

Nadia Mansour and Michelle H. Martin

What Can Danish Multicultural Children's Literature and African American Children's Literature Learn from Each Other?

Literary Histories in Dialogue

*Abstract: In its pedagogical context, multicultural literature is defined as an instrument for multicultural education that seeks to include and raise the voices of historically silenced and invisible minorities in the school curriculum. The contemporary American definition of multicultural literature emphasizes #OwnVoices and elevates authentic stories from insider perspectives, while in Denmark, no clear line is drawn between the author's background and the literary content when categorizing multicultural literature that depicts minorities' experiences. In this article, an African American scholar and a Danish scholar will put Danish and African American children's literary histories in dialogue with one another and ask what Danish multicultural literature can learn from existing definitions within American multicultural and African American children's literature, formulated by Rudine Sims Bishop, Mingshui Cai, and Michelle H. Martin. They will also address what literary movements and practices might be adapted to facilitate a more welcoming space for minority stories in Danish literature. In the United States, lively conversations are occurring about insiders vs. outsiders, #OwnVoices, and stereotypes; what are the implications for Danish children's literature? The writers will analyze recently published works from each country that depicts the lives of minoritized people such as Özlem Cekic and Dorte Karrebæk's *Ayse får en lillebror* (2018) and Derrick Barnes and Gordon C. James's *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* (2017). This comparative analysis will highlight how marginalized and silenced voices bring new perspectives and fresh ideas into the cultural conversations of each country that would otherwise go unrepresented in children's literature.*

Keywords: categorizing literature, Denmark, United States, literary definition, pedagogical definition, insiders vs. outsiders, silenced minorities, authenticity

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Introduction

Nadia: I am a Palestinian refugee who was born in a refugee camp in Lebanon and raised as a minority in Denmark, where many minority groups live. I grew up living between a host of different cultures. Not having grown up as a white Dane, I have personally experienced the lack of positive representations of minoritized cultures in children's books – books that still fail to represent the people I see in my everyday life in Denmark. Since my research about multicultural literature in Denmark draws on American research on African American literature and multicultural literature, I spent three months at the University of Washington in Seattle as a Visiting Doctoral Scholar as a part of my Ph.D. program at the University of Aarhus in Denmark. I contacted Dr. Michelle Martin because her groundbreaking work explores how characters have been depicted historically in African American children's picture books. I wanted to learn more about her work and get to know more about the struggle as African American writers' books entered book markets, libraries, and schools in the United States. During my studies in Seattle, we discussed many issues about literature and the literary history of the two countries. These discussions made clear to me that we cannot use the same labels that are used in the United States to describe Danish phenomena, since we have both different literary traditions and also different histories of minority marginalization in schools and in society. Still, enough parallels exist between the two to prompt me to consider how the history of African American children's literature could inform my study of multicultural literature and education in Denmark. Since racism has not yet been systematically examined in Danish children's picture books, my research differs markedly from Martin's.

Michelle: When Nadia contacted me through a mutual scholar-friend, Philip Nel, to ask whether she might come to the University of Washington as a Visiting Scholar for three months, I was both flattered and puzzled: what could a Danish doctoral student learn from me, a scholar of African American children's literature? The more she explained her project, the easier it was to answer that question, and the more I realized how much I would also learn from her. That has come to pass. In this essay, we offer our perspectives on what American and Danish multicultural children's literature can learn from one another. Our awareness of how differently these literatures have evolved in our respective countries has led us to this work, and since we believe that more scholarly cross-cultural conversations will help us all to solve thorny and persistent challenges in the genre – perhaps historical ones – we would like to encourage other

scholars of children's and young adult literature to dive into these international cross-cultural conversations about the diversification of the literature for young people in particular countries.

Background

For decades, multicultural children's books in the United States have been a prominent way of celebrating – however imperfectly – ethnic and cultural diversity as a strength of American identity. In contrast, discussions about multicultural children's literature are just beginning in Denmark. While the United States and Denmark have very different histories regarding diversity, Denmark is much more diverse now than it was 35 years ago (“Befolkningsfremskrivning”), but cultural and religious traditions other than those depicting the Danish majority culture still rarely appear in Danish children's literature.

The lack of diversity in American children's literature has likewise been persistent. Nancy Larrick published her whistleblowing essay on September 11, 1965 in the *New York Times*, “The All-White World of Children's Books,” in which she offered eye-opening statistical evidence of the lack of diversity in American children's literature. After examining 5,206 children's books published between 1962 and 1964 by 63 publishers, Larrick determined that only 6.4 % of those texts (349 total) included black characters in the illustrations, and 60 % of these stories were set outside of the United States or prior to World War II (64). On March 15, 2014, nearly 50 years later, long-time children's and young adult author Walter Dean Myers, who also served as the Library of Congress Ambassador for Young People's Literature, and his son, author, artist, and now publisher Christopher Myers, published complementary *New York Times* op-ed pieces, posing virtually the same question: “Where are the People of Color in Children's Books?” and “The Apartheid of Children's Literature,” respectively. In contrast, these parallel questions concerning diverse representation have only recently been raised in Denmark; Mansour has studied minorities in children's and YA literature, and she has done so by drawing on research from discussions in the United States and comparing those with conversations in Denmark. This essay details the Danish and American definitions that Mansour considers in crafting her own definition of multicultural literature and education in Denmark.

Furthermore, while comparing the Danish and American contexts, one should note that the United States has always had immi-

grants (some who moved voluntarily and many who were moved by force as in chattel slavery), and indigenous people have also been minoritised. As a result, the United States has always been a culture marked by struggles for citizenship, equal rights, and power. In contrast, Denmark did not experience a large inflow of migrants and refugees until the second half of the twentieth century (Kong-slien). For this reason, Denmark's dialogues about race, migration, and "Danishness" versus foreignness, are more recent than in the United States.

Multicultural Children's Literature in the United States

Discussions about African American children's literature emerged more than 130 years ago in the United States. In Violet J. Harris's 1990 foundational article, "African American Children's Literature: The First One Hundred Years" in *The Journal of Negro Education*, she opens noting that although "African Americans have been depicted in general literature since the seventeenth century," these were typically pejorative, stereotypical, negative, and generally written by outsiders to the culture and therefore inauthentic (540). While the majority of Harris's overview discusses twentieth century writers and texts, Katharine Capshaw and Anna Mae Duane's recent co-edited anthology, *Who Writes for Black Children? African American Children's Literature Before 1900* (2017), takes an archival approach to the genre, offering analyses of texts by, about, and for black children by both African American and white authors that were written much earlier than most scholars have defined the genre.

Although Capshaw and Duane's work contradicts that of Harris, who notes that literature created for African American children by African Americans first appeared in the nineteenth century, Harris's point about the exclusion of this literature from school curricula is still valid and relevant: "This literature has never been a central component of schooling" (540). She blames the literary canon for this omission. And while many school systems do still adhere to the literary canon, which is composed primarily of works by dead white men, most American K-12 (primary and secondary) schools do integrate some multicultural texts into students' reading, even if that occurs only during Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, etc. Most American students read and study African American texts like Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014) and/or Christopher Paul Curtis's *Bud, Not*

Buddy (1999), to name a few, at some point during school. In addition, picture books by artists like Jerry Pinkney, Tom Feelings, Faith Ringgold, R. Gregory Christie, Bryan Collier, and Natasha Anastasia Tarpley are typically purchased for school libraries and shared in preschool and elementary classrooms in the United States. Further fueling this change toward diversifying children's literature more recently are contemporary movements like #WeNeedDiverseBooks, #WeNeedDiverseReviewers, and #ReadingWhileWhite, which have made the American publishing industry more aware of where their gaps lie. Publishers are starting to understand that excuses such as that books about children and teens of color don't sell as well as books about white characters will no longer suffice. Furthermore, publishers' clientele is rapidly changing: according to recent research on the 2020 Census, children of color are projected to become the majority by the middle of 2020 (Sáenz and Poston, "Children of Color Projected"; Sáenz and Poston, "Children of Color Already"). These changing demographics and pressure on the publishing industry from those who advocate for more diversity are also forcing powerful "gatekeepers" like the American Library Association (ALA), that grants most of the major children's book awards, to work toward diversifying representation on their committees, which are still largely white, middle class, and female.

The ALA has been getting pressure to make changes in the process for selecting award books since, for too long, books by and about people of color were not getting fair consideration, which especially holds true for awards not specifically for minority-focused books (such as the Coretta Scott King and Pura Belpré Awards, which *must* be awarded to creators from African American and Latinx backgrounds, respectively). As a result, the last several years of the ALA Youth Media Awards have seen a larger number of awards go to diverse books and #OwnVoices writers than in the entire history of the awards (Yorio). In 2019, nearly 40 books with diverse content won ALA Youth Media Awards ("Multicultural 2019"). This was unprecedented but also demonstrates the power of social activism to shift the practices of the publishing industry to better serve the public when it has historically placed profit above everything in decisions about what to publish.

While the American children's book industry's publications as a whole still do not reflect the diversity of those who read children's books, the statistics collected by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, that has documented diversity in American children's literature since 1985, are showing signs of improvement, which we hope

will continue. On the other hand, the development of multicultural children's literature in Denmark is unfolding in a very different way than it has in the United States, though lessons learned in the United States might have useful implications for Danish children's literature and vice versa.

Multicultural Children's Literature in Denmark

The emergence of multicultural literature for young people in Denmark draws on American research about multicultural literature and its pedagogical potential in schools. Efforts in Denmark are focused on raising the voices of Denmark's silenced minorities and representing diversity through literature. Since Danish society has a different history of migration and a different political situation than the United States, we argue that the Danish concept of multicultural literature has to be discussed in context and in dialogue with research from the United States and other countries – research that deals with literary inclusion and equitably educating all students. The literary inclusion of minorities and people of color has to be seen in the context of the political, cultural, sociological, and literary realities in Denmark (Mansour, "Multikulturel ungdomslitteratur" 23). For example, in Danish schools, books under the subject "Danish" help students develop their personal and cultural identity ("Dansk Fælles Mål"). Given the number of hours children spend in school, the subject Danish has a significant influence on students' identity and cultural development (Holmen 31). They read literature to better understand themselves, others, the society in which they live, and the world of which they are a part. Problematically, studies of the Danish curriculum show that instead of urging teachers to use diverse literature to accomplish this goal, teachers are encouraged to use literature by canonical Danish authors that contribute to students developing a monocultural, national identity (Rørbech 100). In contrast, Danish Public School Law requires teachers to take the students' experiences and knowledge into account when planning their classes. Given this mandate, it becomes relevant to ask whether all students' experiences are reflected in the choice of literature and in the approaches to reading the literature.

The emergence and integration of multiculturalism in the United States and school curriculum can inform the discussion of multiculturalism in Danish children's literature. One might critically ask of Denmark the same questions that African Americans in the United States were asking in the 1920s during the Harlem Renaissance:

where are the voices and experiences of minorities in the curriculum? And how, if at all, are minorities represented? According to Mingshui Cai, the rise of multicultural literature in the United States was a political, rather than literary movement (Cai, *Multicultural Literature* 3), although we will add that the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement certainly fueled its development. James Banks notes that multiculturalism grew out of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s and also as a result of the growing attention to multicultural education and teaching (“Multicultural Education” 10).

The term “multicultural literature” is directly connected with issues of power and enabling minority voices to be heard in the school curriculum (Cai and Bishop 59). The educational function of multicultural literature emphasizes the important role that teachers play in addressing issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in schools so that every child feels welcome, respects others, and builds cultural awareness and skills that are essential for children becoming global citizens. Curriculum reform is one means by which teachers and schools can and should start changing education to include the voices of minorities. Banks creates a curriculum hierarchy showing that multicultural curriculum reform cannot be effective as an “add-on” to curricula, but rather that it needs to permeate the curriculum (255). Researchers in multicultural education argue: “It is not who the teachers and the students are in a particular school but what they do that makes an education multicultural” (Stanton and Rios 4). Multicultural education is not only about recognizing minorities; it should develop *all* students’ cultural perspectives (Cai, *Multicultural Literature* 167). This emphasizes two important ideas, on which Mansour’s research builds. The first one takes as a given Banks’ argument that the aim of multicultural curriculum reform is to change the structure of the curriculum to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of those from diverse ethnic and cultural groups (“Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum” 255). The second is to enable students to make decisions on important social issues and take action to solve them. This level of curriculum requires a change in schools not only for minorities, but for all students. These ideas relate to Banks’ view on identity and culture:

American youths are members of many different cultural groups and have multiple group attachments and identifications. An American child can be simultaneously a Baptist, a southerner, a Girl Scout, a female, an Anglo-Saxon, and an Appalachian. (Banks, *Educating Citizens* 120)

Banks presents a theory in which culture and identities are fluid and dynamic – an idea that also emerges in Critical Race Theory through Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality (Coaston). An individual is never only connected to one identity or one culture. One can be part of several and contradictory groups, and cultures are never fixed since every individual develops cultures over time. According to Stuart Hall, it is “participants in a culture who give meaning to people, objects and events. Things ‘in themselves’ rarely if ever have one, single, fixed and unchanging meaning” (3). We meet each other (more than ever before) across cultures. For instance, the internet can reduce the distance between cultures. Furthermore, currently 244 million people live outside of the country where they were born, which fosters opportunities to cross cultures (Nel 357).

This fluid view of identities and cultures is important when defining multicultural literature in a Danish context. One cannot connect a specific culture to specific students, and the same applies when defining multicultural literature. Drawing on the American discussions about insider-outsider perspectives and authenticity in literature, different patterns and discussions appear in Denmark and force researchers to discuss and create fluid understandings when defining multicultural literature.

Terminology in the United States and Denmark

In the United States, Mingshui Cai and Rudine Sims Bishop offer the definition of multicultural literature for youth that is most useful for the Danish context. In Cai and Bishop’s understanding of multicultural literature, the term implies the goal of challenging the existing canon in the United States by expanding the curriculum to include literature that depicts the variety of cultural groups in American society (58). In Cai and Bishop’s configuration, the term is primarily pedagogical rather than literary; hence, they do not suggest that any particular unifying literary characteristics define multicultural literature. Instead, they present an understanding of multicultural literature as an umbrella term that includes three kinds of literature: world literature, cross-cultural literature, and literature from parallel cultures (Cai and Bishop 62). Under the rubric “world literature,” they include literature from “non-Western countries or other underrepresented groups outside the United States” (63). They include folktales and fiction from what they also label “root cultures” of non-Western countries. “Cross-cultural literature” is either books about a given cultural group by a writer from another cultural group or books ex-

PLICITLY about interrelations between people from different cultures. “Parallel culture literature” is literature written by an insider about his own minority culture. The author represents the experience and “self-image developed as a result of being acculturated and socialized within a group” (66). Cai and Bishop state that cross-cultural literature must be chosen carefully. They prefer parallel culture literature and argue that this insider perspective has an important role to play in multicultural literature programs, “to promote understanding of parallel cultural groups and to help students from those groups develop a sense of cultural identity” (68).

Editors Maria Andersson and Elina Druker also employ this classification by geographical and cultural boundaries in their Swedish book *Mångkulturell barn- och ungdomslitteratur: Analyser* (Multicultural Children’s and YA Literature: Analyses, 2017)). They discuss and apply the concept of multicultural literature based on Cai and Bishop’s understanding of the term. However, Andersson and Druker are skeptical of two phenomena: the desire of multiculturalists to portray minorities positively, which may overlook social conflicts within a minority group, and the risk that the concept of multiculturalism will lead to the reproduction of existing power dynamics between majority and minority cultures (11).

While the majority of the critical discussions about multiculturalism in Denmark have focused on adult literature, in Finland, the literary and educational researchers Juli-Anna Aerila and Lydia Kokkola write explicitly about the role of multicultural literature in education and urge immigrant writers for young people to write multicultural literature that is authentic, of high quality, and that represents immigrant themes positively (48). They show how few Finnish children’s texts are written with authentic, multicultural themes. According to these Finnish researchers, the authenticity of the literature is assured when the authors themselves come from the cultures the literature reflects. Jaana Pesonen provides more nuanced insights into these matters in her article in this special issue.

In Denmark, terminology about this literature is still quite contested. Researchers use the terms “indvandrerlitteratur” (migrant literature), “indvandrerforfatter” (migrant author, Albertsen), and “migrationslitteratur” (migration literature, Frank) in their research about books written by authors with minority backgrounds or books about migrants, but none of these scholars conduct research on literature for young people. Some use the label “multikulturel litteratur” (multicultural literature) but with no clear definition of it. Ingeborg Kongslien describes the multicultural literary landscape in Norway,

Sweden, and Denmark in her 2007 article “New Voices, New Themes, New Perspectives: Contemporary Scandinavian Multicultural Literature” (2007). Here Kongslien uses “multicultural literature” to indicate that “migration leads to diversity in society” (199). In her study, she investigates how the process and result of cultural meetings demand new narratives. While Kongslien deals with a broader conception of multicultural literature, her article reflects the time in which she wrote it (2007), when literature about cultural meetings, integration, and identity dealt solely with migrant themes. Therefore, it is not clear how migration literature differs from multicultural literature in her article. She writes: “The emergence of migrant literature or multicultural literature dates from around 1970 in Sweden, the mid-1980s in Norway, and from the beginning of the late 1980s or early 1990s in Denmark” (Kongslien 204), and she also uses the term “multicultural authors” without defining this term (217). Migration and migrants first became an object of research in the 1980s (Hauge 16), and few Danish researchers have applied or discussed the concept of multicultural literature. Despite this fact, similarities across borders emerge when discussing insider-outsider perspectives, and authenticity in the United States (Cai and Bishop; Colby and Lyon; Gopalakrishnan; Kruse and Horning; Martin; Mongillo and Holland; Norton; Sims; Yokota) and in Denmark (Albertsen; Frank).

Data on Multicultural Children’s Literature in the United States and Denmark

One asset that this genre has in the United States that many other countries, including those in Scandinavia, lack is an organization that collects diversity statistics annually for the books published for young people. The Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has been tracking the number of books published by authors from minoritized backgrounds since 1985.¹ This has enabled scholars and educators to track just how slow the progress has been to make American literature for young people more reflective of the population who reads it. For instance, in 1985, 7.2 % of children’s books were written by African American authors and illustrators; in 2018, this number had only increased to 11 % (“Data on Books”), despite the fact that African Americans were the majority minority in the United States until 2003, when Hispanics/Latinxs became more numerous than African Americans (Clemetson).

In addition to decades of CCBC statistics on diverse American children’s literature, the United States has also benefited from de-

decades of academic research on this topic that has advocated for the diversification of the genre. And although they are not as abundant as books about canonical texts, a number of critical books about multicultural children's literature have been published about American children's and YA literature from many disciplinary perspectives including English, Education, Library Science, and other interdisciplinary approaches like American Studies and Childhood Studies. In contrast, no one has yet conducted a study of Danish literature for young people to investigate how minorities are represented. In fact, Danish researchers do not even know how many books represent minorities because they have no equivalent of the CCBC keeping those statistics. In addition, it is problematic in Denmark to define literature using terms like "insider" and "outsider" or #OwnVoices, as do Americans, because Denmark has many texts written by minorities in which insiders criticize their own culture, as does Yahya Hassan, who writes critically about Islam in his autobiographical book *Yahya Hassan* (2013), or Ahmad Mahmoud in his *Sort Land* (Black Country, 2015), when he depicts his upbringing in a family with arranged marriages.

Existing Definitions in Scandinavia

Some understandings of multicultural literature favor insider perspectives (Cai and Bishop; Kruse and Horning; Norton), and researchers argue for cultural accuracy and evaluation of multicultural literature using different criteria (Mongillo and Holland). Authenticity matters. However, no consensus exists when it comes to determining what is authentic.

In Denmark, Søren Frank shows that there is a tendency in non-migrant literature to reflect themes and employ discursive strategies often thought of as typical for migrant literature. He proposes a shift in terminology from *migrant* literature to *migration* literature to move away from the narrow authorial biography. He shows how migration literature is characterized by intratextual features such as thematic categories and stylistic categories. At the same time, Frank sees the aesthetic characteristics of migration literature as a consequence of the migration author's loss of an original place, because he recognizes the traditional, narrow understanding of the specificity of migrant literature as a result of biographical circumstances (*Migration and Literature* 16). The concept of migration refers both to the author's background and to the characters' spatial and temporal movements (intratextual migration), and lastly to the aesthetic and

artistic implications of the age of migration in the literature. While writers in Frank's theory can write authentically about migration because they are imaginative professional writers, we find a different use of terminology in Anita Albertsen's research. Albertsen uses the terms "indvandrerlitteratur" (migrant literature) and "indvandrerforfatter" (migrant author) with political arguments, speaking from the cultural political discourse in society, which in recent years has maintained the idea of a homogeneous Danish identity despite the increasing cultural heterogeneity in the country. She prefers a narrow understanding of Danish migrant literature written by insiders, because insiders are able to contribute qualified, nuanced counterparts to the immigrant stereotypes in media.

The problematic aspect of using the terms "migrant literature," "migrant authors," or "migration literature" are threefold. Firstly, not all minorities in Denmark are migrants; people can be minoritized because of skin color, sexual orientation, or other aspects of identity. Moreover, the desire of multiculturalists to give all students equal opportunities through academic inclusion is not only relevant for students who migrate. Secondly, authors with immigrant backgrounds refuse to be stigmatized as "representatives of multiculturalism" or as "immigrant writers" who write exclusively literature about their own ethnicity (Albertsen 203). Writers oppose the tendency to mainly be praised and read for the social relevance of their books rather than for their aesthetic qualities (Albertsen). Thirdly, acknowledging the struggle and power relations calls for a need to explicitly focus on marginalized groups in Denmark, not in Europe or in global society.

Nadia Mansour's research focuses on the literary inclusion not only of migrants, but of different minorities in Denmark. Minorities are defined as groups whose norms, preferences, and backgrounds differ in various ways from the norms and preferences found in public spaces, the local environment, or embedded in contexts such as the education system (Gitz-Johansen 75-76). These may include linguistic, religious, cultural, physical, visual, sexual or gender minorities.

New Definitions for a New Era

Using the existing definition of multicultural literature, formulated by Cai and Bishop (62), who emphasize the pedagogical definition and connection to multicultural education, and using migration theory formulated by the Danish researcher Søren Frank, Mansour is

creating a *literary* and a *pedagogical* definition of multicultural literature in Denmark. She presents thematic and stylistic categories that are relevant for multicultural literature, which is not about migration across countries, ethnicity, or world literature, but about cultural meetings, power relations, and integration within a nation (Mansour, *Multikulturel litteratur i danskfaget*). The thematic categories are characterized by a mimetic logic, in that multicultural literature reflects multicultural issues in a society within a nation. For instance, multicultural literature reflects the question of multiple identities and cultures and deals thematically with cross-cultural experiences, hybrid cultural identity, and integration issues. The stylistic level reflects a multicultural society with creativity in language as a result of mixing slang, languages, and dialects from minority cultures into mainstream Danish language. The definition of multicultural children's and young adult literature in Denmark draws on research and literary traditions in the United States and in Scandinavia.

Mansour's perspective on multicultural literature is based on the literary characteristics and content of the text, and not whether the text is regarded as an authentic representation of the minority reader. Following Frank, the author's background is not considered a crucial criterion for multicultural literature (*Migration and Literature* 15). In contrast to Cai and Bishop's understanding, the literature is not defined by insider or outsider representations. Mansour's definition of multicultural literature is therefore based on the content and stylistic aspects of the literary text, and not on the author's skin color or background.

Mansour's definitions of multicultural literature and education for young people in a Danish context employ the following concepts from other theorists:

- Multicultural literature reflects the diversity of a society through depicting various overlapping cultural forms, such as values, perspectives, traditions, religions, and views of life (Frank, *Migration and Literature*).
- Multicultural literature thematizes identity negotiation across cultures within a nation by questioning identity and culture as fixed (Frank, *Migration and Literature*). Frank discusses this between cultures, while Mansour discusses it within the same culture.
- Multicultural literature deals with themes that emphasize integration and cohesion across cultural groups (Cai and Bishop).

- Multicultural literature focuses on stories about minorities' struggle for rights and equality (Hauge; Cai and Bishop).
- Multicultural literature privileges the minority perspective and portrays minorities' experiences (Cai and Bishop; Yokota).
- Multicultural literature includes "melting pot" books that deal with universal themes such as grief, friendship, love, school, or other themes, but with minorities as protagonists (Sims), expressed through minority markers such as the names of the characters.
- Multicultural literature depicts minorities visually (Bishop; Martin).
- Multicultural literature contains a linguistic mix that reflects different cultural groups, for example, through including dialect or foreign words in the text. Syntax in these books is also sometimes deliberately written to reflect culture (Frank, *Migration and Literature*).

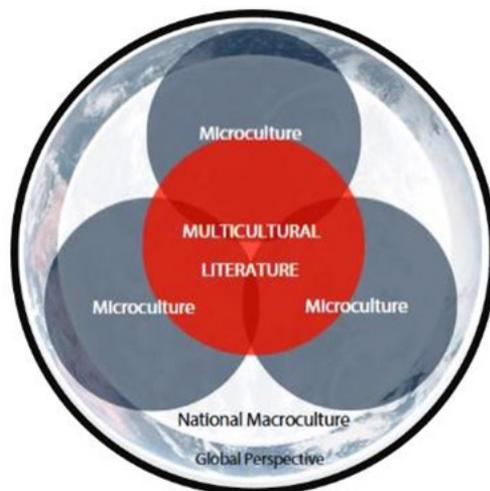


Figure 1. Multicultural literature as defined by Nadia Mansour. (Reproduced with permission from Mansour)

Mansour's model (figure 1) illustrates that multicultural literature crosses microcultures within the national macroculture. Multicultural literature is thus placed within the national framework, but since all of the overlapping circles in the figure exist inside of an image of planet Earth (Global Perspective), and also exist within the national macroculture, this visual emphasizes that multicultural literature is distinct from world literature because it focuses on cultures within a nation. The microcultures overlap the national macroculture and the global perspective. The figure shows how multicultural literature crosses cultures and should not be considered static. In Mansour's model, multicultural literature becomes part of a nation, which aligns with Christian Horst's idea that the lives and voices of minorities should not be marginalized but should be part of national self-understanding (9-11). The pedagogical aim of Mansour's research is to represent minorities within a nation to promote acceptance and show diversity in Denmark. In her dissertation, she argues for raising the voices of minorities and accepting them as part of Danish reality, not as foreign influences.

Comparing Children's Literatures across Cultures

Given the conceptual nature of this essay thus far, we conclude the essay by discussing two pairs of texts (two American, two Danish) to illustrate how some of these concepts related to multiculturalism surface in American and Danish children's literature. In the first pairing, the American picture book *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* (2017) by Derrick Barnes and Gordon C. James, and the Danish picture book *Ayse får en lillebror* (*Ayse Gets a Little Brother*, 2018) by Özlem Cekic and Dorte Karrebæk, each text privileges the minority perspective and portrays minorities' experiences; they depict minorities visually in a positive way, and they thematize identity negotiation across cultures within a nation by questioning identity and culture as fixed.

Crown tells the story of a young African American boy, getting a haircut in a barbershop he frequents. Though likely a weekly or biweekly activity for this child, the language with which Barnes tells the story suggests a strong sense of community among those in the barbershop; a significant sense of pride that the boy gains from attending to his self care. His speculation about the adults he sees attending to their hair care encourages readers to believe that this is an important social space where a black child's self image and spirit can be nurtured. This picture book privileges the minority perspective in that both Barnes and James are African American, making this an

#OwnVoices story. The African American barbershop is also a space that very few people who have not frequented it understand. It is not just a place to get a haircut; it is a community, and *Crown* makes this clear. When the barber finishes the boy's cut, he says everyone in the shop "will rise to their feet and give you a round of applause for being so FLY! Not really. . . but they'll look like they want to. You'll see it in their eyes" (Barnes n.p.). James's illustrations also positively portray the protagonist and others in "the shop." The image of the boy, who remains unnamed, takes up a lot of the page, and in the final double-page spread, which shifts from landscape to portrait, the majority of his body shows when he affirms that his fresh haircut makes him feel like royalty and assures him he is ready to face the world. The images of the others in the barbershop (the woman "with a butterscotch complexion," the dude with "a faux-hawk," the guy with the "masterful designs carved on the side of his dome") show how much the boy admires them. As an #OwnVoices book, *Crown* is able to take a deep dive into an aspect of African American life that few outsiders know. While it doesn't necessarily portray ethnic identity as fluid, it certainly shows lots of variety and combats prevalent stereotypes of African American hair as nappy or unkempt, and instead portrays the black barber as an artist and the barbershop as an important locale of community building.

The Danish *Ayse får en lillebror* by Özlem Cekic and Dorte Karrebæk was published in a digital magazine called *Læseraketten* (the Reading Rocket) which is financed by the two NGOs Red Barnet and Oxfam Ibis. In *Ayse får en lillebror*, a strong and resilient girl, Ayse, has a little brother, who is about to be circumcised. Ayse goes to school and talks proudly about her brother's circumcision party. It prompts a discussion in the classroom, and the teacher explains why Jews and Muslims circumcise boys, and one of the other kids compares it to Christian baptism. Some of the kids do not like the fact that boys are circumcised, and Ayse defends her parents' position and right to practice their religion. The main conflict in the story is between Ayse and her friend Louise. Ayse is sad that Louise does not want to come to the circumcision party to which she is invited. Ayse talks with her brothers about it, and they encourage her to invite Louise again. The story ends with Louise joining the party.

Besides the negotiation of different cultural practices and the presence of Islam through the depiction of an Imam and the Koran, the story also visually represents the Christian baptism. In that sense, the story portrays various overlapping cultural forms and discusses them from the child characters' points of view. Despite the obvio-

us pedagogical intention with this book, which is to help teachers talk about this tradition and mirror the Muslim and Jewish religious practice of circumcision, this story exemplifies one of the few fictional stories written in Denmark that explicitly prioritizes the perspective of minorities and portrays their experience in a respectful way. The story sparked a debate in Denmark about whether or not circumcision should be illegal. The characters' names in the story suggest they are part of a Turkish or Kurdish minority group, which is the second-largest group of minorities in Denmark, most of whom originally came to Denmark as so-called "guestworkers" in the 1970s.

Our second pairing of texts, *All Are Welcome* (2018) by Alexandra Penfold and Suzanne Kaufman, and *Nour og Noras første dag i børnehaven* (Nour and Nora's First Day in Preschool, 2018) by Camilla Kaj Paulsen, exemplify the positive visual depiction of minorities and cohesion across cultural groups. *All Are Welcome*, set in an elementary school, tells a poetic story of everyone's preparation for a Chinese New Year celebration. The phrase "all are welcome here" recurs throughout the picture book which depicts families from varied backgrounds, who are visually distinct and who wear various types of clothing, some of which represent religious affiliation. The illustrations show a variety of physical abilities and disabilities, gender identities, and portray several mixed-race families and different family compositions. To emphasize the international origins of this school's student body, a bunch of children gather around a world map and point to where they come from. And if this picture book has a protagonist, she is a little African American girl with her hair in curly puffs, who goes to school, enjoys the school-wide family festival and happily gets tucked in by both of her parents at night. This book normalizes all kinds of differences and emphasizes that everyone belongs – regardless of race, skin color, ability/disability, religion, nationality, gender identity, partner choice, or background. This positive and visually rich book includes lots of details to notice and talk about, and most children can find a reflection of themselves somewhere in the images. As the book's front matter explains, the concept for this book started with a colorful, lively poster that Kaufman created that became popular with schools. Penfold became enamored of the poster and wrote a manuscript for it.

Nour og Noras første dag i børnehaven, written and self-published by Camilla Kaj Paulsen, targets kids ages 3–5, and the author writes in the paratext that the book is intended to assist professionals when talking with children about skin color and cultural meetings. The teddy bear, a metafictional figure, appears in the story and asks the

reader questions. For instance, in a scene where Nora and Nour are comparing Christmas with Eid, the teddy bear jumps up and asks the reader what they celebrate at home, facilitating an interactive approach to reading. Paulsen promotes cultural meetings through her book, but she also visits many libraries and reads the book aloud to children. This book aims to reflect the diversity and cultural mixing within Danish society, but does so within an institution such as the preschool that integrates different cultures. Although minorities are visually represented through skin color and Arabic typing, this book is notable for encouraging dialogue with very young children about culture and differences between cultures. The book has some weaknesses, however. The story includes so much description that it leaves little for the illustrations to add. Furthermore, this story does not represent the minority perspective since it has two characters: the white girl, Nora, and the Arabic girl, Nour. The narrative is focalized through both of the girls, whom the reader follows as they eat lunch, play with dolls, and draw, but in all of the scenes, Nora, the white girl, is presented as being more knowledgeable. For example, when Nour asks Nora to pass her the skin color crayon. Nora gives her the brown color. Then Nour says:

“Naaaaaarjjjj, hudfarven,‘ sagde jeg” (“Nooooo, the skin color,‘ I said”).

“Men din hudfarve er da lysebrun,‘ siger Nora” (“But your skin color is light brown,‘ says Nora,” Paulsen n.p., our translation).

Their conversation sets up a problematic hierarchy between the two girls. Even when the author puts the character of color in a position where she teaches the white character about Eid, she still positions Christianity as the dominant religion; Christmas is the default, and Eid is shown as being different from Christmas in particular ways.

Conclusion

Our comparison of literary traditions and landscapes in Denmark and the United States has opened new perspectives and views of how minorities are depicted in literature for young people. As we consider important similarities between these literatures, we acknowledge that in both the United States and Denmark the statistics suggest that the number of minorities in each country will increase substantially in the future, making clear both the need for more diversity in the genre in each country and the need for more research on multicultural literature for young people.

Scholars in both countries discuss insider-outsider perspectives, authenticity, labelling within the genre, and literary characteristics in literature specifically about minoritized people. Both countries have made strides toward literary inclusion of marginalized people in the school curriculum (with varying degrees of success). We agree with Banks that education as a whole needs to change so that all students encounter diversity and different cultures through the literature they read in school as well as in school pedagogy. Multicultural literature from a wider variety of backgrounds needs to be available in both the United States and Denmark.

While both countries should continue to push the publishing industry to increase minority depictions and include more varied portrayals of minoritized people in their publications, some stark differences also exist in the children's and YA literature between the two countries. This article suggests that different patterns and histories of migration and diversity have influenced studies of multicultural literature. While the United States has conducted many studies of African American Literature and multicultural literature for youth, no research yet exists in Denmark that studies how minorities are represented in children's and YA literature – either historically or in recently published children's and YA books. Scholars in the United States have also studied how children *use* multicultural literature (see e.g. Cai, *Towards a Multidimensional Model*; Iwai; Norton), but in Denmark only Mansour has conducted an empirical study investigating how students and their teachers negotiate identities while reading this literature. Furthermore, racism in this genre has been discussed extensively in the United States while in Denmark, very little research has been conducted on how race is depicted in children's and YA books specifically.

Danish and other Scandinavian scholars' discussions of labelling and categorization within the genre build on a more fluid and dynamic view of identity and culture than do American scholars. While Danish researchers can learn from American researchers when discussing racism, people of color, and marginalization in children's and YA literature, scholars in the United States would benefit from the more fluid view Danish scholars have of identity. For instance, American scholars tend to assume that all #OwnVoices texts positively and authentically portray the focal culture, but this might not always be true and perhaps even essentializes minoritized writers.

We have learned to be critical about the vocabulary we use to discuss multicultural literature. As Mansour is working in Denmark,

she should not simply absorb terminology developed in the United States or in other countries with a longer history of the genre. Context matters a great deal and should help shape how multiculturalism is theorized. Clearly, terminology changes as literature and society change, and we believe this commitment to flux and change is essential.

We have found this a productive dialogue that we hope will positively impact the study of literature for and about marginalized children in both countries and encourage further dialogue among scholars across cultures who study multiculturalism.

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Notes

1 Multicultural literature as defined in Mansour's research (*Multikulturel litteratur i danskfaget*), and used in this article is understood as a genre in the lexical sense of the word. Genres are understood as groups of texts that are constantly being transformed.