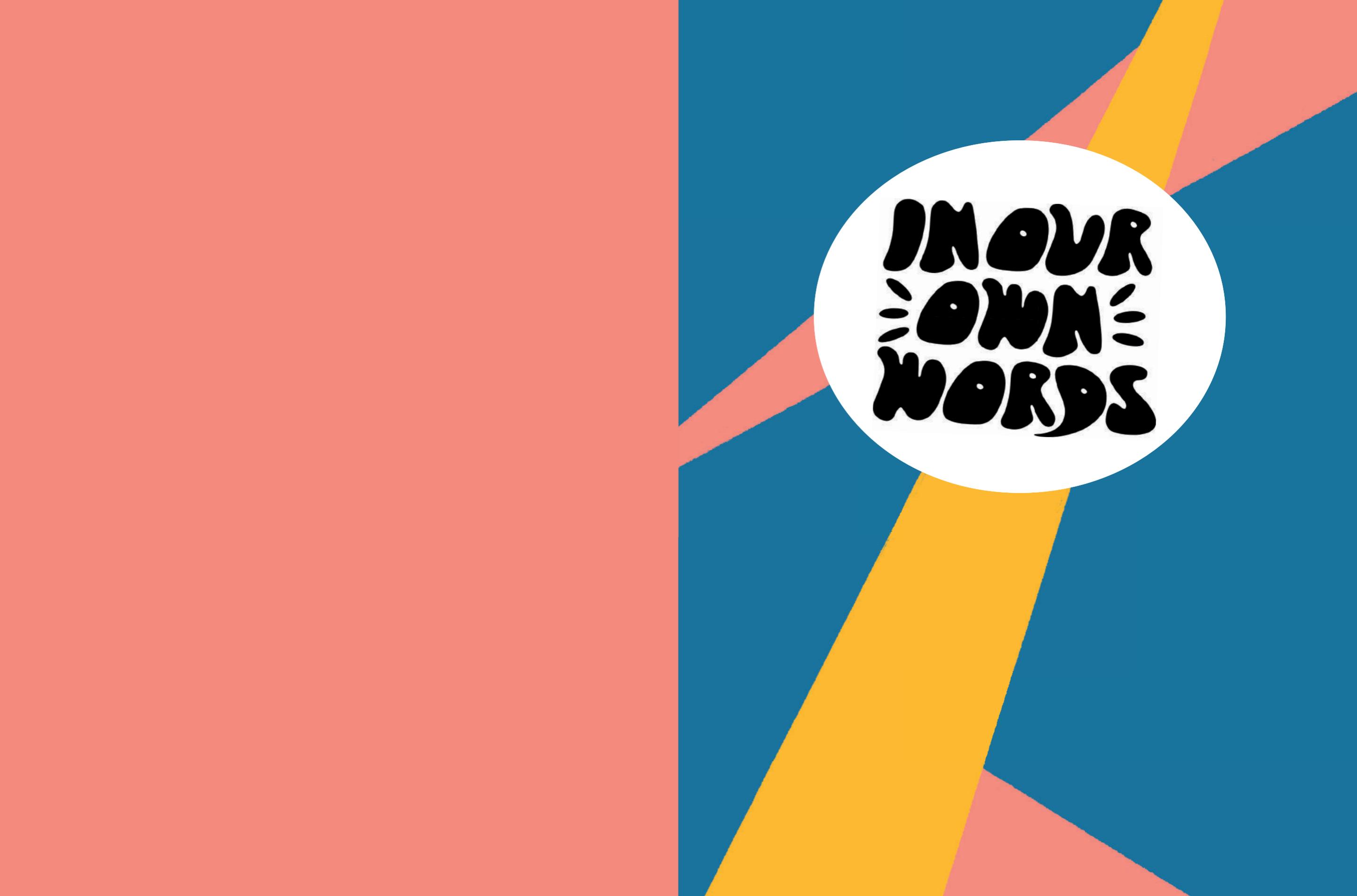


IN OUR OWN WORDS







**IN OUR
OWN
WORDS**

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Visions for children's books

Isabel Hölzl and Alexandra Stang

Children's books shape the worldview we grow up with. We have to be able to recognize ourselves in stories, illustrations, and narratives, and to learn about the different realities of life around us. But what if children's literature in Germany, Finland and other (Northern) European countries today does not reflect the diverse societies in which we live, or makes a growing proportion of its young population invisible? At the end of 2018, the Goethe-Institut Finland launched a project dealing with the representation of children in picture books produced in Northern Europe and Germany. Following a seminar in Turku on how children's literature read in daycare centres and schools in Finland could be made more representative of the country's population, the project was extended at the end of 2019, since questions of inclusion and norm-critique cannot be dealt with in a few seminars. Structural changes are needed, which take time and effort.

We at the **Goethe-Institut Finland** and our partner organizations, most of whose staff belong to the *white* majority society, are not shaping the thematic focus of this project alone. Three professionals – **illustrator Warda Ahmed** from Finland, with **illustrator Jasmina El Bouamraoui (EL BOUM)** and **author Chantal-Fleur Sandjon**, both from Germany – contribute their expertise and experience to design the project and help assess how it meets its targets.

We have been organizing several webinars to start building a network and to share knowledge across countries and creative fields of bookmaking. We held workshops for writers, events during festivals and conferences to discuss diversity in the book-market from different angles, and produced articles and materials for the website. The project has focused on an intersectional approach to representing children of Colour.

With the term "intersectional" we mean that different types of discrimination (i.e. unfair treatment because of racism, sexism, classism, ableism etc.) are linked to and affect each other.

Since equal participation is a key question facing Europe's diverse societies, the DRIN project addresses the need to empower and enable everyone to participate. How can alternative, underrepresented narratives, voices, and images be introduced? What good examples can we share? And what can the various players in this field – authors, illustrators, publishers, libraries, and readers – learn from each other?

Promoting knowledge exchange, empowerment, networking, capacity building and awareness raising in a (Northern) European context are the main objectives of the DRIN project. We learned other criteria to choose books, read out more consciously and collaborate differently. Based on the project

experiences and events, this publication has been developed to frame visions for a more plural children's literature from a perspective of Colour, or rather from a multitude of BIPOC perspectives. "In Our Own Words" will keep transferring knowledge, long after the project activities end. We hope that it will inspire a change in book production and contribute towards a more inclusive children's book market that reflects the diversity of our societies.



It takes a village... of perspectives to change the book industry

Warda Ahmed, Jasmina El Bouamraoui, and Chantal-Fleur Sandjon

We started working on the DRIN project in autumn 2019 as part of an artist residence in Helsinki, Finland. An illustrator and a writer from Germany with a comic artist from Finland, all Black or of Colour. We only brought our different professional and artistic practices together but also our different positionalities, and a shared vision: to contribute to the debates surrounding diversity in children's literature by centring BIPOC¹ perspectives, not only on the pages of children's books, but behind them.

During those weeks of researching and conceptualizing what would soon become the DRIN project, we saw many, many books with a diverse cast (or in many cases, diverse sidekicks) and spoke to many people who were passionate about diversifying children's literature. But when we shifted focus from who is portrayed in the books to who is producing them – as authors, illustrators, editors etc. – the conversations dried up.

Our questions could only be answered with an uncomfortable silence, which directed us towards the lack of justice, equality, and inclusion that is still given in children's book publishing. Frankly put, while some of the faces on the covers may change quickly, the faces within the industry are not.

Diversity: Let's talk about... justice and equality

Visualizations of diversity have increased in the last years in most North European countries, e.g., by having a more diverse cast portrayed in illustrations. This is an important move towards more equality and inclusion in children's literature – but only the first step. Unfortunately, debates about diversity still mainly ignore the structural dimensions of racism. Who is creating these books? Who is telling stories, illustrating them, editing them, or has the power to

"There is no "grapefruit juice diet" for questioning and disrupting centuries-old colonial continuities."

choose publication? Who is talking to children and families about books, in bookstores, libraries, kindergartens, or school? If the answers to these questions are still far from reflecting the diversity that exists in European societies today, the book industry is still far from creating books that will prepare children – all children! – for their own roles in shaping our tomorrows.

Better than any guide: BIPOC in publishing

This publication started out as a guide but did not turn into one. We hate to break this to you but there is no "grapefruit juice diet" for questioning and disrupting centuries-old colonial continuities.

And there is no one-size-fits-all solution with infinite shelf life for inclusive children's literature that questions norms. Thus, this publication became a process-oriented, evolving platform for underrepresented

BIPOC perspectives in children's literature. Their opinions and experiences could guide us all towards more justice, equality, and inclusion in the children's book industry. This may be the true next step towards transforming not only the stories we find in books but also the structures and societies where they arise. This lasts so much longer than seven days on grapefruit juice or five quick fixes for outdated book concepts. Enjoy the insights these outstanding storytellers, publishers, visual artists, academics, and literature activists will share with you here!

1 BIPOC is an abbreviation for "Black, Indigenous, People of Colour".

Black children, *white* perspectives. How diverse is the German-language children's book industry?

Chantal-Fleur Sandjon

The German-language children's book industry is at a turning point: To remain relevant in an increasingly hyper-diverse society, we need to open closed doors and address existing structural exclusions. Many book creators of Colour provide decisive input for this.

Distant worlds and everyday occurrences

Rocket. This is the name of the protagonist of the children's book *Look up!* (Puffin, 2019) by Black British author-illustrator duo Nathan Bryon and Dapo Adeola. Her brother Jamal thinks it's because her breath is as fiery as the propulsion of a rocket. Her mother explains: On the very day of her birth, a spaceship started its journey into space. This is exactly where Rocket's great passion lies and consequently the focus of the book – Rocket wants to become an

outstanding astronaut and explorer just like Mae Jemison, the first Black woman in space.

The book opens up vast expanses and distant worlds for Black children and at the same time anchors them in the everyday. It allows the Black protagonist to dream, to imagine manifold futures for herself, and shows her as active, taking the initiative to mobilize her whole neighbourhood to gaze at a meteor shower. This representation should be self-evident in children's literature, and often is – but unfortunately not for marginalized characters.

"I see a lot of children's books on the UK market at the moment that are praised for the diversity of their representations", explains illustrator Dapo Adeola. But often the characters have literally just been made Black, without any reference to the cultural locations and relationships of the protagonists, to the complexity of their identities and how multi-layered this all is. An illust-

ration in *Look up!* shows Rocket sitting between her mother's legs while she braids her daughter's hair. Adeola explains that the image has no direct textual reference but resonates strongly with Black readers – simply because it reflects an everyday lifeworld that is rarely referenced.

Mirrors and windows

Adeola's approach can be understood as an artistic realization of exactly what the Black US professor Rudine Sims Bishop outlined as early as 1990: for children, books are mirrors and windows. Books should not only give children access to the experiences of others (windows), but also reinforce and offer positive role models and self-images, especially for underrepresented and (multiply) marginalized children (mirrors). If children are primarily presented with negative references to their own identity, or not represented at all, they learn a harsh lesson about their place in the social power structure – and in the world.

For the Black German professor and educationalist Maisha Auma, this highlights the need to strengthen Black perspectives and perspectives of Colour in the narrative and visual production of children's books: "Given the reality of racialized exclusion, marginalization, and dehumanization, it is particularly important to continually re-centre the voices and world interpretations of



racially marginalized people themselves." This applies to children's books, with their powerful images and narratives. To recentre stories in this way, Andrea Karimé, Lebanese-German author and poetry educator, has been publishing children's books since 2006. Her books portray children of Colour with experiences of asylum seeking, migration, and/or racism as individuals, with their own family stories, interests and abilities.

In *King kommt noch* (King is still coming, Peter Hammer, 2017), for example, she tells an empowering story of seeing asylum from the seeker's perspective. After arriving in Germany, the young first-person narrator wonders about people who shovel dog poop into bags every day and about rubbish bins that are locked in cages. And he misses his dog, which he had to leave behind. Themes of friendship and loss provide a common thread that many children can pick up on, accurate observation, age-appropriate poetic language and subtle humour that avoids slapstick stereotyping make this book stand out from the multitude of escape-centred narratives. *King kommt noch* impressively demonstrates how narratives change when perspectives shift and object-subject relations are redefined.

Too complex for a children's book?

Karimé was awarded both the Austrian Children's and Young People's Book Prize



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and the Children's Book Prize of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia for her work, gives poetry lectures, and conducts writing workshops – and repeatedly finds that publishers do not understand and reject her stories. Her view of the growing debate about diversity in literature is sobering: “There is a powerful wave of interest in children's books starring children of Colour. After Merkel's ‘We can do it!’ there were suddenly many books about refugees, but most of them were written by *white* authors who had not dealt much with the topic before, which is often noticeable in the books. We can see the same thing happening again now – children's books are supposed to become more diverse, but perhaps the people who write them are not. In the German children's book industry, we are still a long way from demands like those made by #ownvoices.¹ A UK study published in 2019 found that less than 2% of published children's book authors and illustrators were themselves Brits of Colour. In Germany, we can only assume similar figures with great optimism. For Karimé, this shows how little interest there is in authentic settings that address the complex lifeworlds of migrant and migrantized children and young people. “Recently I received feedback on a manuscript about a highly sensitive child with an Arab–German family; it was seen as

covering too many ‘issues’ at once. Yet in my poetics, which is shaped by my biography, my connections to the Arabic language and cultural (space) are like singing birds in the background of all my stories, not an added thematic layer that can be scraped off again.”

Is complexity of migrant experiences overloading the text and overwhelming (*white*) children? Such a perspective on diversity not only explains the concentration of German children's books that reproduce stereotypes of children of Colour, but also the barriers that authors and illustrators of Colour face in establishing themselves as experts based on their own experiences. The power of imagination is often cited in a dismissive way. And yes, *white* book creators can imagine the experiences of Black people in many ways, some powerful, empowering, and affirming. Nevertheless, this does not come close to the experience People of Colour have, and the knowledge and socialization, the values and norms, prejudices and evaluations associated with it. Other perspectives would enrich German children's literature in the long term.

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More languages, more visions

For Fitsame Teferra's work as founder of the publishing house Habte Books, her own Ethiopian, migrant experience enables her to clearly identify gaps in the book market: “When we talk about diversity and representation, we need to think about underrepresented languages. Bilingual children's books with European second languages are numerous. But even books with languages like Hausa or Kiswahili, which are spoken by many African and Afrodiaspora people, are almost non-existent in Germany.” She too first approached German publishers with a concept for a book centred on a Black person who had experienced migration. After this was rejected, she has been publishing multilingual children's books with and in African languages herself since 2015. Her picture dictionaries are in great demand in Afrodiaspora communities in Germany and especially in the USA. “In our books, many Black children see children who really look like them on the cover for the very first time. And they can read the books or be read to in a language that is otherwise often only appreciated in family contexts – another much too rare experience for them.”

Publishers have a responsibility

Many book creators of Colour are making important contributions to the book industry. Now it is up to industry itself and their publishers to define diversity as more than an aesthetic-visual trend and to anchor participation and equitable involvement in their own structures. “It is essential”, explains Professor Maisha Auma, “to recognize the barriers associated with marginalization due to othering, i.e. placement in relation to the manufactured norm and relegation to the margins of narratives, structures, and societies.

This requires real commitments and a practical plan to remove these barriers.”

This issue is not about censorship or restriction, but expansion. More precisely, it means expanding the group of people creating children's literature, so the diversity of the people behind the words and images in children's books reflects the diversity of the children who read them.

¹ The hashtag #ownvoices has been used on social media since 2015 to promote the perspectives of marginalized authors in children's and young adult literature and to draw attention to books whose protagonist is underrepresented in the same way as the author.

ANDREA KARIMÉ

Children's book author Andrea Karimé

Andrea Karimé was born in Kassel, Germany, she grew up in a Lebanese-German household, studied art and music, and worked as a primary school teacher for 12 years. Since 2007 she has been living in Cologne as a freelance author of children's books. She has received numerous awards for her work, most recently the North Rhine-Westphalia Children's Book Prize. Her twentieth children's book, the poetry collection *Das schönste Zimmer in meinem Kopf* (The Most Beautiful Room in My Head) was published in 2021.

1) From your perspective, how diverse are children's books in Germany?

“Even diverse contexts are constructs and often get stuck in stereotypes.”

2) Are there developments in the book market, both nationally and globally, that give you hope?

Still underdeveloped! Publishers are currently making efforts to discover and depict diverse children's book heroines, but there is still no noticeable change among key players in production and media. The perspective remains predominantly *white* and privileged and this has an impact on narratives and discourses. Even diverse contexts are constructs and often get stuck in stereotypes.

As a result, children's literature is mainly represented in the public sphere by *white*, usually privileged people.

But there is a new development in my life: people are asking me to do sensitivity reading. That is a good sign, but it would be better if publishers made an effort to invite me and more other authors of *Colour* to work with them so we'd be proportionally represented in book production.

Yes, one positive thing is that publishers want to show book covers to me, to have illustrations checked for hidden racism. And the fact that more is being translated, for example from Arabic, is also a good sign. Also, an indie book market is emerging online. Various books are being produced on demand by people from “the margins” (see Grada Kilomba) and marketed in the social media community.



3) What do you wish existed on the children's book market? What stories would you like to read? In other words, where do you see gaps in content and ideas?

I especially want to see more BIPOC authors who write books for children. From their lives or from the “most beautiful room in their heads”. There is a lack of discourse, exchange, annuals, festivals, and workshops with children. I would like to stop feeling like an alien who does not get offered the specific “foreigner’s programme slot” by major publishers because it is already taken.

At the moment, people often work to this rule: if a heroine has a foreign name, young readers with non-German names will know that the story is being told to them. That is only the first step. But if the author has a non-German name, the children know that they, too, can tell stories and write.

m e s p r a c h i g
e r p r a h i g

4) How is diversity present in your stories and how closely does this relate to your perspective as a children's author of Colour?

Sure, my diverse biography influences my perspective on diversity and my POETICS. I think it automatically flows into the stories, it tells them, as especially cultural diversity is an important part of my life, and therefore a voice in the books. To put it poetically: I have a poetic animal called Ara-Bear (in German Ara-Bärin, which is linguistically my false – or true – friend as an Arab woman, in German *Araberin*) living with me, who usually takes notes on my texts. This creates characters who grow up with several cultures and languages in Germany, but this is not the conflict or the driving force behind the story.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has written an essay entitled *The danger of a single story*. In it, she describes the danger of describing only one aspect of a character, such as a child who has experienced being a refugee. Focusing on this aspect, the plot of a “single story” is developed in which the heroine is stuck with the role of victim.



5) You developed the term *Meersprachigkeit* (“nauticalilingualism”, in contrast to *Mehrsprachigkeit*, or multilingualism) – what does it mean to you?

This is, firstly, racism, a colonial continuity in the view from above, and secondly, uninteresting. That is what I am writing against. *Counter-narrative* is what Max Czollek might call it. I also have heroines who have had to seek asylum, but they are never weak because I do not construct their journey and its effects as a problem in the plot, but describe it as part of the child's life and as naturally present. The focus of the story is on completely different strengths and interests of the heroine.

Another poetic effect of my biographical diversity is to invent new languages. By this I refer to the fact that *language* is often an important issue in BIPOC lives. On the one hand, it is associated with stories and experiences of marginalization. On the other, multilingualism and interest in languages creates poetic potential and space to experiment. This concerns biographically significant languages that the person might not speak. Like the wonderful world of words I moved into as a child, for example when my father spoke Arabic, which I didn't understand. There was a magic in the room for me then, something fantastic. And I translated his language fantastically. Filled in the gaps. In this sense, I feel I am *meersprachig* (“nauticalilingual”) which refers to *mehrsprachig* (“multilingual”) as well as to this poetic and creative component of my upbringing. You could call this “translingualism” or “diversity in language”.

“I would like to stop feeling like an alien who does not get offered the specific ‘foreigner’s programme slot’ by major publishers because it is already taken.”

Understanding the diversity gap in children's literature

Maisha Auma

When children begin to explore literary worlds, they are confronted with a reality of deep inequalities. Writing about multilayered intersectional experiences of 'missing in literature', about the lacking representation of hyperdiverse realities in Children's books, from my location in Berlin, Germany includes looking into the context of children's literature in German-speaking countries, looking outward to the wider European context, and further includes looking towards underrepresented geopolitical contexts like African, Asian and South American societies, as well as to the lived realities of First People (Indigenous societies) whose daily experiences and territories have been erased from narrations of social realities.

On Being Excluded

Nigerian feminist author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns of the dangers of „a single story“, based on the geopolitical dominance of *white*- and west-centric narrations. This critique questions stories which generalize the experiences of *white*, male, able-bodied, 'white-Christian', heterosexual, male-identifying, middle-class people. Centralizing these perspectives is deployed at the expense of Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, Sinti and Roma, Muslim- or Jewish-identified, religious-non-practicing, disabled/other-abled, working-class or working poor, female-identifying, queer, inter* and trans* people.

“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize.”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in 'The Danger of a Single Story'¹

The singularity written into the stories in children's books contains problematic normalizations. The most comprehensive study of 20th century children's books undertaken in the United States; *Gender in Twentieth-Century Children's Books: Patterns of Disparity in Titles and Central Characters*, analysed 6,000 books published from 1900 to 2000. It was carried out by sociologists of gender at Florida State University (McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido and Tope, 2011). The most important finding is that when adult males and male animals counted into one category of representation they were represented as lead characters in 100% of all analysed children's books. Adult females and female animals were only represented as lead characters in 33%. Racialized marginalization in Children's publishing shows a similar pattern of inequality: Based on descriptive statistics collected by the Cooperative Children's Book Center,

CCBC in Madison/Wisconsin (*Diversity Gap Studies*) since 1985, David Huyck and Sarah Park Dahlen found enormous disparities in the representation of BIPOC Children in comparison to animal figures and *white* characters in Children's books (Stechyson, 2019). For 2015, of the approximately 3,000 annual new children's publications 73.3% of the main characters were *white* children, 12.5% of the main characters were animals (including fantasy-figures and inanimate objects) leaving only 14.2% for the representation of all racially marginalized groups together.

This picture had shifted in 2018 to now 50% of all main characters being *white*, 27% animals including fantasy figures and only 23% of all main characters representing all racially marginalized groups counted together. The relation of represented Children of Colour had now sunk below the level of represented animals. There is no difficulty

in representing animals, fantasy and inanimate figures. There seems to be resistance to representing Children of Colour and their realities.

Harmful Fictions

The representations of the social world in children's literature are mostly fictional. They have however proved to be systematically excluding. Where BIPoC children are included, their depictions and those of the geopolitical territories associated with their lives tend to be stereotypical, stigmatizing or dehumanizing (Auma, 2018). Many German picture books and children's books normalize the "white adventurer". The German shoe label *Salamander* has published a comic-booklet (featuring its mascot, a male fire salamander named Lurchi, which is derived from the German word for salamander, *Lurch*), from 1937 to the present. In a 4th Edition of *Lurchi with the barbarians/Lurchi bei den Wilden* from 2019, Lurchi paints himself black (which is in effect blackface). This is accompanied by a racist term about Lurchi becoming a N****lein (a little N****). Lurchi does this to not being cooked and eaten (Bochmann and Stauffer, 2013; 7). The geopolitical context of his 'adventure' is a BIPoC society. Other German/European examples of the *white* adventurer are "Die kleine Hexe/The little witch", "Longstocking in Takatuka Land" and the Tin Tin Comics

(*Tim und Struppi in A*****) to name just a few (Auma, 2018).

BIPoC children and the societies are depicted systematically as laughable, comical, barbaric, naïve or immoral, as beings closer nature than to culture, as beings who are dependent on *white* knowledge and benevolence (Auma, 2018). Such depictions are not only fictional, they are also harmful! They do not only deprive very young BIPoC readers of a positive self-image and positive images of their social worlds, they also force them to deal with the normalization of their devaluation, of being overlooked or dehumanized. Young readers must "read between the racism/the harm" (Masad, 2016). These patterns of disempowerment are no misrepresentations. They are toxic representations, because they cause harm to the self-worth of racially marginalized children. The regularity with which geopolitical contexts associated with BIPoC and their social lives are represented is a form of cultural violence.

Powerful Readers

I would like to close with some thoughts on initiatives, working towards more equity, race- and norm-critical intersectionality and social, economic and political inclusion in Children's literature. They want to promote the production of diverse Worlds in books and other childhood media, addressed at

plural, hyperdiverse societies/mini-publics. A common aim of two European initiatives; DRIN and "Powervolle Lesende" (Powerful Readers) is to bring together key actors in the arena of children's books production, circulation and consumption, especially towards the goal of re-centering the voices and perspectives of marginalized social groups. Four North American initiatives #WeNeedDiverseBooks, "Disability in Kid Lit", "Young, Black and Lit" and "I am Here, I am Queer, What the Hell Do I Read?", all serve as an inspiration for the quality of intersectional justice approaches necessary, for work required in order to consistently empower diverse and marginalized young readers.

These initiatives all draw on Rudine Sims Bishop's call to create and normalize "win-

dows and mirrors" with regard to racially marginalized young readers. Mirrors serve to empower young BIPoC readers to see themselves, their social lives and the geopolitical regions associated with their hyperdiverse diasporic realities represented as normal elements of daily narrations. Windows serve to close the empathy gap towards marginalized groups, by normalizing the way they negotiate barriers and the conditions of their dehumanization. Windows provide a crucial insight into the lives of all our marginalized neighbours, as they deal with realities, which are rarely represented in children's media. In Chimamanda Adichie's words, these approaches broaden the scope of the stories we tell and read. They reconnect us all in our daily struggle to affirm our own and each other's humanity.

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MIR JAM NUEN NING

Educator and translator Mirjam Nuenning

Mirjam Nuenning is the founder of the Afrodiaspora Kindergarten Sankofa in Berlin and a freelance translator of Afrodiaspora literature. She supports kindergarten teams in developing holistic pedagogical approaches and in raising awareness of racism. After studying for years at the renowned Howard University in Washington, DC, on graduation she moved to Berlin, where she now lives, works, and runs a Waldorf kindergarten.

1) From your perspective, how diverse are children's books in Germany?

“In Germany, too, we seem to be slowly waking up.”

I think a lot still needs to happen in Germany regarding diversity in children's books. There's just not enough diversity in all areas of children's books: cultural diversity, family forms, gender, etc. I'm always looking for books with Black characters. Unfortunately, when BIPOC appear in books, it is often as the *white* protagonist's only friend of Colour, or in the context of the issues of racism, discrimination, or “tolerance” (a word I find very problematic). These cannot be the only books and topics in which we are represented.

2) Are there developments in the book market, both nationally and globally, that give you hope?

I am very glad that the lack of diversity in children's books is being addressed more and more. Great diverse children's books are available in English already – there is still room for improvement, but things are moving in the right direction. There are initiatives, organizations, bookshops and publishers who consciously deal with these issues, create great book lists, publish great books, and raise awareness. In Germany, too, we seem to be slowly waking up.



3) What do you no longer want to read or see in children's books? What do we need less of on the children's book market these days?

(Racist) stereotypes, generalizations, or attributions. Books in which People of Colour are portrayed as victims who are saved by *white* people. Racist language. Books in which colonial ways of thinking/images are normalized and perpetuated. Books in which Black people are seen/portrayed as objects.

“It is often very difficult for children of Colour to find mirrors in kindergarten. It does something to their self-esteem. So it is incredibly important that educators ensure all children have images to identify with.”

4) From your perspective as an educator and day-care centre manager, why is it important to have a diverse range of picture books and toys in children's daycare? To what extent should the choice of children's books be conditioned by the proportions and identities of the children in the group?

It is incredibly important that children have opportunities to identify. Rudine Bishop Sims speaks of mirrors in this context. Mirrors in which the children can recognize themselves and the realities of their lives. It is often very difficult for children of Colour to find mirrors in kindergarten. It does something to their self-esteem. So it is incredibly important that educators ensure all children have images to identify with. *White* children also need to feel and experience from an early age that people are very diverse. The realities of life and the stories of People of Colour are just as important and should be just as central as their own. That is why I would like to see a diverse range of books and toys even in kindergartens where all the children are *white*. And when a Black child comes to kindergarten, or when the *white* children meet a Person of Colour, it is normal for them, too, because after all, it is.

“I would like to see more books where People of Colour do normal things, just like everyone else.”

5) To what extent do you consider addressing diversity, experiences of discrimination, and barriers to participation in the pedagogical context as optional or indispensable?

It is imperative that educators address these issues. There is no way around it. We live in a diverse society and educators encounter diverse children and families in their work. These children and families experience discrimination time and again, including in kindergartens and schools. If educators are not sensitive to these issues, they cannot encounter these children and families as equals. Also, educators who do not confront their own prejudices subconsciously project them onto the children and families they work with. In the best case, children and young people can distance themselves from these prejudices (but this makes real relationship impossible). In the worst case, children and young people internalize them, which has negative consequences for their mental health.

6) What do you wish existed on the children's book market? What stories would you like to read? In other words, where do you see gaps in content and ideas?

I wish there were more books by Black authors and illustrators. I would like to see more exciting fairy tales, myths, and fantasy stories starring BIPOC. Books in which Afrodiasporic narratives and myths are retold. I would like to see more books where People of Colour do normal things, just like everyone else.

Stories without conflict: Opening up other worlds to our children

Joshua Kwesi Aikins

Tales, narratives, stories are one of the most precious gifts we can give our children. They enable our children to imagine the world – and possible worlds – from different perspectives. They invite empathy and can make truths, experiences, and sensations felt and tangible in fiction, in a way that pure facts cannot. Narratives are a basis for how we think, understand, and evaluate history, our present, and our lives, but also our knowledge. Minna Salami writes about this in *Sensuous Knowledge*:

“The narrative through which we view knowledge is both the seed and the fruit of the culture it produces. To produce nourishing fruit, we need to plant sublime seeds.”

Yet the way we tell stories revolves around conflict. Western literature, films, fairy tales, stories for young and old, usually centre on a conflict that the protagonists work through, from which they grow. Even the history of the Black movement, from this perspective, becomes a conflict with racism,

white supremacy etc., from which Black people emerge stronger and which seems to give “meaning” to their suffering in a sometimes questionable way. This is the case in the vast majority of Western films about the Civil Rights Movement or the struggle against apartheid.

But what if there was another way of telling stories? A way of telling stories without conflict? What if conflict were not the main motif, but development, individual or communal maturation, the place of the individual in the community? How nourishing, strengthening, and empowering could that be for our children? Because, you might have guessed it, there are many non-Western traditions of telling stories differently.

The multiplicity of story structures

Author Kim Yoon Mi has provided a rich overview of narrative heritages and tra-

“All children, regardless of heritage, could benefit from and would certainly enjoy being offered some of these rich modes of storytelling.”

ditions in her extensive blog post “World Wide Story Structures”, which delves into Kishōtenketsu, the Japanese four-arc story structure that is often used as the conflict-free narrative tradition par excellence. But her blog post makes clear that there is a dizzying multiplicity of Asian, Latin American, Indigenous, African, and African diasporan story structures that go far beyond the conventions of Western plot lines – including in children’s and YA literature.

This means: the majority of children in the world have a storytelling heritage that is not (yet) reflected in most children’s books. All children, regardless of heritage, could benefit from and would certainly enjoy being offered some of these rich modes of storytelling.

It also means: the challenge for authors far exceeds what is now trending under the rubric of “diversity reading” where authors are offered ways to write about peoples and cultural heritages other than their own wit-

hout falling into clichés, stereotypical and all too often racist language, metaphors, or character arcs. In as much as such services enhance reflection and reduce boring or harmful repetition of prejudices, they are needed. But when looked at from the rich heritages of differently unfolding narratives, solutions that do not engage at that level can still seem like the proverbial lipstick on the pig. That is not to say that pigs are not lovely creatures, but that, in this case, the enhancement is merely cosmetic, they are dressed up to seem something they are not. Diversity remains decorative if it does not reach the level of storytelling traditions.

Providing nourishing stories for children

Diverse characters are not just garnish, and the art of inclusion does not end at the level of language and appropriate vocabulary,

but extends to story itself. These characters deserve to have stories told in ways that honour the storytelling heritage of the communities they supposedly represent – or at least have them acknowledged, in and through story. For these are not empty conventions, but expressions of these communities' way of being in the world, seeing, sharing, and shaping the world, especially for their next generations. These structures, conventions, and modes are part of what makes stories nourishing – which is why variety is key here, too.

Offering this rich story food to children early and purposefully, I think, is just as important as offering children African and

Afro-diasporic food, through which our ancestors have unlocked previously inaccessible nutrients and taste experiences. It may be part of the cultural and culinary heritage for some of us, but it can be nourishing and satisfying for all of us.

Just like in kid lit, in the West there is often an assumption that bitter, nutty, or nuanced are not flavours kids necessarily enjoy, but most actually do, especially if their taste buds are exposed to them early. Just as food shapes the taste buds, experiencing and enjoying other stories at an early age enables children to absorb and enjoy, to think and feel the world through other stories.

Links for further reading on the subject

The significance of plot without conflict

<https://stilleatingoranges.tumblr.com/post/25153960313/the-significance-of-plot-without-conflict>

Is conflict necessary?: Kishōtenketsu and the conflict-less plot

<https://wordsliketrees.wordpress.com/2019/01/27/is-conflict-necessary-kishotenketsu-and-the-conflict-less-plot/>

Worldwide Story Structures

<https://www.kimyooniauthor.com/post/641948278831874048/worldwide-story-structures>

No time to waste: Dismantling discrimination in libraries

Leslie Kuo in conversation with Chantal-Fleur Sandjon

When I talk about diversity in the library context, I always remind people of this: There are no quick fixes. The topic is very urgent, but increasing justice, equality, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) requires an appreciative and reflective approach. That takes time.

Since 2018, I have been working as the 360° Diversity Agent at the Pankow Public Library District in Berlin. 360° is the German Federal Culture Foundation's grant program for increasing diversity in cultural institutions. For four years, I am accompanying and shaping the processes here to make the library more inclusive. My conclusion so far: there is still a lot to do. For a long time, public libraries in Germany did not perceive and implement JEDI as a holistic process. Often, they only took selective action, such as buying multilingual titles in children's literature or organizing events. But to make libraries more inclusive, JEDI needs to be

a core issue that touches everything else, not the "cherry on the cake". joy, but most actually do, especially if their taste buds are exposed to them early. Just as food shapes the taste buds, experiencing and enjoying other stories at an early age enables children to absorb and enjoy, to think and feel the world through other stories.

Making libraries more inclusive

The good thing is that many librarians see their profession as a vocation, which they pursue with a lot of commitment and initiative. Many want to ensure that libraries are there for everyone, inclusive, and accessible. Together, on this basis, we can find out exactly where libraries are not yet living up to this claim. The three Ps help here (programme, public, personnel):

1. PERSONNEL

Who works in the library?

How homogeneous or heterogeneous is the staff in terms of experiences of issues like racism, classism, ableism, gender identity, or migration?

How are positionalities, privileges, and power relations reflected, what space is given to self-reflection, individually and in the team?

How far is a critical attitude to discrimination promoted as an important component of continuing professional development?

2. PROGRAMME

Who chooses new media acquisitions?

What are the criteria for selecting media?

How much do the criteria include self-reflection and awareness-raising on diversity issues?

How are library users, their experience, and their opinions involved in the process?

How do people find out about new publications, not least from small and micro publishers? Is an effort made to represent heterogeneity among authors and illustrators?

3. PUBLIC

Who uses the library and who doesn't?

What services are needed to reach groups that use the library less?

What structural barriers are there, be it all-gender toilets, accessibility issues like ramps at entrances, or dealing with racist content?

Decision-making power: Who decides what and for whom?

The key step is to engage with decision-making power: who decides what is important, for whom? Decision-making power must be shared to make libraries a more inclusive place in the long term – especially as they are state institutions in which social exclusion is reproduced if this is not consciously counteracted.

In the Pankow libraries, for example, we work closely with local organizations run by and for immigrants. They have clearly communicated that they want to help shape libraries. They started by organizing an annual multilingual fairy tale and now advise on EDI processes, and are involved in selecting media.

We also share decision-making power with young people in the project “Powervolle

Lesende” (Powerful Readers), our cooperation with the German Federal Agency for Civic (bpb), RAA Berlin e.V. under the scientific guidance of Prof. Maisha Auma (Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences). This project empowers BIPOC children and young people to take their own approaches to, critique, and enjoy books and other media.

There is so much to say about diversity in libraries – enough to fill a book! And as a matter of fact, we public libraries in the 360° diversity program are publishing an open access book on this topic at the end of this year (Julia Hauck und Sylvia Linneberg: *Diversität in Bibliotheken. Theorien, Strategien und Praxisbeispiele*. DeGruyter, 2021). There is so much to do and change, and these changes take time. All the more reason to start today. There’s no time to waste!

Links for further reading on the subject

The significance of plot without conflict

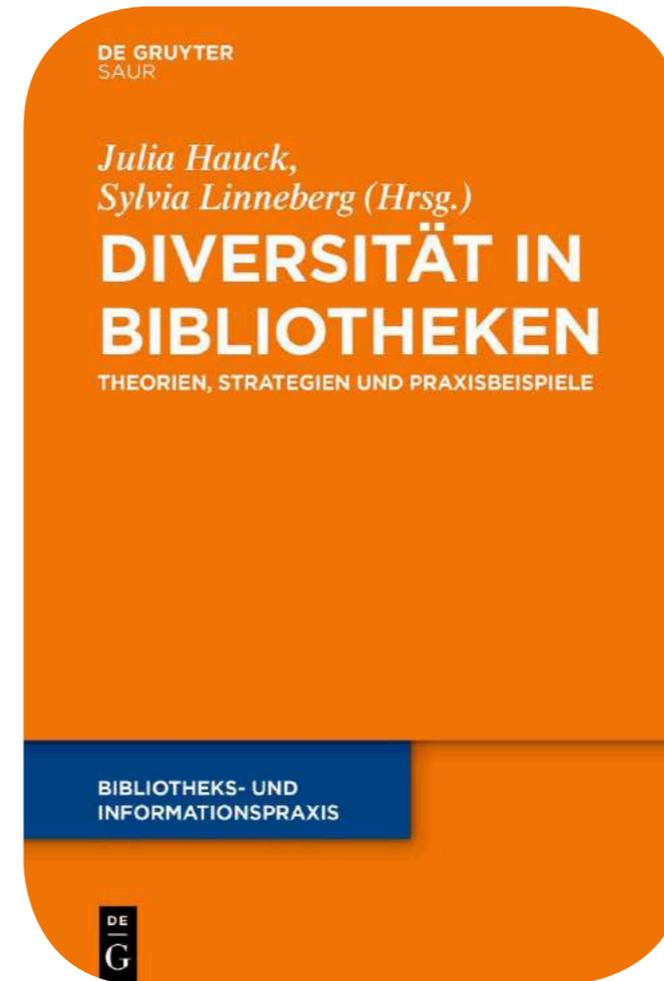
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LUCY FARFORT

**Illustrator
Lucy Farfort**

Lucy Farfort is an illustrator and writer of mixed Caribbean/English heritage. Her work is a mix of traditional and digital media, and she specializes in illustrating for the children's book market. Farfort's most recent work includes an illustration commission for *Happy Here* (Knight's Of, 2021), a Black British anthology, and an illustration to accompany a story about iconic journalist Claudia Jones in *Bedtime Stories: Beautiful Black Tales from the Past* (Scholastic, 2021). Further releases are already planned for 2022, including the first picture book of her own.

1) From your perspective, how diverse are children's books in the UK?

It's certainly got much better in the last 5 or so years, and has hugely improved since I was a child growing up in the 1980s. Back then I never saw a children's book that featured any diverse characters. There were almost no ethnic minority main characters or characters with a disability.

In recent years though, there has been a huge push to get more representation in terms of the stories published and those creating them. Especially now that the CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education) publishes an annual report titled *Reflecting Realities*, that surveys ethnic representation within UK children's literature. From my own perspective the market feels more inclusive now, certainly in terms of race and possibly the LGBTQ+ community. Although I think it still has quite a way to go in being representative in other areas – such as disability, neuro-diversity, and class.



2) Are there developments in the book market, both nationally and globally, that give you hope?

“BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) writers, just like any other writers, should be allowed to write stories that aren’t centred around their race or culture.”

3) What do you wish existed on the children’s book market? What stories would you like to read, write, or illustrate yourself?

Just seeing more books by people of colour in shops, and discussed on TV and online already gives me a lot of hope! And the longer that continues the more I’m convinced that this is not just a flash in the pan.

Having shows like Bookmarks on Netflix, where books by Black authors are read to children by Black celebrities and artists, is testament to the changes being made.

Now there are many initiatives, competitions, and mentorship opportunities for people from minority ethnic communities in the UK who want to be published in children’s literature. That’s huge change – when I graduated as an illustrator many years ago there was nothing like that.

The CLPE report, and the industry drive to employ, not just authors and illustrators from underrepresented backgrounds, but also more publishers, editors, librarians, and booksellers, allows me to believe these positive changes are here to stay.

I suppose I would like to see more stories with main characters from underrepresented backgrounds that aren’t focussed on things specifically associated with race. So more general stories where the character’s race, culture, or experiences relating to those things isn’t used as a tool to educate others, or be the centre focus of the story.

BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) writers, just like any other writers, should be allowed to write stories that aren’t centred around their race or culture. They should be accepted to write for story’s sake, not to educate people, or to fill some sort of token quota.

I personally want to be free to write about all sorts of things, as other writers and illustrators have been free to do for decades and centuries.

4) From your perspective as a Black British illustrator, what would you like to see changed in the near future?

5) You were awarded first prize for illustration, Faber Children’s inaugural FAB Prize in the 2017 competition. Can you tell us a little bit about the FAB Prize and about the impact this had on your career?

6) How did your journey as a children’s book illustrator continue from there?

“It would be great to see more Black librarians and book sellers.”

That’s a difficult one, but it would be great to see more Black librarians and book sellers. I’ve only really ever seen any in London. I’m sure there are some outside of London, but it would be good to see this across the UK.

Entering the FAB Prize was without a doubt a huge boost for my career. I stumbled across it on the Andlyn Agency website, at a point when I was trying to find an agent. When I read the details I was so excited, I’d never seen an opportunity like it!

Set up by Faber Children’s and Andlyn Literary Agency, it’s a prize open to unpublished and agented writers and illustrators from underrepresented backgrounds. The finalists’ work is very well publicized, and Faber are really supportive of winners and runners up so you get your work seen widely. Also they have an event for the finalists and winners, which is well attended by agents, and it was there that I met my wonderful agent Alice Sutherland-Hawes (ASH Literary).

At the time when I entered, part of the first prize for illustration was a one-year mentorship with the Art Director Emma Eldridge – which for me, was the main draw.

She helped me work on a book dummy for a story I’d written. It gave me confidence, and helped me understand what publishers look for, by demystifying the industry which before had felt so inaccessible.

At that point I’d been trying to get a proper break as an illustrator for around 15 years. I had graduated in 2001, and was floundering, not knowing where to go or what I was doing wrong, always feeling like an odd fit. Having the guidance from Emma was so helpful. It was like getting a key to a door I had never quite been able to open.



The only one in the room: On being a Finnish-Somali comic artist

Warda Ahmed

Children's literature has been close to my heart since long before I had children of my own. The fairy tales my parents told me and the stories I read continue to spark my imagination to this day. Children's books very openly mirror the ongoing debates in society around us at the moment. For two years, I have been involved in the Goethe-Institut's DRIN project, speaking up for children's literature. I have been able to talk with others about our shared passion for telling stories in images and words.

But my own background as an artist is in comics. Comics have consistently been my passion and favourite medium since childhood. When I was young, I made a conscious choice to focus on comics as a form of expression. I studied graphic storytelling at Aalto University. My background is in education studies and I have been working in the field for almost fifteen years. For me, making art and teaching have always gone hand in hand. When I teach, I gain new per-

spectives by solving teaching challenges. Gradually growing feminist and anti-racist networks support my work.

Making art for my audience

I write and draw stories that I think need to be recorded: stories of migration, of parallel realities, of Afro-European identity, stories that are my heritage. I hope not only to entertain readers, but also to connect with them, to make them think, to make them wonder, and ultimately to make them feel that they, too, have a story to tell. The community of artists of Colour in Helsinki that has formed in recent years has become an important audience for my art, which gives me much-needed feedback on my work.

My own path as a comic artist and illustrator has not been smooth. I have often been the only one in the room. People have been interested in me through my visible identities.

That I am a Black Muslim refugee. My work is read through this lens or assumptions are made about what I write. They're not really interested in what I do, they're interested in who I am. In the past, when I didn't have a clear community to read my work, I said I was making my work for myself. The truth is that I do want to make art for an audience, but that audience is not necessarily the general public. That said, I also work with the general public in mind. I don't live in a vacuum.

My work is mostly reviewed and judged by *white* culture commentators. They decide whether I'm making "real art", whether I deserve a publishing platform or a grant. *White* artists rarely experience not being the first target audience for a work. The angry reader or viewer of my art will want me to explain exactly what I meant or will claim the right to send hate mail because I dared to criticize the prevailing norms of society in my work. So, it's challenging to try to shut

out these external things when I'm working. Making art from a minority point of view means that you have to deal with othering in your own work before you can move on to other subjects. It's part of growing as an artist, unfortunately.

I have long considered myself a black-and-white comic artist. I use light, shadow, and line in my art. I use a paintbrush and thick paper. The right kind of paper and the way the brush runs over its surface are a satisfying experience in themselves. I find black-and-white drawing more honest and edgy than the use of colour. My aim has been to create beautiful and spectacular originals. To follow the European big names. For practical reasons, however, my originals are often composed of pieces and are small. I make additions and subtitle the works digitally. Our own routines are dictated by constraints other than aesthetics.

Worlds in black and white – and colour

And looking back at European black-and-white comics, I often see that it's easier for the artist (usually a man) to rely on stereotypical human representation than to focus on uniqueness and personality. Typically, such artists draw one type of sensual female body, or rely on racist caricatures of people who are not *white*. In my own work, I have chosen not to underline the ethnicity or gender of the characters, but rather to subtly encode this content into the text and images as needed. So, I have not “coloured in” the skin of the characters. But I do make stories about us, people who look like me or who have stories to tell that are close to my heart. *White* artists are rarely asked why they draw characters that look like them. For me, it's one of the recurring questions. In the 2020s, I have access to a very rich visual world of Black and Brown (BIPOC) artists. I find online communities, works, and writings that resonate. Little by little, I've started to use colour in my work, when people who commission it want colours. At the same time, many steps have been digitalized, starting with drawing. My visual style has adapted to this, but retains its own character. Traditional methods and sketchbooks are part of the process. I still work with black-and-white images in my own projects.

For me, professionalism is strongly linked to the concept of livelihood. My identity as an artist depends on whether I see myself in the field for years to come. Uncertainties are part of the nature of my field. There are few permanent work contracts, and grants are the main source of income. The opportunity to teach is my main security. But that doesn't mean I'm not fighting to improve working conditions in the arts and culture sector. I have worked in several organizations, trained migrant organizations, and co-founded the Feminist Party. Most recently, in the Finnish Ministry of Culture's Working Group on Cultural Policy, Immigrants and the Promotion of Cultural Diversity, I have been calling for better livelihoods for migrant artists and for state funding commitments to implement the Equality Act in institutions. I feel that as an artist from a minority background I cannot afford to refuse activism because I have supposedly achieved a more stable base in my own profession. I don't feel stable yet, because I'm still too often the only one in the room.



Changing the narrative: Interview with Enajite Efemuaye

by Eliphas Nyamogo

The Nigerian publishing house Kachifo has ventured into children's books with our Tuuti imprint. Managing editor Enajite Efemuaye

on the importance of publishing narratives that centre Nigerian and West-African experiences.

Publishers of children's literature from Northern Europe and Germany have been faulted for not adequately reflecting the increasing diversity of those societies in their books. On the other hand, African societies are also becoming more diverse due to globalization. To what extent does cultural diversity determine the content you publish for children in Nigeria?

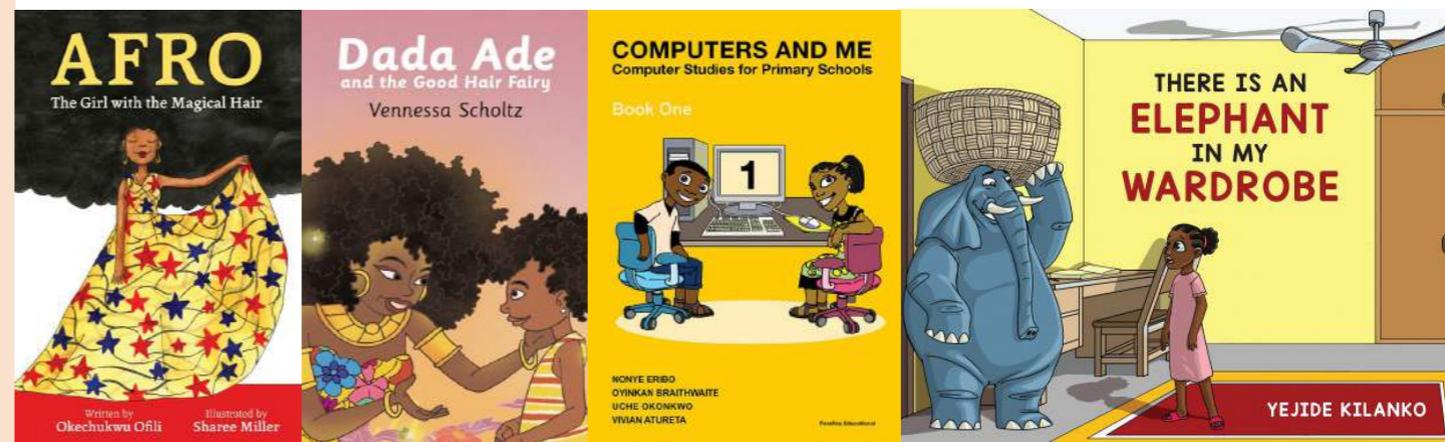
Many of the children's books you find in local bookstores are foreign books. So the most important thing for us right now is representation for the average Nigerian child, which means making sure that our illustrations look like our audience and the stories reflect experiences the children can relate to. We also consider cultural diversity but it means something different for us. We have over 300 distinct ethnicities in Nigeria but most of

the books tend to represent the three "major" ethnicities – Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. On the other hand, globalization and migration have added another variable into that equation. Our policy is to reflect these realities in the content that we publish.

Due to the limited availability of locally published books in Africa, books from Europe and North American often find their way on to the African book market. Have you identified any stereotypes in those books that you deliberately deconstruct as you provide alternative literature with local content?

Africa is rarely represented in those books. And when it is, the image is that of a homogenous, indistinct "African" village or city or forest. This monolithic Africa silences a truly exciting multiplicity of ethnicities and experiences. The stories we publish shift the focus to Africa. They examine our place in the world, as good literature should.

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FITSA ME TEFERA RA

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SPOTLIGHT 4

Independent publisher Fitsame Teferra Woldemichael

Fitsame Teferra Woldemichael is a children's book writer turned publisher. Originally from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, she moved to Berlin, Germany in 2015 to study for an MA in Childhood and Children's Rights. In Berlin she also founded the children's book publishing house Habte Books. Habte Books publishes multilingual and inclusive stories and games that represent African and Afrodiaspora children. The aim of Habte Books is to fill the gap in story representation and make books available in various underrepresented languages from the African continent.

1) From your perspective, how diverse are children's books in Germany?

I believe diversity in children's books is taking baby steps in Germany. Compared to the last few years, there is a bit of diversity here and there but one still has to do vast and time-consuming research to find books that are inclusive and diverse. I can see some baby steps in the small but growing publishing houses founded by parents and teachers who are exhausted with the research themselves. And to reach the point where mainstream publishing will follow suit and publish books that have diverse characters and stories will still take a lot of time and work.

2) Are there developments in the book market, both nationally and globally, that give you hope?

I believe the last three years have seen an increase in diversity and inclusion, at least in terms of illustrations of characters with various cultural backgrounds, but not of main characters. Books that talk about hair and race issues are more dominant. I could not say the same in terms of authentic content, where development is still very slow or almost invisible.



“I believe we need more stories of historical and inspirational figures from the African continent.”

3) What do you no longer want to read or see in children’s books? What do we need less of on the children’s book market these days?

Stories that represent the stereotypical Black or African child as a poverty stricken, waiting to be saved by *white* people. Books that only discuss race and hair, in my opinion, divert the development as the everyday life of a child should be included.

4) What do you wish existed on the children’s book market? What stories would you like to read?

I would like to see stories of inspiring heroes from the African continent that have contributed to the change in history. Such as Queen Nzingha of Angola, Yaa Asantewa of Ghana, Queen Dahia - Kahina of Mauritania. I believe we need more stories of historical and inspirational figures from the African continent.

5) Why did you start Habte Books as an independent publishing house and not, for instance, publish your books with an existing publisher?

I first founded Habte Books in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to meet the need for local stories published in local languages due to the dominance of imported children’s books in the market. Upon moving to Germany in 2015, I found that a similar need existed here in terms of the representation of Afrodiaspora children. I did attempt to find publishers for the first book I have developed portraying an Afrodiaspora character, but the response from publishers was not motivating. So I founded Habte Books once more in Germany to produce books that are multilingual and culturally diverse.

“Compared to the last few years, there is a bit of diversity here and there but one still has to do vast and time-consuming research to find books that are inclusive and diverse.”



BIPOC leading by example: Best practice in Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK

BIPOC writers and illustrators are still largely underrepresented in European countries. The following organizations aim to change this – and employ a variety of outstanding strategies to make children’s literature more inclusive!



Ruskeat Tytöt (Brown Girls, Finland) Media is an independent Finnish online publication committed to centring the perspectives of Brown women and people with underrepresented genders in Finnish and Nordic media. 2017 they founded their LIT Academy, offering writing and

media courses to young People of Colour. Engaging with Finnish publishers, publishing their own magazine and video series, and introducing a writing masterclass for emerging talents, Ruskeat Tytöt has become a major influence on the Finnish publishing industry.



LIT QID (Germany) brings together queer BIPOC creators of books for children and young adults to strengthen each other through networking and to exchange knowledge and experiences. Queer BIPOC actors are still highly underrepresented in German-language children’s and

youth literature, and intersectional perspectives are few and far between. LIT QID therefore wants to promote exchange between aspiring and established actors and advocate for equal participation in the children’s and YA book market.



Breaking New Ground (UK) is a project by the literature organization Speaking Volumes in partnership with the Book Trust and pop-up projects celebrating British writers and illustrators of Colour who are creating stories for children and young people. It was launched at the London

Book Fair in 2019 with a booklet featuring over 100 contemporary creators. 30,000 copies of the booklet were distributed to every school in the country, as well as to librarians, festivals, venues, publishers, agents, and all key people working in this sector of literature.



Rose Stories (Netherlands) was founded by Moroccan-Dutch entrepreneur Chafina Bendahman because she believes in the power of the story to bring about positive change by promoting equality and diversity in society.

The publisher's success in doing so is exceptional – besides a wide range of children's and YA books, mostly by creators of Colour, they are highly invested in inclusive talent development and offering mentorship for emerging writers and illustrators.

FAB
PRIZE

The Faber Andlyn (FAB) Prize (UK) was created by Faber & Faber and the Andlyn Literary Agency in 2017 to help discover new writers and illustrators for children from underrepresented backgrounds. Every child deserves to see themselves in books,

and in the authors and illustrators whose work they read. The annual FAB Prize aims to discover and showcase new talent of Colour, closing the gap between what is currently published and the reality for many families.



Inklusive Books

(Norway) is an Oslo-based publishing house, online bookstore, and consultancy. Founder and social entrepreneur Michell Mpike believes that diverse and

inclusive stories are important, for everyone. The independent publishing house aims to be a platform for more diverse authors, illustrators, stories, and characters.



Tebalou (Germany) is a Black-owned online store promoting diversity through play. Here, every child, regardless of skin colour, denomination, family constellation, physique, preferences,

wishes, and dreams, should find positive images to identify with. The store sells books and media, dolls, games, craft materials, and much more.



Each One Teach One e.V. (EOTO) and its project Black Diaspora Library Berlin (Germany) has grown since 2014 into a place where Black, African and Afrodiaspora people shape

the discourse around literature and culture. Around 7,000 books, regular readings and lectures inspire young Black people to be active, creative, explore their own history, and shape their society.

REGINA FELDMANN

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SPOTLIGHT 5

Debut children's book author Regina Feldmann

Regina Feldmann is a 36-year-old business graduate, mother of three, children's book author, and activist. She started writing children's books because she didn't find the diversity that she would have liked for her own children on the German book market. True to the motto "Create the things you wish existed!", Feldmann simply set to work herself.

1) From your perspective, how diverse are children's books in Germany?

Since my own childhood, things have at least moved on to the extent that some children's books sometimes feature a secondary BIPOC character or a disabled child. Of course, this is nowhere near enough and one has to search very hard for these books. I have the feeling that in the last seven years, in which I have meticulously scoured the German children's book market, very little has happened. Diversity and inclusion are unfortunately still not the rule but rather, the exception.

2) Are there developments in the book market, both nationally and globally, that give you hope?

I think it is a good sign that more and more translations of diverse children's books from the USA are appearing on the German market. But these books have a major shortcoming – the realities of American life often have little in common with those of German children. There are also some promising developments around the children's book market. Within the last few years, several online shops have sprung up in Germany that specialize in diverse books. Various collectives are currently forming to network BIPOC who work in the media and create children's books in their own voices. That at least shows me that the demand and the supply is there. Now the publishers just have to follow suit and recognize the potential on the ground.

"Diversity and inclusion are unfortunately still not the rule but rather, the exception."



3) What do you no longer want to read or see in children's books? What do we need less of on the children's book market these days?

Even though some publishers are trying to make their programmes more diverse, disabled children are still often portrayed as needing to be saved and BIPOC kids are marked out as "foreign". Unfortunately, stereotypical racist depictions are still found far too often in children's books. I don't want to see discriminatory language or images in children's books. Removing them does no harm to anyone – quite the contrary.

4) What do you wish existed on the children's book market? What stories would you like to read? In other words, where do you see gaps in content and ideas?

I find it very unfortunate that the children's books on certain key topics, such as "first visit to daycare", "milk teeth" or "potty training" usually have *white* protagonists. There are umpteen different variations of blond children who somehow all look the same. It would already be a great step forward if in just one of these picture book series, a disabled or Black child would explain the world to all the other children.

"I don't want to see discriminatory language or images in children's books. Removing them does no harm to anyone – quite the contrary."

5) You have written children's books yourself and approached German publishers. How have your experiences been so far?

Very mixed. I've had everything from clearly racist statements to genuine interest. The biggest hurdle is always getting through to publishers. I have the feeling that many publishers have almost all their preselection done by agencies, who are relatively risk-averse and not very receptive to unconventional concepts.

6) What changes would you like to see in the publishing world, for example in terms of book selection criteria or publishing structures and BIPOC representation in publishing houses?

I would like two things to happen:

Firstly, for publishers to realize that they need to be much more diverse internally in order to be able to identify and break up entrenched structures. All staff, especially editors, should be trained to be critical of discrimination.

Secondly, for publishers to recognize the importance of books written in people's own voices. And not only on topics like racism or migration. Once this is achieved, the barriers should be lowered so that children's book creators can get through to editors in the first place. This is where publishers could proactively reach out to marginalized people, for example by specifically stating that they are looking for these people on their website. In terms of quality, no compromises are needed, because marginalized people have the potential to create great children's books.

Reflection questions for white-majority teams and institutions

Chantal-Fleur Sandjon

Adapted from an unpublished method developed by Josephine Apraku and Dr Jule Bönkost (founders of the German Institut für diskriminierungsfreie Bildung [Institute for Non-Discriminatory Education]) in 2014.

1.

How do staff position themselves in relation to experiences of discrimination? **Who** holds which position? **Who** is responsible for what?

3.

What spaces for reflection are there to deal with privileges, experiences of discrimination, and barriers to participation on a regular basis, both individually and as a team, and to exchange views on these issues?

2.

How do the freelancers we work with (e.g. illustrators, authors, editors) situate themselves in relation to experiences of discrimination?

4.

For whom do the available or produced media represent positive and diverse identification opportunities? For whom do they not? **Why?**

6.

Does the composition of the staff and freelancers reflect the composition of the target group (children and young people in Germany) in relation to experiences of discrimination? **Where** is this the case, **where not?**

8.

Are similarities or differences between the groups reflected and addressed with their consequences for the production, promotion, or distribution of diversity-appropriate children's literature? **Why? Why not?**

5.

Who speaks in the available or produced media? **Whose** perspectives are centred? **Whose** perspectives are not represented? **What** norms do these media fail to question?

7.

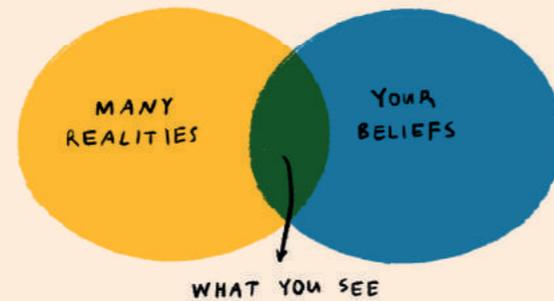
How could structures be created to develop multiple perspectives in the team in the long term and thus (even) more strongly integrate people with different positions and perspectives?

CHALLENGE THE DEFAULT

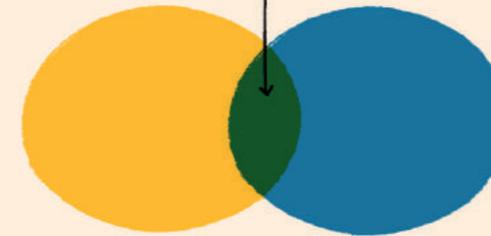
HOW DO WE CHALLENGE THE DEFAULT?

ALL OF US HAVE PRECONCEIVED BIASES REGARDING AGE, CULTURE, RACE, ABILITY, STATUS, SEXUALITY, ... WE HAVE THE TENDENCY TO SEEK, INTERPRET AND REMEMBER INFORMATION IN A WAY THAT SUPPORTS OUR ALREADY EXISTING BELIEFS AND WORLDVIEW.

CONFIRMATION BIAS



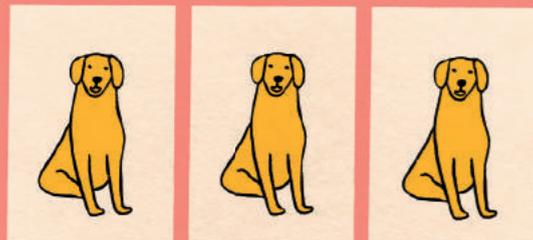
THE DEFAULT



THERE ARE AS MANY REALITIES AS PEOPLE ON THE PLANET BUT BY FOCUSING ON JUST A FEW, WE CREATE THE SO-CALLED "DEFAULT".

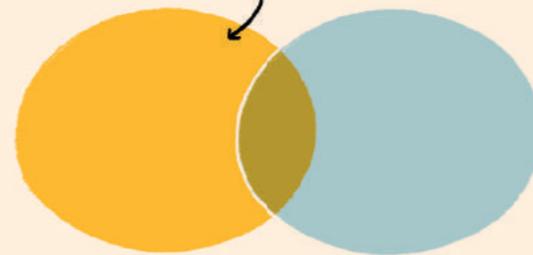


CYNTHIA M. FRISBY TALKS ABOUT A RESEARCH* WHICH SUGGESTS THAT MASS MEDIA HAS STRONG SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS ON VIEWERS.



SO IF WE REPEATEDLY DRAW THE SAME IMAGE OVER AND OVER AGAIN, WE START TO CREATE AN ENFORCED VIEW WHICH EXCLUDES MANY OTHER REALITIES.

EXCLUDED REALITIES

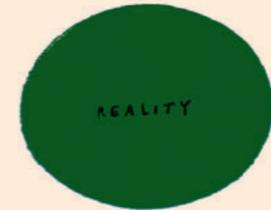
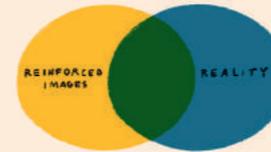


TELEVISION PROGRAMS LIKE SESAME STREET PROVIDE MANY CHILDREN WITH THEIR FIRST EXPOSURE TO PEOPLE OF OTHER ETHNICITIES, RELIGIONS AND CULTURES.



WHAT THEY SEE ON-SCREEN CAN IMPACT THEIR ATTITUDE ABOUT THE TREATMENT OF OTHERS.

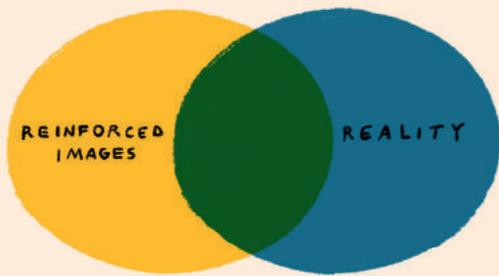
*Cynthia M. Frisby How you see me, How you don't: Essays on stereotypes and representations in media of minorities, adolescents, and women



ONE STUDY* FOUND THAT TWO YEARS OF VIEWING SESAME STREET BY PRESCHOOLERS LIVING IN THE US WAS ASSOCIATED WITH MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS RACIALIZED PEOPLE.

ANOTHER STUDY* FOUND THAT WHITE CHILDREN EXPOSED TO NEGATIVE EXAMPLES IN TELEVISION OF BLACK PEOPLE HAD A NEGATIVE CHANGE IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS BLACK PEOPLE.

SO WHEN CERTAIN IMAGES AND IDEALS PRESENTED TO CHILDREN ARE REINFORCED OVER YEARS OF CONSUMING MEDIA...



THEREFORE, IF CHILDREN SEE IMAGES IN BOOKS AND ARE UNABLE TO MAKE A COMPARISON WITHIN REAL LIFE, THESE IMAGES WILL THEN BECOME REALITY TO THEM.

... THE IMAGES AND REPRESENTATIONS BECOME THEIR REALITY.

WITHOUT CHANGES MADE IN THE BOOKS, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THESE UNREALISTIC AND INACCURATE STEREOTYPES WILL BE UNCHANGABLE.

*Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger, and Wright, 2001; Ball and Bogartz, 1970; Huston and Wright, 1998

** Tan, Fujioka, and Tan, 2000

Building community: Reflections on a writing workshop for BIPOC in Helsinki

As part of the DRIN events in 2021, we held a workshop for BIPOC interested in writing children's books in Helsinki, Finland. Over one week in August, the participants came together for writing sessions, received input on the craft of writing, did a session on illustrations, and overall started to grow more confident in their own work and in the support they could give each other on their writing journeys.

Any creative endeavour demands self-authorization from us, the assurance that our perception of the world and what we notice within it (and within ourselves) matters. For People of Colour whose perspectives are constantly being marginalized and nullified

in European contexts, creating art in any way, telling or illustrating stories for instance, can become a great act of empowerment.

Being part of a group that can relate to one's own trials and triumphs, having others with more experience around who can act as role models and share their creative lessons, can help tremendously in committing to completing a story and sharing it with the world.

Here some of the participants from the Helsinki writing workshop share their thoughts on the importance of such safer spaces for emerging writers of Colour:

I have benefitted a lot from the talks with the tutors, it has been good that they work in different roles. Some do more writing and some more illustrations. To me the workshop has been a push to start my process, to bring my book ideas to reality. I am more confident now to work on my own book.

I've loved the writing exercises which gave me a way back into writing and finally finishing my story. I also got the spark of writing back. Something else I am really benefitting from is the networking of writers here in Helsinki that we are building. I've now got people around me who give me feedback and who are also aiming to write stories for children.

I have started writing again and found a network with whom to share the process. I learned new ways to approach children's books, for example how you can take illustration into consideration in the writing process. The workshop also gave me:

- *ideas on the importance of regular writing*
- *book tips*
- *the realization that there is more than one way to approach the story – as an architect or gardener*
- *encouragement to start writing*
- *a community*

Where to go from here? This is just the beginning...

Warda Ahmed, Jasmina El Bouamraoui, and Chantal-Fleur Sandjon

Justice, equality, diversity, and inclusion affect us all. We can talk about them from our own experiences and from our own hearts. But we can also take a look at the numbers:

In 2018 in the UK 33.1% of pupils were of so-called minority ethnic origin – as were only 4% of the main characters in children's books published in the same year.

The first language of 20.9% of primary school pupils in the UK is not English; 28.9% of nursery age children speak another first language.

In 2017 36% of children and young adults in Germany had a so-called migration background. In cities they made up 49% of all children. Hard to call that a minority experience anymore, right? Especially when looking at it from a broader perspectives: Those deemed minorities in Germany and other North European countries belong to

the global majority of Brown and Black people worldwide.

Be(come) an observer!

Yet, there is still neither enough BIPOC representation in children's literature from North European countries nor enough research and statistics on it. We encourage you to create your own explorative study – and send us the results. Pick 100 children's books in any library near you and take a look at the main characters in them. Or browse the new releases in your country and analyse them with regards to the main characters' race. When we have so few statistics, we all have to become observers of the world we live in and the worlds we find in books.

Be(come) a change agent!

As long as the children in books do not even come close in their diversity to the realities and experiences of the children that engage with these stories, as long as the professionals involved in creating and distributing, promoting, and acquiring these books do not represent the hyperdiverse societies we live in today, we have a long way to go to create a truly diverse and inclusive children's literature.

Thus, DRIN will continue contributing to debates in the broader children's literature industry. It will continue empowering BIPOC creators to tell their own stories, supporting networks to critique norms, educating *white* publishing professionals to foster change in the industry, working with librarians and everyone else who puts books into children's hands – and gives them mirrors and windows on the world.

There are as many perspectives as people on the planet and we hope to add some of them to the next version of this publication, which will grow and evolve with us and the book market over time. We look forward to more collaborations across borders, to more impactful conversations that lead to actions, to more diverse creators entering the children's book market. We can reshape and reimagine children's literature, together.

DRIN Co-Creators

Warda Ahmed

is a Finnish–Somali comic artist, teacher, and illustrator who lives and works in the Helsinki metropolitan area. As an anti-racist feminist, she takes part in the public discourse on structures that make our societies more unequal. Recently, she has worked in the Comics and Migration project, funded by Kone Foundation. With the working group Sisaret 1918 (Sisters 1918) she won the Finlandia prize for comics in 2019.

EL BOUM, Jasmina El Bouamraoui

is a German-Moroccan illustrator from Berlin. Inspired by queer aesthetics and the city's unconventional spirit they create fun characters within a bright and popping colour range. Not drawn to the usual, they invite the viewer to question stereotypes of all kinds. Queer and decolonial politics have a decisive influence on their work.

Chantal-Fleur Sandjon

is an Afro-German writer and editor. She has already published numerous books, including a children's non-fiction book and a novel for young people. She is interested in decolonizing language and narratives. She is currently working on a queer Black youth novel in verse, for which she has received a grant from the German Literature Fund; it will be published in 2022.

Joshua Kwesi Aikins

is a political scientist, human rights activist, and senior research scientist at the civil society organization Citizens For Europe in Berlin, Germany. He is doing his PhD at the University of Kassel, where he teaches about decolonial perspectives on development and indigenous political authorities in Ghana.

Prof. Dr. Maisha Auma

has been Professor for Childhood and Difference (Diversity Studies) at the University for Applied Sciences, Magdeburg-Stendal, since April 2008. She is currently a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies of the Technical Univer-

sity Berlin (2020/2021). She has been active in the Black queer-feminist collective Generation Adefra, Black Women in Germany since 1993.

Enajite Efemuaye

is the managing editor at Kachifo Limited, based in Lagos, Nigeria. She is also a freelance writer and graphic artist. Her work has appeared in African Independent, sabinews.com, brittle-paper.com, Ake Review, and This is Africa.

Leslie Kuo

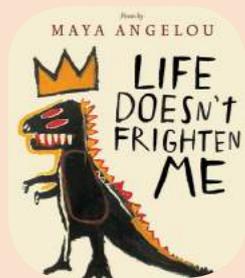
is a designer, librarian and Person of Colour. Born as a child of immigrants in the United States, she has lived in Germany as an immigrant herself since 2006. She holds degrees from

Yale University and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Since 2018, she has worked at the Stadtbibliothek Pankow (Pankow Public Library District) in Berlin, Germany as the 360° Diversity Agent.

Eliphas Nyamogo

is currently the head of the Goethe-Institut's online editorial office in Munich. He previously worked as the head of information and library services at the Goethe-Institut in Nairobi from 2002 to 2017. Together with the editorial team, he developed the project Latitude. He continues to curate the content and develop other formats for publication in the magazine.

Recommended: Beloved books by BIPOC and *white* creators

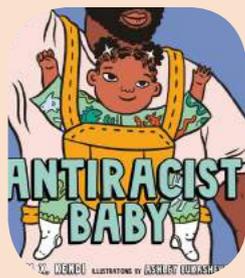


Angelou, Maya / Jean-Michel Basquiat (ill.) (2018): **Life Doesn't Frighten Me**

Ages: 6+

“This book is a poem about fears with a kind of refrain: “Life doesn’t frighten me at all.” One verse refers to anti-Black racism. The text is powerful, rhythmic, empowering, and targets children’s strengths; it is written by a great Black poet and illustrated in a sophisticated and unconventional way by a great Black artist. This is what I call a new narrative in children’s literature – although it was published in 1983.”

Andrea Karimé, author, Germany

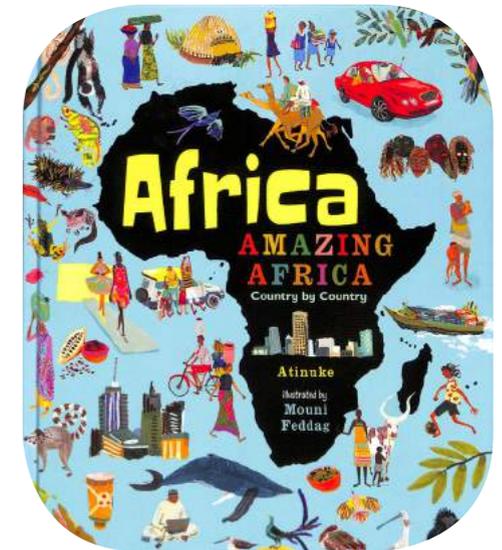


Kendi, Ibram X. / Ashley Lukashevsky (ill.) (2020): **Antiracist Baby**

Ages: 0+

“I love this book because it names racism as not just the problems of the adult world, but a system of beliefs, practices, and policies that influence children’s perceptions and experiences at a very early age. It urges and guides parents to talk about racism. It also does a great job representing parents with diverse backgrounds and identities.”

Tuğçe Aral, research associate and aspiring children’s book writer, Germany



Atinuke / Feddag, Mouni (ill.) (2019): **Africa, Amazing Africa**

Ages: 6+

“As the International Youth Library, we compile around 200 international children’s and youth literature titles each year in the White Ravens catalogue, with brief notes on the books. One of the books that excited us in 2021 is Africa, Amazing Africa. Through her entertaining and informative short texts, Nigerian-British author Atinuke successfully challenges stereotypical depictions of Africa as she highlights the diversity of the fifty-five African countries she introduces. Though she sometimes perpetuates existing clichés, the renditions of traffic jams in Lagos (Nigeria) and skyscrapers in Luanda (Angola) clearly dispute them by attesting to modern city life. Far from claiming to be a comprehensive encyclopaedia of Africa (if such a thing were even possible), this book offers a kaleidoscope of snapshots, curious details, and personal impressions.”

Ines Galling, editor, Germany

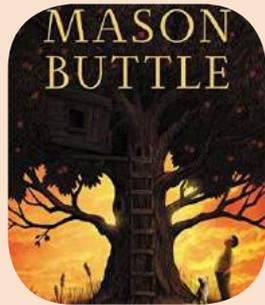


Lee, Hannah / Fatimaharan, Allen (2019): **My Hair**

Ages: 4+

“Join one girl’s search for the BEST party hair – as demonstrated by her family and friends. Will it be locs or a twist out? Braids or a high-top fade? Joyous and vibrant, this captures perfectly the excitement of getting ready for festivities, as well as showcasing a dazzling array of intricate hairstyles. We’ve read this one to bits; it’s a true celebration of Black hair every day.”

Emily Joof, writer and education advisor, Sweden and The Gambia



**Connor, Leslie (2018):
The Truth as Told by Mason Buttle**

(German translation by André Mumot, Die ganze Wahrheit [wie Mason Buttle sie erzählt], 2021).
Ages: 8+

“I loved reading this story because it is told from the view of such a lovable and unique character. Mason Buttle is a little slow on the uptake and gets bullied for it. But the thoughtful way he tells his story makes the reader slow down too and reflect about the things that really matter. The book highlighted, for me, the value of diverse children’s literature: of looking at things from another angle and offering new perspectives.”

Ronja Fischer, press and events manager for children’s books, Germany



**Joof, Emily (2021):
Ballet with Heart**

“Join Louis and Ella on a new adventure as they start ballet classes. Together they meet new friends and challenge themselves to fulfil their dreams to dance with heart. A heartwarming, inclusive story of friendship and perseverance. Ballet with Heart highlights boys in ballet, as well as classical dance for children of all abilities, genders, and races. The book includes a wonderful interview with principal dancer at LINES Ballet Adji Cissoko and an afterword by professional ballet dancers and teachers Gina Tse and Clyde Emmanuel Archer.”

Emily Joof, writer and education advisor, Sweden and The Gambia



**Joof, Emily / Ruta, Matilda (ill.) (2021):
Det Djupa Blå**
(The Deep Blue [Swedish])

“The sea is big when you are small. Many children are sometimes afraid of water and what might be lurking under the surface. This book is about being afraid of the unknown depths, but nevertheless approaching them in small steps. A book that encourages and inspires with beautiful watercolour pictures.”

Emily Joof, writer and education advisor, Sweden and The Gambia



**Karimé, Andrea / Rasmus, Jens (ill.) (2017):
King kommt noch**
(King is still coming [German])
Ages: 6+

“In this book Karimé impressively demonstrates how narratives change when perspectives shift and object–subject relations are redefined. She tells an empowering story of seeing asylum from the seeker’s perspective. After arriving in Germany, the young first-person narrator wonders about people who shovel dog poo into bags every day and about rubbish bins that are locked in cages. And he misses his dog, who he had to leave behind. Themes of friendship and loss provide a common thread that many children can pick up on. Accurate observation, age-appropriate poetic language and subtle humour that avoids slapstick stereotyping make this book stand out from the multitude of escape-centred narratives.”

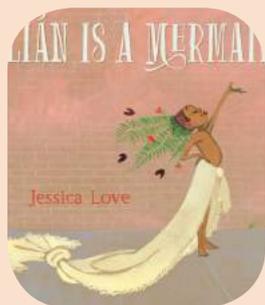
Chantal-Fleur Sandjon, author and editor, Germany



Kermani, Navid / Teich, Karsten (ill.) (2017):
Ayda, Bär und Hase
 (Ayda, Bear, and Rabbit [German])
 Ages: 6+

“Ayda, the Iranian-German main protagonist, is initially quite angry and sad because others only call her ‘nipper’. But then she meets Bear and Rabbit, who become the friends she has longed for, and comforts her dad when the first day of school comes around. FC Köln loses again, while she dreams of the baklava from the bakery next door. Multiple affiliations and multilingualism are self-evident components of this story, which gives readers an idea of how deeply one has to be rooted in the underlying reality to be able to bring it to life. Above all, it is simply fun.”

Chantal-Fleur Sandjon, author and editor, Germany



Love, Jessica (2019):
Julian is a Mermaid
 (German translation by Tatjana Kröll, Julian ist eine Meerjungfrau, 2020)
 Ages: 4+

“This children’s book is about a Black gender nonconforming or trans child who wants to be a mermaid. It has very little text, a great story, and stunning illustrations. I particularly like the body positivity in the illustrations, which I think is neglected in many children’s books.”*

Regina Feldmann, author, Germany



Mian, Zanib / Mafaridik, Nasaya (ill.)
(2019 and later):
Planet Omar (Series)
 Ages: 8+

“This is one of my favourite children’s books at the moment and has been for a while. It’s a chapter book that was published in 2019, and I love it because it’s centred around a Muslim boy and his family, and manages to address racism and bullying in a way that’s clever and accessible for children. It’s also very sweet and funny, and a book that all children can enjoy – a classic in the making!”

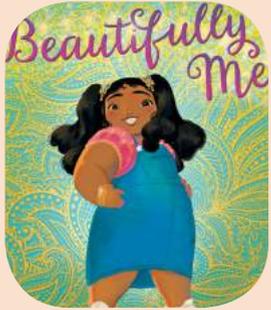
Lucy Farfort, illustrator, UK



Bryon, Nathan / Adeola, Dapo (ill.) (2019):
Look Up!
 Ages: 4+

“My daughter adores this book and I love reading it to her aloud. It is a quirky, well-crafted and empowering story about a girl named Rocket who wants to become an outstanding astronaut and explorer just like Mae Jemison, the first Black woman in space. The book opens up vast expanses and distant worlds for Black children, yet anchors them in the everyday. It allows the Black protagonist to dream, to imagine manifold futures for herself, and shows her as active, taking the initiative to mobilize her whole neighbourhood to gaze at a meteor shower.”

Chantal-Fleur Sandjon, author and editor, Germany



Noor, Nabela / Ali, Nabi H. (ill.) (2021):
Beautifully Me

Ages: 4+

“From designer, creator, and self-love advocate Nabela Noor comes a much-needed picture book about loving yourself just as you are. A beautiful story that celebrates body acceptance and self-love.”

Emily Joof, writer and education advisor, Sweden and The Gambia



Parvela, Timo / Sortland, Bjørn / Pitkänen,
Pasi (ill.) (2017 and later):
Kepler62

(Series, originally in Finnish, widely translated)

Ages: 10+

“Recently I have read quite a few children’s books, and would recommend Kepler62. The themes it covers are heavy and topical, but they are well addressed. It’s lovely to read the fruits of an international collaboration: this made the reading experience even more interesting for me. And it confirmed the feeling that the concerns raised in the series are global and should matter to all of us.”

Maryam “Mellu” Abuzaid-Ryu, illustrator, Finland

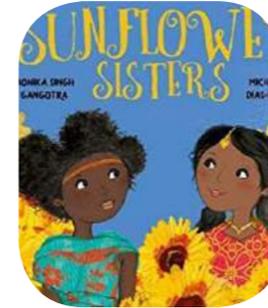


Sánchez Vegara, María Isabel et al. (2014 and later):
Little People, Big Dreams (Series)

Ages: 4+

“This highly popular series has various heroes and sheroes that children did not get to read or hear much about before like Harriet Tubman, Josephine Baker, and Maya Angelou. They can be great role models and have a positive impact for kids of all backgrounds.”

Fitsame Teferra Woldemichael, publisher, Germany

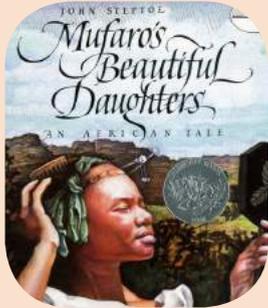


Singh Gangotra, Monika /
Dias-Hayes, Michaela (ill.) (2021):
Sunflower Sisters

Ages: 4+

“The first in a new, uplifting picture book series, Sunflower Sisters centres around best friends Amrita and Kiki. While the story offers a window on the lived experiences of people affected by colourism, it also celebrates the joy of the two girls experiencing each other’s South Asian and Nigerian communities and traditions, in this case weddings. A story about a Nigerian–Indian friendship – a match I’ve been waiting for!”

Emily Joof, writer and education advisor, Sweden and The Gambia

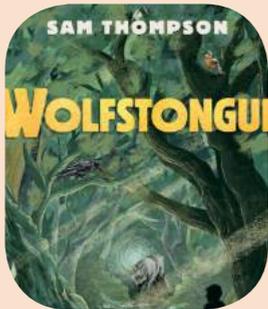


**Steptoe, John (1997):
Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters**

Ages: 5+

"I am currently enjoying reading this with my 7-year-old daughter. Set in Zimbabwe, Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters is about two very different sisters who set out on a journey to meet the king who is looking for a wife. Yes, I know, the old fairytale cliché.... But I love fairytales and fantasy stories, with enchanted places and creatures, and the illustrations in this book are very detailed and beautiful."

Mirjam Nuenning, educator and translator, Germany



**Thompson, Sam (2021) / Anna Tromop (ill.):
Wolfstongue**

Ages: 9+

"This stunning fantasy adventure explores themes of neurodiversity and inclusion for middle-grade readers. It follows a young boy named Silas who struggles to get his words out, and finds himself drawn into the hidden world of the Forest, where language is power."

Kate McNamara, marketing manager for children's books, Ireland



**Trần, Hoa Mai (ed.) / Schultz, Michaela (ill.) (2020):
Wir Kinder aus dem (Flüchtlings) Heim**

(We Children from the [Refugee] Centre [German])

Ages: 6+

"Even the title of Hoa Mai Trần's participatory children's book project promises empowerment – "refugee" is crossed out in red. This book does not let any stereotypes about refugees into its pages: the children prefer to transform into Batman and Wonder Woman and fight grumbling zombie security guards. Created in cooperation with refugee children, the Cool Kids, it is available in bilingual editions, with text in both German and Arabic, Kurmancî, Tigrinya, English, or Farsi."

Chantal-Fleur Sandjon, author and editor, Germany



**Autere, Kuura / Sarajärvi, Tina (ill.):
Lohikäärme, jolla oli keltaiset varpaat**

(The Dragon who had Yellow Toes [Finnish])

"A dragon with yellow toes tells the story of the birth of an intersex dragon baby. It is a story of parents' love and their positive curiosity about the emerging little one, and the importance of community support for family well-being. It is the first children's book in Finnish on the subject. For adult readers, the book provides a model for how to talk about these important topics with children."

Kuura Autere, social psychologist, early childhood educator and writer, Finland

Affirmations for People of Colour
who create worlds for children

I believe in my roots and my wings.

**I give thanks for
the child that I once was
the person that I am today
the creative healer that
I am becoming.**

**There is a child out there for
whom my art is their first mirror.
I create for this child today.**

**I create utopias that we can live in
- and call them home.**

**I am my ancestors' dreams of an-
other tomorrow manifesting today.**

**My art, my vision, my message
matter to me. And they matter to
the world, too.**

**I offer the world the gift
of my stories.**

**I am not afraid of myself when I
create. When I create, I am nothing,
and I am everything.**

**I never create alone. I stand on
the shoulders of giants, with my
siblings right next to me.
We are a multitude of voices and
perspectives, of myths and
cosmovisions, of pasts and futures.**

**I let go of representation pressure.
I let go of representation pressure.
I let go of representation pressure.**

**My ancestors always guide me –
those whose work inspires my own
as well as those whose lives are
linked to my own.**

**I grant myself permission to
create freely and boldly,
envision new and other worlds
that already exist inside of me.**

IMPRINT

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