

(Im)migrant and Ethnic Minority Literature in Education Curricula in Slovenia

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### Recommended Citation

Vižintin, Marijanca Ajša "(Im)migrant and Ethnic Minority Literature in Education Curricula in Slovenia." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 18.1 (2016): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2763>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2763)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

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**Volume 18 Issue 1 (March 2016) Article 7**  
**Marijanca Ajša Vižintin,**  
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<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss1/7>>

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 18.1 (2016)**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol18/iss1/>>

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**Abstract:** In her article "(Im)migrant and Ethnic Minority Literature in Education Curricula in Slovenia" Marijanca Ajša Vižintin argues that there is a need to develop in the educational system of Slovenia a comprehensive theoretical and applied approach for the inclusion of (im)migrant and ethnic minority students: in addition to writers who represent the Slovenian majority population, school curricula should include members of Slovenian (im)migrant and ethnic minority members of the country irrespective of the language in which they write. In accordance with this objective and recommendation, the reading and study of the cultural production of (im)migrant and ethnic minority texts ought to be recognized and included in the canon. At the same time, Vižintin calls for a fair representation of women authors.

## Marijanca Ajša VIŽINTIN

### **(Im)migrant and Ethnic Minority Literature in Education Curricula in Slovenia**

When constructing a curriculum for the language arts classroom in education, authors of curricula often limit their choice to text by writers and scholars of the country's majority culture and language. Since the second half of the twentieth century, ethnic minorities who live in neighboring countries, as well as (im)migrants are included in these canons if they write in their native language. The decisions about whose texts belong to the canon of a nation state are consequently reflected in curricula and teaching materials. Taking into account that world literature is an additional part of the curriculum, this often means that Western European, North American and the literature of the majority culture prevail in the classroom (see Nieto and Bode; Thomsen), while the literature of ethnic minority (im)migrant literatures present inside the state are mostly non-existent in teaching materials.

The concept of intercultural education in European scholarship started to develop in the second half of the twentieth century (see, e.g., Portera; Rey von Allmen), while in North America (i.e., Canada and the U.S.) the concept of multicultural education is used (see, e.g., Grant and Sleeter; Nieto and Bode; for a bibliography for the study ethnic minority writing in Canada, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, Sayed, Beneventi <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/canadianethnicbibliography>>). Both concepts were developed as an answer to the actual ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in societies. Scholars also became aware of the fact that non-White and (im)migrant students achieve lower learning results than the cultural majority. Both concepts have similar goals in many regards: overcoming monocultural, ethnocentric, and national curricula in order to raise awareness for a pluralistic society and emphasize multi- or intercultural competence (see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek and López-Varela). This competence is not only intended for (im)migrants or members of ethnic minorities, but for all citizens. As we encounter examples of racism and negative discrimination, it is all the more important that we reduce prejudices and see education as part of a wider social system that needs broad support in order to introduce changes. The terms "multicultural" and "intercultural education" are sometimes used as synonyms. However, opponents emphasize that multiculturalism implies only the co-existence of various cultures, which do not necessarily overlap and connect. Interculturality, in contrast, denotes a dynamic process and interaction between various cultures and the exchange of opinions and active participation (see, e.g., Rey von Allmen). Taking into consideration this point of view I use the term intercultural education. But it is important that both concepts call attention to the unequal position of non-majority communities and the necessity of having teaching material that reflects pluralism. However, this does not only hold true for the literary field, but also for history, geography, the choice of foreign languages, etc.

Mads Rosendahl Thomsen posits that "comparative literature has deep roots in a time when nations and national identity were dominant" (3). In Slovenia, the circumstances are similar as described by Janja Žitnik Serafin who analyzed in her book *Migrantske* eighty textbooks for primary and secondary schools with respect to material for Slovenian culture and literature curricula. She found that there are neither texts by representatives of the various ethnic minority groups in Slovenia nor by writers who immigrated to Slovenia. It seems that in the twenty-first century we are still not able to surpass the limits set by nineteenth-century notions of what literature is. As Krištof Jacek Kozak puts it, "when universal literature started to get national outlines and national borders this started to limit the thinking about literature" (130; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). In order to change the majority's (lack) of awareness and (lack of) knowledge about the literary creativity of all inhabitants, the majority of the Slovenian population and its ethnic minority communities need to cooperate and the inclusion of formerly neglected literary texts, anthologies, curricula, and reading materials would follow: "evidence suggests that students learn more when they can see themselves and their communities mirrored in their curriculum" (Gay 170). Not only do students learn more: ethnic minority and (im)migrant communities and languages become visible. Thus, we also enhance the development of intercultural education with literature curricula and the development of an intercultural society in Slovenia. On the other hand, the absence of non-majority perspectives from ethnic minority and (im)migrant communities expresses the ethnocentricity of the majority (see Vrečer).

Žitnik Serafin advocates for the inclusion of the cultures and literatures of all inhabitants who live in Slovenia: "majority cultural output in Slovenia along with that of emigrant and transborder communities outside of Slovenia and the cultural output of non-Slovenian minorities in Slovenia (constitutionally protected minorities, 'new' minorities, and immigrants) are defined in this book as co-cultures because they are linked by an essential factor: only taken together do they cohere to make up Slovenian national multi-culture in the contemporary sense of the world" (*Bridges* 17). However, such an all-encompassing approach to Slovenian literature is rare and exists "unfortunately more in theory than in practice" (Žitnik Serafin, "Migrantske" 18). There are many multicultural writers active in present-day Slovenia. They include Bosnian Herzegovian and Slovenian Josip Osti, Ismet Bekrić and Senada Smajić; Serbian Slovenian Miomira Šegina, Ivan Antić, and Branko Bačović; Croatian Slovenian Jadranka Matić Zupančič, Bekim Sejranović, and Jure Drlječan; Macedonian Slovenian Lidija Dim-

kovska and Žanina Mirčevska; Slovak Slovenian Stanislava Crobáková Repar; Roma Slovenian Rajko Šajnovič; Italian Slovenian Martina Gamboz, Franco Juri, and Aljoša Curavič; Hungarian Slovenian Judit Csuka Zagorec, Lajos Bence, and Albert Halász; and U.S.-Slovenian Erica Johnson Debeljak. Many of these writers live and work in several states and received renowned international awards. The Macedonian Slovenian writer and translator Lidija Dimkowska writes that "it is the fact that nowadays there are more and more authors in Slovenia and around the world who move, change places, home, and some of them change the language. Nomadism has become a natural phenomenon among artists and migration has become an inseparable part of life. Therefore, it is no wonder that more and more authors do not represent only one state at literary meetings. It is obvious for me (and also for the organizers of literary events around the world) that together with my name Macedonia and Slovenia are written together" (11; on the problematics of transcultural writers with multiple "homelands", see, e.g., Dagnino; Sturm-Trigonakis).

Despite the fact that members of ethnic minorities in Slovenia are overlooked, many writers with other national affiliations publish their works in their countries of origin and translate Slovenian authors into their mother tongues thus spreading the Slovenian culture and language. Some writers publish their works bilingually and are translated into Slovenian. For example, the collection *Romske pravljice / Romane vištorje* (Roma fairytales) by Rajko Šajnovič is written in Slovenian and the Roma dialect from the Dolenjska region. Judit Csuka Zagorec published six independent collections of poems between 1997-2013, three of them in Hungarian, two in Slovenian, and trilingual Hungarian, Slovenian, and German. Martina Gamboz creates "prose in Slovenian and Italian [and] does not give priority to any of the two languages, but she chooses the language code with regard to the topic" (441)). Of significance is that The Slovenian Writers' Association took an important step in 2010 by acknowledging authors who moved to Slovenia from other countries and whose native language is not Slovenian. Article 9 of *Temeljni akt Društva slovenskih pisateljev* (The Basic Act of the Slovenian Writers' Association) proclaims to accept as its members citizens of Slovenia who write "in Slovenian or in their native language". Debeljak, the US-American Slovenian writer, deems this extraordinary and writes that The Slovenian Writers' Association "addresses us from a place which is not a place of vulnerability and subordination, but a place of power and security. It showed that it does not view itself or the Slovenian language on the brim of the existential abyss. It showed that it is not afraid of diversity and openness" (<<http://www.pogledi.si/mnenja/sem-slovenska-pisateljica-ne-pisem-v-slovenscini>>). In 2010 *Antologija sodobne slovenske literature* (Anthology of Contemporary Slovenian Literature) (Zupan Sosič, Nidorfer Šiškovič, and Huber) was published. In addition to the texts by mainstream writers in Slovenia this collection included texts by transborder literary artists such as Miroslav Košuta, Marko Kravos, Boris Pahor, Marko Sosič, and Florjan Lipuš, as well as texts by writers who were born outside Slovenia (i.e., such born in other republics of former Yugoslavia). Dušan Jovanović, for example, was born in Serbia in 1939 and moved to Slovenia in 1953 and Dragica Potočnjak was born in 1958 in Croatia and moved to Slovenia in 1964. Some of those who are included in the anthology are descendants of immigrants, for instance Esad Babačić, who was born in 1965 in Ljubljana. Published four years earlier, *Nevihta sladkih rož* (The Storm of Sweet Flowers) was published by Peter Kolšek who studied and written in Sarajevo and moved to Slovenia in 1993. With such a selection of authors, both aforementioned anthologies widen the concept of who is considered a Slovenian author. At the same time, they mirror an inclusive approach, because texts by transborder and (im)migrant authors, as well as their descendants are not presented separately in a special chapter.

Lidija Dimkowska's anthology *Iz jezika v jezik* (From Language to Language) presents the literary creativity of (im)migrants and ethnic minority members in the most holistic way. Thirty-four authors are covered in a volume of more than five-hundred pages. The texts are published in both languages, the writer's native language and in Slovenian. According to Dimkowska, the texts represent "the attempt of a dialogue with Slovenian readers, the transition from monologic to the dialogic state, which is characteristic for the relation between the author and the reader" (17). Together with Žitnik Serafin's book *Bridges and Walls*, it constitutes an important foundation for further research, dedicated to the "question of the topical, stylistic, and socio-cultural specificity of the literary production of Slovenian emigrant and migrant writers in Slovenia" (Žitnik Serafin, "Vloga izseljensk" 39-40). In addition to these first steps, it would be necessary to develop the results of individual research projects, for example on Roma literature (e.g., Vižintin, "Slovenske") or the poetry of Slovenian Italian and Croatian Italian writers (e.g., Košuta; Deghenghi Olujič). Alenka Žbogar thinks that "it is necessary to consider how we can contribute to the enhancement of the individual's cultural awareness (and identity) -- individual, national, and global -- and how to encourage inter- and intracultural connectedness in literature lessons" ("Kulturna" 351).

Next, I discuss how we can put Žbogar's goal into practice in curricula. My recommendations are intended for writers of curricula because curricula influence the choice of authors and texts in teaching materials, affect publishers, teachers, and (im)migrants and ethnic minorities. My first recommendation is that we include intercultural education in literature curricula, learning goals, and standards of knowledge. The development of intercultural competence in teachers and students would thus not only be the matter of individual teachers (see Skubic Ermenc; Zudič Antonič); instead, intercultural compe-

tence would be a constitutive part of the learning process and that recognizes and supports the existing intercultural society. The Slovenian literature curriculum was revised in 2011 "also due to the so-called competence approach, which was promoted by the Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council of European Union on key competences/the most important competences for lifelong learning in the twenty-first century" Bešter Turk 112). My second recommendation is to include texts and authors which mirror Slovenian multicultural, plurilingual, and multiethnic society. This could mean, for example, that each year schoolchildren read one text by an author from one of the legally recognized ethnic minorities, for example the Italian, the Hungarian, and the Roma minority. I further suggest reading each year two texts by authors of other minority communities, such as Albanian, Kosovar, African, Bulgarian, Bosniak, Croatian, Chinese, Macedonian, Serbian, or Slovak minorities. Lastly, each year students should read one text which focuses on the inclusion and exclusion of (im)migrants and ethnic minorities.

I suggest a similar solution for teaching materials in higher education. At universities, the study of the literatures of ethnic minorities and (im)migrants in Slovenia could be offered as an optional course. The suggested number of texts is a recommendation, about which further discussion is needed, but it is necessary that these overlooked writers are read and studied. Thus, they would gain visibility as members of Slovenian society. It would be necessary to represent writers proportionally to common countries of origin: the majority of (im)migrants, circa 80% to 90%, come from successor states of the former state of Yugoslavia. Therefore, I recommend that texts of authors from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, and Kosovo be focused on, while there should also be texts by other (im)migrant writers. If we include each year at least three texts by members of ethnic minority and (im)migrant communities, Slovenian multiculturalism, interculturality, multiethnicity, and plurilinguality would become more visible. I recommend to the publishers of teaching materials that those texts be published bilingually: in the native languages of the authors and in Slovenian. The same policy should hold for new media technology, i.e., material available online (on this, see Vižintin, "Kdo" 509). A further recommendation I have is with regard to instructors at all levels of the educational system, namely to make arrangements with members of ethnic minorities and (im)migrants to perform interpretative reading in other native languages than Slovenian. This can be an opportunity for cross-cultural communication and intercultural education. Research in three school environments show that (im)migrant children and their ethnic minority descendants would, I think, accept such invitations for reading in their native language (see Vižintin, *Vključevanje*). In particular, I discourage authors of curricula and teaching materials from relegating these intercultural encounters to a special content part as this would constitute another marginalization. While Slovenian transborder and emigrant authors have already become part of some Slovenian anthologies, curricula, and reading materials, in my opinion this is not done sufficiently.

My next suggestion does not refer to the literatures of (im)migrants or members of ethnic minorities, but to the presence or absence of women authors. Among the selected mandatory (canonical) authors and texts there should be an equal amount of texts by both genders, a deficiency that is still evident in current Slovenian curricula for primary school (see Poznanovič Jezeršek, Cestnik, Čuden, Gomivnik Thuma, Honzak, Križaj Ortar, Rošč Leskovec, Žveglič 68-73). In "A Survey of Slovenian Women Fairytale Writers," Milena Mileva Blažič enumerates writers in Slovenia who were overlooked because they were women and because they wrote youth literature: "adult literature marginalized youth literature in the second half of the nineteenth century, whereas youth works and/or male and female authors were only mentioned fragmentally between 1848 and 1918 in newspapers" (<<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2064>>). While in many educational systems children's and youth literature are included in the canon (this including Slovenia: see Blažič, "Children's Literature" <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1714>>), in Slovenia woman writers remain marginalized. In the Slovenian primary and secondary school system, the following mandatory authors are included in the first three years: Niko Grafenauer, Oton Župančič, Kajetan Kovič, Ela Peroci, Svetlana Makarovič, one contemporary author (selected by a teacher or student) and Slovenian folk songs (see Poznanovič Jezeršek, Cestnik, Čuden, Gomivnik Thuma, Honzak, Križaj Ortar, Rošč Leskovec, Žveglič 21-22). In the second three-year period, teachers are supposed to discuss Bina Štampe Žmavc, Astrid Lindgren, Milan Dekleva, Leopold Suhodolčan, Boris A. Novak, Dane Zajc, Hans Christian Andersen, and, again, one self-selected contemporary author (see Poznanovič Jezeršek, Cestnik, Čuden, Gomivnik Thuma, Honzak, Križaj Ortar, Rošč Leskovec, Žveglič 43-44). During the last three years, students should read Fran Levstik, Josip Jurčič, Prežihov Voranc, Tone Pavček, Homer, two contemporary authors according to the teacher's choice (in both the seventh and the eighth grade), Anton Tomaž Linhart, Valentin Vodnik, France Prešeren, Janko Kersnik, Ivan Tavčar, Anton Aškerc, Janez Menart, Niko Grafenauer, Lev Tolstoj, Primož Trubar, Simon Gregorčič, Ivan Cankar, Oton Župančič, Josip Murn, Dragotin Kette, Srečko Kosovel, Ciril Kosmač, William Shakespeare, and three current-day authors (see Poznanovič Jezeršek, Cestnik, Čuden, Gomivnik Thuma, Honzak, Križaj Ortar, Rošč Leskovec, Žveglič 68-69). This means that it is mandatory for Slovenian students during their nine years of schooling to read twenty Slovenian male writers, four foreign writers, three Slovenian women writers, and one foreign woman writer and this, obviously makes women writers under-represented. The gender ratio in the



last three-year period becomes even more imbalanced, because there are no women writers required to read. At the same time, there is no Slovenian transborder author among the canonical authors nor is there a Slovenian emigrant author, ethnic minority author, or an author who immigrated to Slovenia. Of course, teachers can introduce women and all other overlooked authors among optional texts. Yet, in order to do so, teachers need to develop an intercultural competence, a skill set that in my opinion is yet to be developed in teacher education.

With regard to the concept and practice of interculturality, it would be necessary to analyze and evaluate the already selected literary texts in the curriculum, because, as Zudič Antonič points out, "intercultural education is not merely realized by adding content about foreign culture, but includes the in-depth examination of existing curricular models" (213). If the texts students read contain examples of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination which are not overcome, we should critically analyze such texts in the classroom and this requires teachers to develop intercultural competence. When reforming the curriculum and teaching materials, we should write transparent standards of knowledge for discriminatory texts or replace them with other texts. I recommend that the selected texts are discussed together with members of other cultural, ethnic, and language communities, because most members of majority communities are not aware of the ubiquity and communicative force of hidden discrimination. Hence I repeat that teachers must play an active role the development of intercultural competence. In order to include (im)migrant and ethnic minority children and practice an intercultural dialogue in Slovenia, seven steps are necessary: 1) society has to embrace interculturality as a basic pedagogical principle 2) we must develop systematic support for the inclusion of (im)migrant and ethnic minority children 3) we need to hire teachers who have already developed intercultural competence 4) there must be an awareness of the advantages of an intercultural society and the willingness to develop this awareness across all subjects of teaching material 5) we need to develop intercultural dialogue in both theory and practice (i.e., in the classroom) 6) schools and teachers need to cooperate with ((im)migrant and ethnic minority) parents, and 7) we need to cooperate with the local community (see Vižintin). While the teachers are waiting for curricula and materials to change, they can introduce new contents and texts in the subjects they teach, in accordance with the ethnicities and communities represented in their classes. In their book *Doing Multicultural Education* Carl A. Grant and Christine Sleeter describe teachers with a developed intercultural competence in the following way: "good teachers choose and use resources thoughtfully rather than over-relying on them. In addition, the best teachers are not only ongoing learners themselves, but also inveterate collectors. Over time, their classrooms become well stocked with materials, and usually they have become active in community or professional activities. Also, they seek out other teachers and librarians with whom to share resources, and varied venues where they can locate new resources. They assume that good resources exist and can be found" (182-83).

In literature classes, presenting and comparing folktales is an excellent opportunity for multiple perspectives and at the same time to discover similarities. Teachers can ask (im)migrant and ethnic minority children to present a folktale from their country of origin during the lesson: "if we fly on the wings of fairytales ... we can see from a bird's view or a polygenetic perspective the dialogue of cultures, continents and oceans, the dialogue of the creation of the worlds which is seen completely different from a frog's or a monocultural perspective" (Blažič, "Strokovna" 70). Teachers can ask students to bring a book in their native language. Maybe a student can even give a book to the school library as a gift, so that its collection of books in the various languages of students grows. I also suggest that migrants and minority members recommend changes themselves. That means they should actively formulate expectations and support their implementation, including the cooperation with teachers, the presentations of the country of origin, the mother tongue, and the culture they wish to see. They should call attention to the prejudice among students and mistakes in teaching materials. A successful example is the project of the African Centre Association (Društvo afriški center), which focuses on the way Africa is presented in Slovenian textbooks for primary and secondary school. Max Shonhiwa Zimani explains that

when learning about history, students do not get any knowledge about what had happened in Africa before Ancient Egypt. The connections between the Egyptian civilization and sub-Saharan Africa are not mentioned. The textbooks also do not mention various kingdoms in Mali, Ghana, and Zimbabwe, which have an important place in world and African history. This is the same as if the Roman Empire was not mentioned in world history. Eurocentrism is present everywhere, it views the world and life in general from a European perspective. Similar problems exist regarding the textbooks for geography. There is a lot of inappropriate and wrong terminology as well as conscious attempts to present Africa and African people as negative -- the emphasis is on poverty, catastrophes, political conflicts, and wars ... We achieved that one of the textbooks was changed after our analysis. It was corrected and published in 2010 under the name *The Geography of Africa and the New World, the Textbook for the 8th Grade of Primary School*. We are aware that the handbook is not perfect, but it is definitely much better than the previous one, especially regarding the content and illustrations, which means that our effort was not in vain. And this is a source of energy for further work. (Shonhiwa qtd. in Milharčič Hladnik 62-64)

In conclusion, my argument is that there is a need to develop in the educational system of Slovenia a comprehensive theoretical and applied approach for the inclusion of (im)migrant and ethnic minority students: in addition to writers who represent the Slovenian majority population, school curricula should include members of Slovenian (im)migrant and ethnic minority members of the country irre-

spective of the language in which they write. In accordance with this objective and recommendation, the reading and study of the cultural production of (im)migrant and ethnic minority texts ought to be recognized and included in the canon. At the same time, I call for a fair representation of women authors. However, it is necessary to approach these changes in cooperation with the members of (im)migrant and ethnic minority communities and individuals, because the members of the majority culture usually lack sufficient knowledge about the literature of other cultural, ethnic, and language communities.

Note: "(Im)migrant and Ethnic Minority Literature in Education Curricula in Slovenia" is a revised and translated excerpt from Marijanca Ajša Vižintin, *Vključevanje otrok priseljencev prve generacije in medkulturni dialog v slovenski osnovni šoli* (Intercultural Dialogue and the Inclusion of First-generation Immigrant Children in Slovenian Primary Schools). PhD Diss. Ljubljana: U of Ljubljana, 2013. and Marijanca Ajša Vižintin, "Kdo vse piše in (so)ustvarja slovensko književnost?" ("Who Writes and Co-creates Slovenian Literature?"). *Recepcija slovenske književnosti* (The Reception of Slovenian Literature) (Ed. Alenka Žbogar. Ljubljana: U of Ljubljana, 2014). Copyright releases to the author.

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