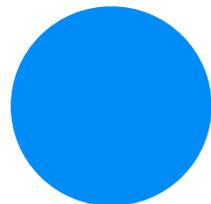
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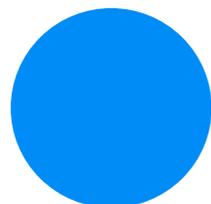
To contact Changing Wor(l)ds, please email PSC Co-Directors Anna Ball, anna.ball@ntu.ac.uk, and Jenni Ramone, jenni.ramone@ntu.ac.uk



WordPress site maintained by the PSC, featuring information on Changing Wor(l)ds: <https://postcolonialstudiescentre.wordpress.com/>



Further information on 'Writing, Translating, Analysing Dalit Literatures' available at <https://dalitliterature.wordpress.com/>



Further information on PAMOJA available via the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum: <http://www.nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk/>

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