

Rethinking 'Diversity' in Publishing: British and German Perspectives

26 April 2021

10:00h **Welcome**, Prof. Gesa Stedman, Centre for British Studies, Humboldt-University Berlin
Keynote and Q&A: Dr Anamik Saha and Dr Sandra van Lente

short break

10:45h **Panel 1: Racial and social inequalities in the publishing industry**

- Aimée Felone, Knights Of and Round Table Books
- Saskia Bewley, Hachette UK
- Nikola Richter, mikrotext
- Ferda Ataman, Neue deutsche Medienmacher*innen

11:45h – 15min break

12:00h **Breakout Sessions I (Zoom)**

- Spread the Word: Equity, Change and Writer Development
- Nikola Richter (mikrotext) and Aimée Felone (Knights Of, Round Table Books): Open topic
- Shantel Edwards (Birmingham Literature Festival) and Naomi Boima (Audream): Representation & Access for Young People

12:20-13:30h Lunch break (with an option to meet online and have lunch together)

13:30h **Breakout Sessions II (Zoom)**

- Saskia Bewley (Hachette UK): The THRIVE staff network
- Maryam Aras (Bonn University, 54books): Literary Criticism
- Crystal Mahey-Morgan (OWNIT!) and Stefanie Hirsbrunner (InterKontinental): Founding2

13:50h – 10min break

14:00h **Panel 2: Reaching wider audiences**

- Crystal Mahey-Morgan, OWN IT!
- Maryam Aras, Bonn University
- Shantel Edwards, Birmingham Literature Festival
- Stefanie Hirsbrunner, InterKontinental

15:00h **Concluding Remarks**, Dr Anamik Saha and Dr Sandra van Lente

15:15-16:00h **Networking** over drinks and nibbles on wonder.me

All times are German times (CEST).

BSL interpretation will be available for the panels and research presentation. Interpreters: Ali Gordon and Akbar Sikder. Please let us know for which of the breakout sessions you require BSL interpretation.

Conference hashtag: #rethinkingdiversity

About “Rethinking ‘Diversity’ in Publishing: British and German Perspectives”

The ‘Rethinking “Diversity” in Publishing’ report published in 2020, exposed the ways that authors from particular racial and ethnic backgrounds continue to be marginalised and disadvantaged in UK publishing industries. This is despite all the various initiatives that publishing houses have implemented in the name of ‘diversity’.

In this conference, the authors of that report want to build dialogue between the UK and Germany publishing industries on how best to deal with racial/ethnic exclusions. It brings into conversation publishing professionals and activist from the UK and Germany who are working on these issues. The conference will be based around two panels, one that explores questions of diversity on the production side of the industry, the other one focussing on audiences. The aim is to explore the similarities and differences between the British and German contexts, and together formulate strategies that can tackle inequalities in the publishing sector.

Panel 1: Racial and social inequalities in the publishing industry

In this panel the invited speakers will engage with the question of diversity within the context of the publishing industries. It will consider where publishing houses have failed to engage people from underrepresented communities, the obstacles that authors of colour face in particular, and what spaces are needed to allow authors and publishing professionals from marginalised backgrounds to truly flourish in publishing.

Panel 2: Reaching wider audiences

In this panel speakers will explore how publishers have engaged - or failed to engage - marginalised audiences. It will consider how publishers value different types of audiences, explanations for why publishers and cultural intermediaries appear to be so disinclined to reach wider audiences, and what strategies/interventions are needed to bring certain communities from the margins into the core of publishing.

The Speakers

Maryam Aras, Bonn University, 54books

Maryam Aras is an academic and online critic. She is currently completing her PhD in Iranian/ Cultural Studies and writes literary criticism for the 54books magazine and West German Broadcasting (WDR).
<https://www.54books.de/author/maryam-aras/>

Ferda Ataman, Neue deutsche Medienmacher*innen

Ferda Ataman is a journalist, co-founder of the initiative Neue deutsche Medienmacher*innen and spokesperson of the neue deutsche organisationen, an association of more than 130 initiatives, organisations and projects that fight against racism and for a more inclusive society. She wrote is the author of the book *Ich bin von hier. Hört auf zu fragen! (I’m from here. Stop asking! S. Fischer, 2019)*.
<https://neuemedienmacher.de/> and <https://neuedeutsche.org/>

Saskia Bewley, Hachette UK

Saskia Bewley is Head of Diversity & Inclusion at Hachette UK, where she is advising on D&I strategy. Her role includes to progress the 'Changing the Story' agenda in respect to employees, authors, publishing content and the wider community.
<https://www.hachette.co.uk/>

Naomi Boima, Audream

Naomi Boima studies Politics and Fine Arts at Universität der Künste and Freie Universität Berlin. She is an artist, co-founder of the artist network Black Art Action Berlin and part of the leadership team at Audream. Audream is an antiracist mobile library in Berlin with a focus on Black feminist perspectives. The Audream library comprises about 500 media items. The Audream team consists of about 30 young people and young adults who identify as Black, Indigenous and/or Person of Colour and who meet regularly, organise events and plan future activities of the library. <https://audream.org/>

Shantel Edwards, Birmingham Literature Festival

Shantel Edwards is the Director of the Birmingham Literature Festival and Creative Producer at Writing West Midlands, the literature development agency for the West Midlands. She holds a doctorate in English Literature from the University of Birmingham. <https://www.birminghamliteraturefestival.org/>

Aimée Felone, Knights Of and Round Table Books

Aimée Felone is managing director of Knights Of – a commercial children’s publisher whose main focus is publishing inclusively by commissioning writers and illustrators from a diverse range of backgrounds, as well as hiring diversely. At Knights Of she has opened Brixton’s only children’s bookshop, Round Table Books, which exclusively stocks titles from underrepresented authors and illustrators. <https://www.roundtablebooks.co.uk/> and <http://knightsof.media/>

Ruth Harrison, Spread the Word

Ruth Harrison is Director at Spread the Word and Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. She is responsible for leading Spread the Word artistically and strategically and working with her team to make a difference to and for writers and their audiences in London. <https://www.spreadtheword.org.uk/>

Stefanie Hirsbrunner, InterKontinental

Stefanie Hirsbrunner and Karla Kutzner founded the literary agency InterKontinental, opened the InterKontinental bookshop and run the African Book Festival Berlin <https://www.interkontinental.org/>

Crystal Mahey-Morgan, OWN IT!

Crystal Mahey-Morgan is a Publisher and Agent at OWN IT!, which she founded in 2015 and now co-owns and runs with Creative Director, Jason Morgan. OWN IT! is a storytelling lifestyle brand working across books, music, art and film. <https://ownit.london/>

Mark Mukasa, Writer

Mark Mukasa is a writer from South London. He works in marketing and is the editor of I Am Hip-Hop Magazine. In 2019 he won a Spread the Word London Writers Award. Inspired by the stories of his Caribbean and African roots, Mark is currently working on his debut novel set between the Caribbean and UK. <https://namthepilgrim.wordpress.com/> and [@MNMukasa](https://twitter.com/MNMukasa)

Denise Rawls, Writer

Denise Rawls won a Spread the Word London Writers Award in 2019. Her storytelling features the joy of sisterhood, motherhood, family, identity and of women who fall apart and back together. She survived a 28-year career in the civil service and now helps third sector organisations make more impact. <https://deniserawls.com/> and [@Denise Rawls](https://twitter.com/DeniseRawls)

Nikola Richter, mikrotext

Nikola Richter is the founder of the independent publishing house mikrotext in Berlin. She was awarded with a German Publishing Award in 2019 and 2020. In 2020 she introduced the pioneering idea of an "open publishing year" to the publishing world and invited guest publishers and their communities to create the programme.

<https://mikrotext.de/> and [@mkrtxt](https://twitter.com/mkrtxt)

Breakout Sessions

First round of breakout sessions: 12:00 Uhr German time, 11am UK time

Spread the Word: Equity, Change and Writer Development

With Ruth Harrison, Director, Spread the Word,

Denise Rawls, writer, London Writers Awards alum (commercial fiction)

Mark Mukasa, writer, London Writers Awards alum (commercial fiction).

This session will be a conversation about equity and change. And, particularly, how writer development can help to address the systemic barriers that writers from under-represented backgrounds in publishing face in progressing their craft and career.

Nikola Richter (mikrotext) and Aimée Felone (Knights Of, Round Table Books): Open topic

This session will be chaired by Nikola Richter and Aimée Felone. It is an opportunity to ask questions, share good practice examples and have a conversation about the topics that come up in the discussion.

Shantel Edwards (Birmingham Literature Festival) and Naomi Boima (Audream): Representation & Access for Young People

Literature can be intimidating – and it is not helping if access and representation are missing. We will talk about the role libraries, festivals and initiatives can have in encouraging children to read – and write.

Second round of breakout sessions: 13:30 Uhr German time, 12.30pm UK time

Saskia Bewley (Hachette UK): The THRIVE staff network

In this session, Saskia Bewley will tell us more about the staff network THRIVE at Hachette and invites the participants to share their experience and questions.

Maryam Aras (Bonn University, 54books): Literary Criticism

Which perspectives and topics does the feuilleton highlight? Who seem to be the intended readers? This is an invitation to think about these questions – and share examples for alternative spaces for literary criticism.

Crystal Mahey-Morgan (OWNIT!) and Stefanie Hirsbrunner (InterKontinental): Founding²

Crystal Mahey-Morgan (agent, publisher) and Stefanie Hirsbrunner (bookseller, festival organiser and more) about the challenges and rewards of starting businesses that take care of more than one step of the production and selling of books.