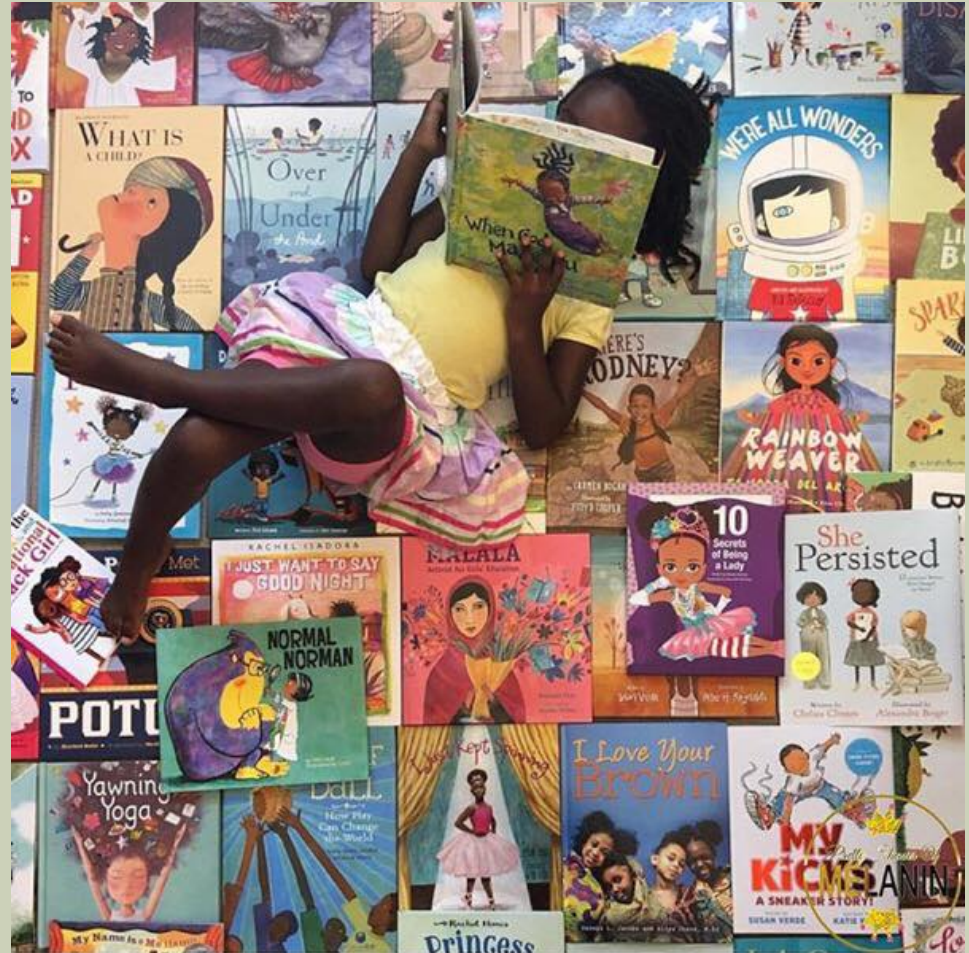


BRIDGING THE DIVERSITY GAP IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Prof. Dr. Maureen Maisha Auma
Kindheit und Differenz
(Diversity Studies)
Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal
Gastprofessorin an der TU Berlin

DRIN - VISIONS FOR CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE VOL.2

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Content of my lecture:

- 1) Lack of Diversity in Children's Literature.
- 2) Cultural violence and the pervasiveness of dehumanization in Children's literary lives.
- 3) Diversify Everything? Bridging gaps by focusing not on one book but on the diversity of collections (Trilemma of Inclusion).

I want to begin by reminding us of the consistent lack of diversity in Kid's Lit (in YA Lit as well) I will focus more on Kid's Lit. That is my first point. Then I will proceed to speak about the stigmatizing, even dehumanizing realities with which a hyperdiverse, very plural postmigrant generation of children are confronted with, when they begin to explore literary worlds. That is my second point. I will then move on to a set of Strategies of Recognition, Inclusion and destigmatization through literature (Kid's Lit /YA Lit). And conclude that point with an argument for a more decisive focus on Book Collections, rather than on a single book as a strategy for diversification. That will at the same time be my concluding point.

Diversity Gap Studies

Lack of Diversity

Missing in Literature

gained popularity in the field of Kid's Lit, in the North American context, around the mid 1990ies.

I would like to show three Infographics to illustrate what Diversity Gap Studies focus on and how they do that:

Infographic 1

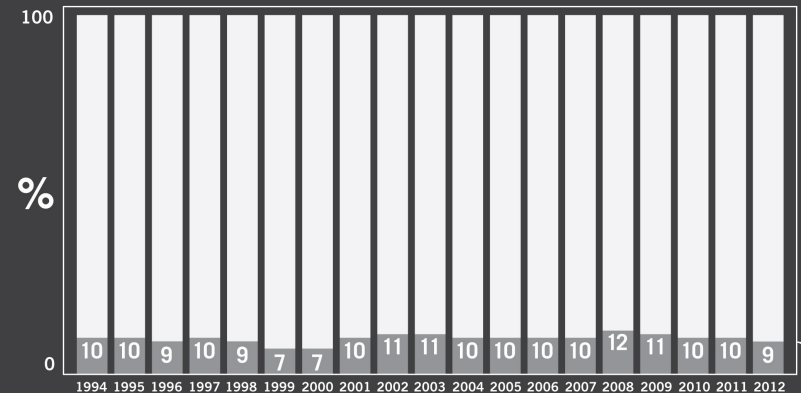
- on the left side of this slide -

Lee and Low Books (2013) Blog

THE DIVERSITY GAP IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

18 YEARS ★ 1994-2012

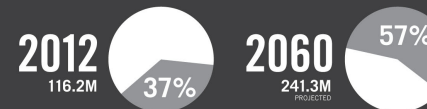
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY AND/OR ABOUT PEOPLE OF COLOR



37% OF THE US POPULATION ARE PEOPLE OF COLOR **10%** OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN THE PAST 18 YEARS CONTAIN MULTICULTURAL CONTENT

DESPITE THE BEST EFFORTS OF LEE & LOW BOOKS AND OTHER PUBLISHERS AND IMPRINTS THAT FOCUS ON MULTICULTURAL THEMES, THE NUMBER OF BOOKS THAT CONTAIN DIVERSITY **HAS NOT GROWN.**

MINORITY % OF US POPULATION



DID YOU KNOW?

THE US IS PROJECTED TO BECOME A MAJORITY-"MINORITY" NATION IN 2043.



ABOUT EVERYONE • FOR EVERYONE for more conversations on diversity, visit

LEE & LOW BOOKS blog.leeandlow.com

Children's Books by and about People of Color National Endowment for the Arts. "Diversity in Children's Literature." Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, University of California, Berkeley. 2008. <http://www.cesr.berkeley.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/2008-08-20-Childrens-Books-by-and-about-people-of-color.pdf>

PRODUCED BY LEE & LOW BOOKS. DESIGNED BY BEN MAUTNER. © 2013



Infographic 2

By Tina Kugler (2012)

DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN'S BOOKS 2018

Percentage of books depicting characters from diverse backgrounds based on the 2018 publishing statistics compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison: ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp



Illustration by David Huyck, in consultation with Sarah Park Dahlen
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The CCBC inventory includes 3,134 books published in 2018. This graphic would not have been possible without the statistics compiled by the CCBC, and the review and feedback we received from Edith Campbell, Molly Beth Griffin, K. T. Harning, Debbie Reese, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, and Madeline Tyner. Many thanks.

Infographic 3

By David Huyck and Sarah Park Dahlen (2018)



So these Diversity Gap Studies which focus on racism and racial marginalization, in effect use the method of descriptive statics.

They count authorship by racialized categorization (books by BIPOC authors). They also count 'multicultural content' (books about BIPOC). They define this as a main character or supporting character, who are central to how the story unfolds and how it ends (CCBC Blog).

One of their most perplexing findings is that it seems to be easier to portray animals and imaginary beings at three – twenty times more than racially marginalized characters and their families.

I would like to illustrate this strange dynamic by citing one more North America study, before I move on to our context in Europe. This one focusses on patterns of female* underrepresentation and the underlying gendered messages. The study **“Gender in Twentieth-Century Children's Books: Patterns of Disparity in Titles and Central Characters”** was carried out at the Florida State University (McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido and Tope, 2011)

“The most comprehensive study of 20th century children's books ever undertaken in the United States has found a bias towards tales that feature men and boys as lead characters. Surprisingly, researchers found that even when the characters are animals, they tend to be male.”

Review of the study in Science Daily, Online: May 4, 2011

The data used in this study was collected from three sources, which are considered to be central for molding the Kid's Lit market in the North American context. These are the Caldecott Medal, which recognizes distinguished picture books of the preceding year, the Little Golden Books Series and the Children's Book Catalogue. A total of 6,000 books published from 1900 to 2000 were analyzed.

Some of the findings were that:

Males (humans) are central characters in 57 percent of children's books published per year, while only 31 percent have female (human) central characters. Male animals are central characters in more than 23 percent of books per year, while female animals are in only 7.5 percent.

Only one Caldecott winner featured a female animal as a main character without any male central characters. The 1985 book *"Have You Seen My Duckling?"* follows Mother Duck asking other pond animals this very question as she searches for a missing duckling. The male animal central characters vary from Peter Rabbit (a rabbit) and Curious George (a monkey).

The last study I would like to cite is a French/German Dissertation which focuses on heteronormative patterns of representation and the marginalization of queer desiring youth. The title of this dissertation is >>*Sissy Boys et Tom Girls? Représentations des homosexualités dans les romans français pour la jeunesse*<< (Lagabrielle, 2007)

Lagabrielle analyzes 30 French YA and Children's books published between 1989 – 2003 which all thematize queer desire. The first queer protagonist (female) is registered in 1989. This is the author Cathy Bernheim's novel „*Coté d' Azur*“, (Gallimard; 1989/ Beltz und Gelberg; 1991).

Some of his findings are that female queer desire is rendered next to invisible. In his whole sample he only finds eight novels with lesbian characters. The authorship of queer desire in YA Lit successively becomes subject matter for non-queer authors (Brigitte Smadja, who wrote the „*Maxime*“ series (in German „*Max und die Frauen*“, or Marie-Aude Murail, who wrote „*Oh Boy!*“ (in German „*Drei für immer*“). And finally that publishers play a huge and crucial role in supporting or sabotaging recognition of the 'diversity of desire' and equal representation. He gives the negative example here of the author Isabelle Chaillou, whose YA book „*H.S.*“ ends with the queer female protagonist's show of affection. In the original it read: „... and I pressed my lips onto hers“. This very last sentence of the book had to be changed, due to pressure exercised by the (female) publisher. The final sentence was changed to „... and I took her hand in my hand.“.

My second point is to speak very briefly about the stigmatizing, even dehumanizing realities with which a hyperdiverse, very plural postmigrant generation of Children are confronted with, when they begin to explore literary worlds. I would like to make three arguments here, before I go on to show some of the material I have analyzed:

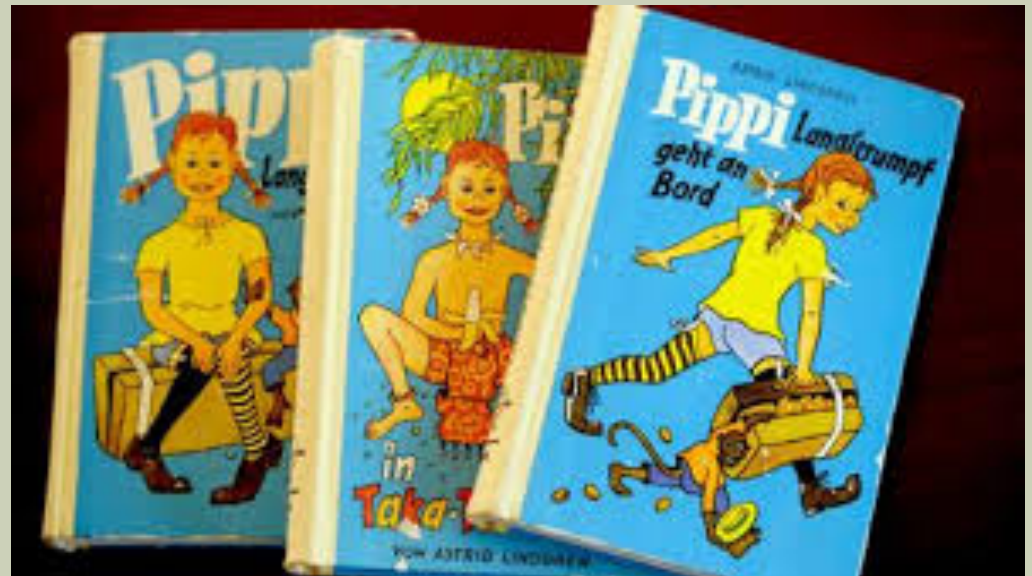
- 1) The first argument is that I will use the frame **Cultural Violence** (a blend of two *Faces of Oppression*) to characterize the marginalizing or dehumanizing portrayals of BIPOC in Kid's Lit. Iris Marion Young defines *>Five Faces of Oppression<* in her analysis of 'Justice and the Politics of Difference' (Young, 1990). These Five Faces are Exploitation, Marginalization, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism, Violence
- 2) The second argument is that I do not speak of misrepresentation any more (to describe stereotyping, overlooking, instrumentalizing etc.) but rather of **Toxic Representation**.
- 3) The third argument is that these dehumanizing depictions are "Harmful Fictions". They are not isolated, they are not coincidental. They are part of a set of techniques deployed to place marginalized groups, even in their own imaginations at the periphery. If it is possible to starkly overrepresent male coded animals and male coded imaginary characters (from sparkly vampires to pre-teen wizards, to dragons, hobbits, muggles, orcs, elves, dwarfs, cyclops, snuffapagalusses Then it is hardly too much to ask that underrepresented groups be included in the secondary world models of Kid Lit.

Having said that, let us look at some (probably) quite familiar examples for the normalization of social hierarchies and of the exploitation of BIPOC and their resources coupled with dehumanizing depictions of BIPOC in Kid's Lit:

Pippi Langstrumpf:

Punk Culture, Living alone, motherlessness (an angel in heaven), Colonial_father (Imperial Ruler of an Island he stumbled upon), clueless sidekicks, subservient Folks of Color who believe in their own inferiority.

(is considered iconic for white-centric, west-centric feminist culture)



König Macius/König Hänschen 1 and König Hänschen on the lonely Island:

Motherless and Fatherless, Child-King, intense Power struggles, unclarified-unending expeditions to Countries marked as non-european, Magical N*_Folks of Color, extreme brutality mostly projected onto the other spectrum of sub/human, dehumanized N*_Folks of Color, who also believe in the natural superiority of the colonizers.

is considered iconic for white-centric, west-centric children's rights

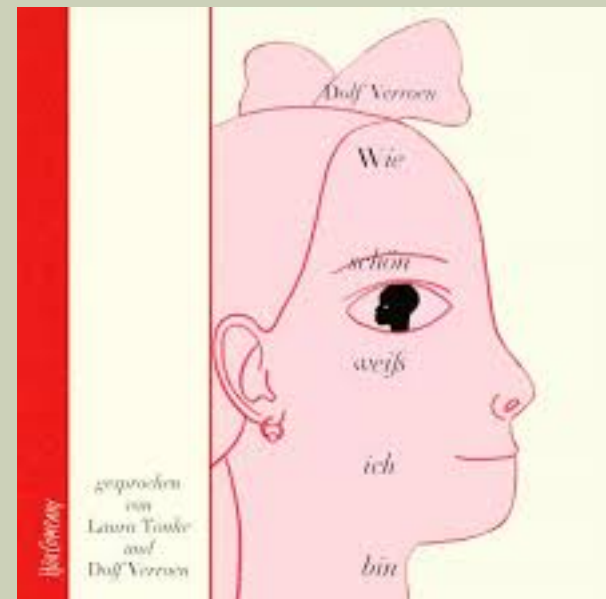


Wie schön weiß ich bin

Gruesome, white female Child, coming of age, three birthday gifts, a handbag, a whip and a human (anti-blackness), depictions of sexualized violence towards minors, normalization of intense emotional and physical violence (by the entire white family).

Awarded the German Literary Prize/2006 and the Gustav Heinemann Peace Prize/2006;

is considered somewhat iconic for white-centric, west-centric 1968 revolution leftist politics)



Enid Blyton's: FAMOUS FIVE _ *Fünf Freunde in German* -

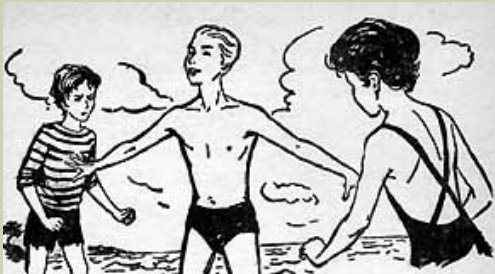
The characters 'George' and 'Jo'

- They are actually in some form 'mirrors'
- Queer Text/non-binary/non-conforming
- 'Timmy the dog' likes them both, suggesting an underlying commonality

But at the same time the simultaneous and continual pathologizing of Roma (Sinti) Families, the criminalization of male identifying members (especially the father figures), the celebration of their incarceration and the justification of removing Roma (Sinti) children from their communities/families towards the end of a 'civilizing mission' into white middeclassness (white savior complex, obsessed with what goes on inside the intimate walls of BIPOC family life).

CONTENT WARNING !!!

Lifted out of a dialogue between the children: "So much tenderness made the little g cry again "I don't like George, but I do like Dick!" the g* looked at him like a slave would look at a prince "I'd do everything for you! You're nice."*



MY last Point:

How do hyperdiverse Children learn to

‘Read between the Racism‘?

Perspectives for dealing with the realities of Cultural Violence, Harmful Fictions and Toxic Representations in YA and Kid’s Lit.

We have become familiar with Rudine Sims Bishop’s Essay:

„Windows, Mirrors and Sliding Doors“

„Children need windows and mirrors“ Perspective

There are a whole array of Checklists (in my sources)

I would like to end by linking the struggle to end the normalization of cultural violence in Kid’s Lit and to advance equity and equality in the representation of marginalized groups to the Dilemma/Trilemma of Inclusion



Trilemma of Inklusion

(Mai-Ahn Boger, 2017)

There is a multilayeredness and complexity in trying to limit, or to end dehumanizing depictions and to advance equity in representation.

At least three Strategies of Inclusion are necessary to do this work:

- 1) DeMarginalizing (Normalization)
- 2) DeStigmatizing (Empowerment)
- 3) DeNaturalizing (Deonstruktion)

Mai-Ahn Boger discusses the complexity of applying Empowerment/Deconstruction and Normalization Strategies at the same time (also Axeli Knapp, 1997).

In order to bring movement into the project of ending or limiting toxic representations, we need to apply a set of strategies, which cannot be covered in one single book, but rather by compiling Book Collections, which base their Diversity firmly on a dilemmatic/trilemmatic approach.

I want to end by showing some examples of Kid's Lit (YA), that are doing a part of this trilemmatic work:

The Arrival by Shaun Tan (2007)

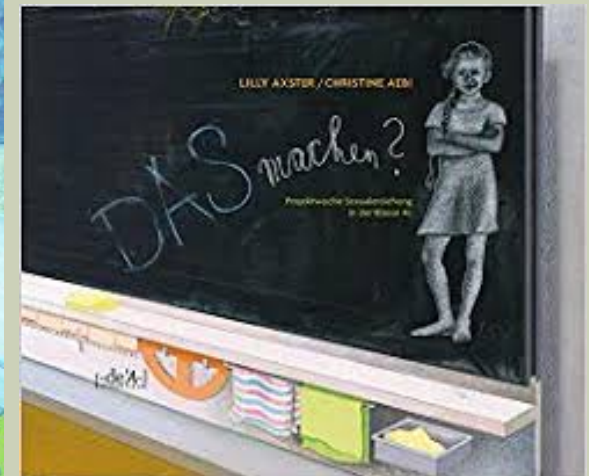
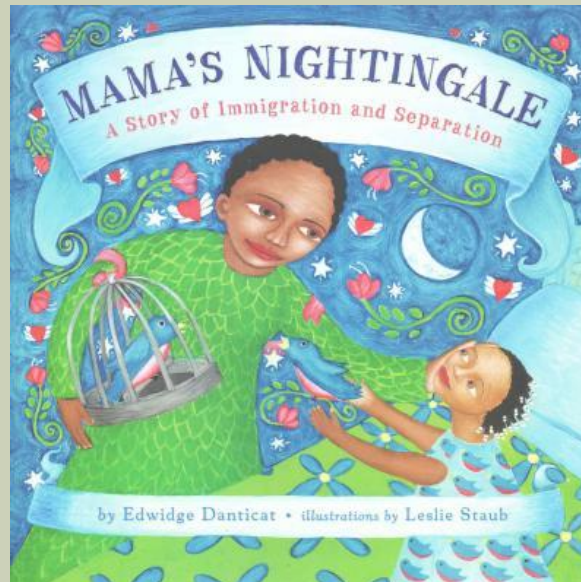
- A wordless graphic novel, just the title and an artist note at the end –
- Australian context/transnational theme
- Surreal paintings (double page of multiple clouds)

Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation by Edwidge Danticat (2015)

- Saya is 9 years old. Her family has migrated to the US from Haiti. Her mother does not have the right papers. She is held in a detention facility/jail. Sayas father writes to politicians to get help but gets no answer. Saya decides to write to the local newspaper and that sets events in motion.

DAS machen! By Lilly Axster (Author), Christine Aebi (Illustrator) (2012)

This picture book is the documentation of a project week (Projektwoche) during which the 4th Class of a Volksschule (Austria) is learning about Sex Education. It is a peer socialization perspective narrated by an 11 year old girl.



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