LITERATURE REVIEW DIGIFOLK

Activity 2.5

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Introduction

DigiFolk aims at collecting, curating, and digitising folktales from marginalised groups residing in the cities involved in the project (Nicosia, Belgrade, Ankara, and Groningen) in order to make these stories easily accessible and freely available to everyone, especially these cities' inhabitants. Our premise is that by collecting, curating, digitising, and sharing the cultural products of these communities we achieve two main goals. One is to give voice to groups which are in the margins in our contexts of inquiry thus contributing to their empowerment. The second goal is to offer other social groups, especially dominant groups in these localities, an opportunity to be introduced to these communities, via exposure to their stories. The ultimate goal of the project is to elevate the idea of common humanity while promoting civic engagement and cultural richness.

To achieve the first of the two goals -give voice to marginalised communities- we invest in building our own methodology for how stories are collected, curated, and digitised. This methodology relies on best practices in ethnographic research paying particular attention to participatory methods and being mindful of matters concerning ownership and cultural appropriation among others. DigiFolk's methodology forms a separate deliverable (see Activity 2.2).

To achieve the second goal, namely, to expose dominant communities to the the cultural products of less visible communities we performed this literature review to determine to what extent stories form a good way of exposing groups to each other; what intergroup benefits could be reaped from such exposure, and what could be the main dangers of such an endeavour. We also deemed necessary to define -using literature- our boundary conditions, i.e., our in- and exclusion criteria for what we consider for the purposes of these project as (i) folktales and (ii) marginalised communities.
With this deliverable we provide literature-informed answers to the following four key questions:

- **Question 1:** What are the defining characteristics of folktales; and what are the in- and exclusion criteria for the purposes of the DigiFolk project?
- **Question 2:** What are the defining characteristics of marginalized communities; and what are the in- and exclusion criteria for the DigiFolk project?
- **Question 3:** Can stories be used to promote more harmonious intergroup relations? The specific case of folktales. What are the key lessons for the DigiFolk project?

Methodology

To perform a review of the relevant literature and give answers to these questions we searched for academic literature using the following keywords.

- **General Keywords:** folktales, oral storytelling, communal storytelling, narrative structure, narrative building blocks
- **Keywords Question 1:** folktales, cultural narratives, narrator, narrative practice, narrative skills, storytelling dynamics
- **Keywords Question 2**: marginalisation, marginalised groups, marginalised communities
- **Keywords Question 3**: narrative-based interventions, prejudice, oral storytelling, edutainment, multiculturalism, intercultural competence and all of them combined with the term 'folktales'; dangers stories, dangers folktales, evil folklore

Question 1: What are the defining characteristics of folktales; and what are the in- and exclusion criteria for the purposes of the DigiFolk project?

Folktales: Definitions and Functions

Briefly, folktales can be defined as stories originating or cantered around the people (folk), their beliefs, lives, and day to day, which are passed down generation by generation (originally by oral tradition), and are narratives about the cultural and social characteristics of these folk. Through this act of passing, groups often develop a sense of identity around the stories and the people with whom they share them, which is how a tale becomes a shared story, a folktale.

Culturally speaking, there is immense richness in creativity and depth of folklore across the world. Types of folktales include, for example, epic poems, eulogies, cautionary tales, legends, plays, and more (White, 1999). Many folktales and day-to-day storytelling engage in the act of 'yarn-spinning', where narrators engage the audience in a long story, with each type of folktale using different methods to do so (MacDonald et al., 1999). Folktales are understood to be tales of the 'everyday' told behind the guise of a large tale (MacDonald, 1999). Some relevant examples of folktale types and their purpose include:

- Stories to pass on culture and heritage in cultures with no written language to achieve preservation language and cultural identity
  - E.g., Nallawilli in Australia, where folktales act as the main recollection of the Nallawi people's culture, heritage, and knowledge (Azuonye, 1999)
- Stories to convey norms, structure, values, and morals to children (and sometimes also adults)
  - E.g., German fairy tale tradition such as the 'Grimm fairytales' (Neumann, 1999)
- Stories (with folktale elements added) having as main function passing down heritage
  - E.g., Troubadours, elders in communal villages (Sokoli, 1999).
- Stories and folklore of the oppressed which are stories aiming at entertainment but also at processing events and the world together, in unisom. They can often be stories of grief.
  - E.g., Rise of Shinto folklore under the military government, resourcing traditional folklore during the Franco era in oppressed communities (Anderson, 1999; Valentine & Valentine, 1998).

On a side note, while personal narratives have often been excluded from folktales, this perspective has begun to change in recent years, as these personal narratives are looked at through the lens of intertextual and interpersonal, cultural importance of sharing these narratives. While not all personal narratives are folktales, many personal narratives continue to inform the identities of the group, and overtime if repeated enough, can become tales themselves (Falconi & Graber, 2019).

Folktales: Content vs. Context

Falconi and Graber, in their paper 'Ethnographic approaches to storytelling and narrative practice' (2019), make a key distinction in the traditional and more current approaches to investigating folktales. While traditional approaches investigate the content of the story from a more classic and literary way, new approaches investigate the context around the stories, and the aspects of the narrative events in which the storytelling takes place.

As such, we divide the research into whether folktales can be investigated in content or in context. That is to say, folktales are made up of both the story and the act of telling it. These two are intrinsically linked and often influence each other, consistently keeping the folktale 'alive'. As such, while the content of the story might be the 'idea', the narrative event creates the experience, which is instrumental to the passing down of the story itself. As the stories are told through generations, they will result in changes not only to the story, but also its interpretation and its narration.

Folktales: in content

Content refers to the content of the story. In narrative analysis, stories, including folktales, all use the same narrative elements to create a story. All of these narrative elements must fit logically with each other to create a coherent story. These key characteristics include: plot, characters, setting style, and narrator; they are presented in more detail next.

- **Setting:** Settings of folktales usually happen within the cultural references of the folk. The setting does not just refer to the geographical location of the story, but also the time frame of story, and the unspoken inferences that must be made from the story (e.g., expecting the presence of gods in a story set in Mount Olympus).
- **Plot:** Folktale plots, or also called narratives, vary widely between storytelling traditions. Yet, most, if not all, stories contain an introduction, a build-up of events, a climax, and eventually a resolution. Depending on the type and purpose of the folktale, plots will include differing components to them. To be mentioned, folktales do not typically deliver a moral directly, but rather lay out the facts of the story and encourage the audience to draw their own conclusions. Typical themes of plots involve good vs evil, coming of age, explanations of nature, and stories for entertainment.
- **Characters:** Characters in stories mainly drive the story forwards with the choices and reactions. In folktales, characters often hold symbolic meanings pertinent to the culture of the folktale. Folktales often include magical and fantastical elements to them, such as talking animals (usually seen in fables), or witches and other equivalent beings. Folktales also often use personification of the environment, canonization of past individuals, and other tools to create a world that is both recognizable and distinct from the present world.
- **Style:** Style can be best described as the way a story is told/written/presented. It involves the perspective of the narrator, the tone of the story, the usage of particular language to convey emotions (e.g., call-backs, specific sounds, persuasive language, etc...), and many other factors that influence how the storyteller embodies the story. Folktales usually have a style (that both suggests to the audience that they must suspend their disbelief, while at the same time appealing to the 'everyday' of the audience; something they can recognize and identify with. Here, the use of literary devices such as metaphors and alliterations are important to maintain the audience engaged. Moreover, depending on the performance, a variety of tools can be used to portray the story, such as music, song, puppets, shadows, and more. The use of these tools are also aspects that are part of the cultural heritage of the people, and exemplify the creativity of the storytelling, as well as the techniques and skills needed to perform these tales. This versatility in folktales has also been called 'folk creativity' **(**Sokoli, 1999).
- **Narrator:** Folktales are unique in the fact that they arose from oral tradition, and in that more often than not, folktales are rarely written and change with time. Storytellers are thus the

main keepers of the stories and are responsible for their dissemination. Narrators in folktales are usually storytellers that actively engage with an audience when performing the folktale. Therefore, it is essential to include the narrator as a key to understanding the story, as they are active players in passing down the folklore along with the identity of their group (Ochs et Capps, 1996). The narrator will be explored in depth further on, along with an analysis of narrative practice in folktales.

Folktales: in context

Folktales are particularly marked by the social and cultural specificities in which the story is told. Originally borne from the oral tradition, the sharing of the stories in a community also creates a social dimension in folktales. When engaging in folktale storytelling, the folktale and its presentation are particularly tailored to the audience, according to the cultural norms of the group. Oftentimes, the act of gathering and listening to a story that has been passed for generations will result in the creation of a group identity for the listeners and tellers of the folktales.

As such, storytelling is informed by historical, cultural, and social contexts of the people at the time of the telling. Folktales can often arise from the historical circumstances of the folk, and usually change hand in hand as the people and world around them changes. As such, folktales must also be looked at in contemporary terms, by observing the circumstances that lead to the story being told.

Yet, a more interesting perspective of folktales is the social context in which they are created, which is particularly relevant in the art of storytelling. The telling of the story is not only bound by cultural specificities of the tale, but also by how the narrator and the audience create an experience around the folktale, which can change the representation and interpretation of the story itself (MacDonald et al., Our Stories Are Not Just for Entertainment: Lives and Stories Among the Travelling People of Scotland 1999).

The Narrator and Narrative Practice in Folktales

As highlighted earlier, a key difference between folktales, and other types of stories is thought to be the 'living' aspect of folktales. Folktales become "alive" as they develop in time and change along with their narrators and audiences. As such, while the story might be the 'idea', the narrative event creates the experience. The narrative event is composed of the narrator and the audience/listeners, and takes place in the social, cultural, and historical context of the occasion. During this event, the narrator, as the one responsible for the story and its telling, must make use of their skills to create an experience that conveys the essence of the story, and brings the audience together. This section is going to be exploring these two parties: the narrator and the audience.

The narrator

Narrators are key in the practice of narrative performance. By bringing folktales to life, they add a complex dimension to the story that is partly independent from the story itself. Here, we look at different aspects of the narrator, as well as how the relationship between the narrator, the audience, and the situation is key in creating and sharing folktales. The interaction between the narrator and the audience creates an event that contributes to the 'meaning making process' of the story (Falconi & Graber, 2019).

The narrator presides over the story, lays out the facts for the audience, is in charge of maintaining everyone's attention, and adds their own personal and cultural twists to the form of it. Each narrator and narrative style is also subjective to sociodemographic, religious, and even gender differences. For example, Ibrahim Muhawi speaks of folktales 'being for women and legends for men' in Palestinian storytelling tradition, where religious and social conventions give different meanings and relevance to the story told (Muhawi, 1999). Furthermore, the narrator often times also holds the cultural responsibility over a story. Even more, the individual experiences of the narrator can also come through in the telling of the story, providing more emphasis on certain parts of the story, or communicating with the audience in a particular way. The art of storytelling is different than just being able to tell a story. Storytelling, especially higher forms of storytelling, is an acquired set of skills, which use the creativity and skill of the teller (or narrator) to engage their audience and take them through the story. The set of skills needed to tell a particular folktale will vary widely between cultures and even within cultures (Falconi & Graber, 2019). Different narrators and audiences can be expected at different events depending on the occasion and type of tale presented.

What qualifies a 'good narrator' varies from culture and art around the world. Nonetheless, most good narrators: (i) are able to keep the attention of audience (MacDonald et al., Professional Storytelling in West Sumatra 1999); (ii) evoque responses from their audience, whether it be emotional or physical (e.g., laughter, call-backs, gasps, etc); (iii) perform 'yard-spinning', by which they crease a pace and a flow for the tale, engaging the audience even more; (iv) hold specific abilities related to the art itself. For example, in the Korean art of P'ansori, folktales are told via traditional Korean singing. For this art, good narration depends on the narrative content, the presence of the performer, their dramatic gestures, and their voice training ('tugum'). Voice training might involve going into nature and trying to mimic sounds from nature to translate them into their singing (Chan, P'ansori, the Ancient Korean Art of Storytelling 1999); (v) know the story, often by heart, and have recounted the story many times. Usually, an impactful narrator has cultural ties to the story itself; (vi) maintain the story (Braid, 1999); delivering on the responsibility to pass down and upkeep the tale for future generations.

Finally, anthropologist Charles Briggs defines the importance and challenges of narrators as: 'the interpretive task that confronts the artist is thus twofold— interpreting both the imaginary sphere and the perceiver's own world … The gifted artist uses stylistic devices in such a way that the form and content of the performance reflect the artist's view of the way these two worlds, imaginary and real, are connected' (as cited in Falconi et al., 2019 p.8).

The listener and the situation

Opposite the narrator stands the audience. Part of the essence of folktales occurs in the interaction between the narrator and the listener, as the interaction between the two, in that specific situation, creates the experience of the story. By situation, we refer to the micro and macro cultural context of the storytellers and listeners, which helps understand the purpose and meaning of the folktale (e.g., tales told under oppression in secret vs a tale told at a grand ceremony by an elder).

During this experience, both parties (listeners and storytellers) hold expectations from each other. These expectations are shaped by the situation, the status and identity of the narrator, by who is listening, and by the purpose of the story. For example, one type of expectation the narrator might have from the audience is oral feedback after a cue (Sturm, 1999). Feedback can take shape as

encouragement to continue from the audience, questions to/from the narrator, disagreements, and/or active participation.

The interactions between audience and narrator obviously change when the dynamic between the listeners and the narrator changes (e.g., new listeners among old listeners who already know the narrator and the story). This is also crucial to understand as our (as external investigators) presence can change the way in which the narrator tells the tale, the way the audience reacts, and overall, the entire experience.

Again, depending on the story and listeners, the performance will vastly change. Even more, depending on the individual storyteller (e.g., some storytellers are good-humored and joyful, others are sullen and serious), folktales will take different meanings, and can change the interpretation of the folktale.

Narrative elements are often linked with the format and purpose of the story. There are 'preset' rules to each format which are communally understood by those partaking in the story (Falconi et al., 2019). For example, fables, personal narratives, interactive narratives, prose, poetry, and more all have an implicit understanding of what is to be expected in the story. These guide both parties through the event.

In- and exclusion criteria for DigiFolk

Given the above these are the following inclusion and exclusion criteria for which stories we consider to be meeting the criteria to be considered as folktales within the DigiFolk project:
Included in the project are stories that:

   i.   are shared within a group ('folk') either at the community level (macro-level), or in sub-groups such as family households (micro-level); and
   ii. are in principle orally told even if they exist in written form; and
   iii. contain at least some information about the 'folk'; and
   iv. fall under the categories of fairy tales, legends, fables, and any other sub-categories of folktales, and
   v.   are shared within a 'folk' that has been marginalised in the civic contexts they inhabit. What we consider to be marginalised community is defined under Question 2.

Excluded from the project are stories that:

   i.   are not shared within a group ('folk) at any level (macro or micro), or
   ii.   have been officially documented; can be found published in any medium which is widely accessible; or
   iii.   they form personal anecdotes which contain no information about the 'folk'; or
   iv. They are not shared amongst a 'folk' that has experienced marginalisation.

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Question 2: What are the defining characteristics of marginalised communities; and what are the in- and exclusion criteria for the DigiFolk project?

Marginalised communities are those communities which have historically been excluded from involvement as well as those continuing to face other barriers to civic participation. Marginalised populations, also referred to as vulnerable, oppressed, underrepresented or undercounted, might include people of different race, ethnicities, low-income populations, the homeless, LGBTQI+, and people with disabilities among others (Brutschy & Zachary, 2014).

Given the above definition these are the boundary conditions for which for the purposes of this project we consider as marginalised communities.

Included in the project are:

i. communities which are vulnerable, oppressed, underrepresented or undercounted, and which have either historically been excluded from involvement or face other barriers to civic participation in the civic contexts they inhabit; and

ii. (ii) have engaged in oral storytelling practices via which they share and transmit their traditions, values, worldviews, customs, folk wisdom, through stories (folktales), as these were defined under Question 1.

Excluded are:
(i) communities which have not experienced any form or exclusion in the civic contexts they are part of; or
(ii) do not engage in passing on stories about the 'folk', as these were described under Question 1.

Some questions remain, what about ethnic, racial, or religious minorities which (i) have not been *historically* marginalised as they are new to a civic context? (e.g., refugees, asylum seekers); (ii) are not systematically or intentionally marginalised but are rather out of sight and silent (such as Latinas in Groningen)? We decided to treat these cases in a more bottom-up and case-by-case fashion. In principle, any community which remains out of sight is susceptible to the same psychological fate as communities that are intentionally marginalised. Prejudice can be an outcome of ignorance as much as it can be an outcome of adversarial intergroup relations.

Question 3: Can stories be used to promote more harmonious intergroup relations? The specific case of folktales. Take home messages for DigiFolk

Stories come with multiple affordances. They can form a means of raising awareness about a number of topics, also sensitive ones. They offer individuals with behavioural scripts helping them navigate otherwise difficult encounters, such as for example a face-to-face encounter with a member of an outgroup. They also help people imagine a different reality (Bruner, 1991; Greitemeyer, 2011) through encouraging reflection and engagement with different perspectives (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013). Finally, especially fictional narratives can simulate real-world experience, providing the opportunity to explore difficult situations, such as war, without the associated risk and trauma (Mar & Oatley, 2008).

Given the above affordances, there are multiple ways in which stories, and storytelling can be used for prejudice-reduction and to promote more openness to o/Others, endorse multiculturalist ideas, cultivate higher intercultural competence, and even contribute to conflict resolution. All these are outcomes that are in line with the scope of our project. We identified two main ways through which stories are deployed to promote more positive intergroup relations the first one being edutainment and the second story construction/production. We will be presented each of these in detail next paying special emphasis on folktales, where possible, as a unique example of stories highlighting both their affordances as well as the dangers they entail. We conclude this section with how DigiFolk can build on these prior initiatives and what it can learn from their weaknesses.

Edutainment

Edutainment refers to the use of entertainment (e.g., stories) for educational purposes. It is commonly used in primary school education to introduce children to multiculturalist ideals through introducing them to different cultures either through stories about them or by sharing their (these cultures') cultural products. One example of such cultural products would be folktales. In this context, stories are forming a pedagogical tool; a vehicle to transmit knowledge.

Edutainment can feature as part of the curriculum or it can happen outside the curriculum, in extracurricular activities. Magos (2018) presents such an instance, in an action-research paper, where Greek children engaged in an after-school activity read and discussed under the teacher-researcher's guidance, Turkish folktales. This edutainment activity aimed at exposing the children to various aspects of Turkish culture as a means of challenging the narrative of the Turk as a 'hostile Other'.

Edutainment can also take other forms which transcend the boundaries of school or after-school education. Such cases would be pop culture including TV shows exposing majority groups to relatable outgroup characters (Murrar & Brauer, 2018; 2019); or radio and TV shows exposing groups that partake in intergroup conflict to instances of positive intergroup relations (e.g, Bilali, 2022; Green et al., 2020; Paluck & Green, 2009). There are probably other more contemporary ways in which this is done, such as by using social media, and these would more likely be bottom-up, individual-level initiatives more than top-down interventions and could potentially be regarded as a wholly different category.

The idea behind edutainment, regardless of its form, is that stories which are otherwise entertainment products can be used as vehicles for communicating information/ knowledge about topics that are sensitive, and/or prescriptive messages about how intergroup relations ought to be (harmonious). Such information (knowledge) and prescriptive messages can, of course, be met with resistance. The advantage of having sensitive information, including prescriptive messages, communicated with storytelling is that they become somewhat immune to contrary persuasion messages. This is obviously the danger of stories too; that by being resistant to counter-messages they can easily contribute to the propagation of a single, unchallenged story, a dominant narrative (Frank, 2010).

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Story-construction/ production:

Re-writing existing stories

Re-writing stories can be seen as an exercise of identifying how existing stories may serve the propagation of dysfunctional norms of negative stereotypes that may impede intergroup relations or contribute to justifying and advancing social exclusion. Hajisoteriou et al. (2022) had children engaging with a purposefully chosen folktale of their own culture starring Mavris (Blacky) and his quest to find god to help him change the colour of his skin. The story which as one would imagine contained a host of stereotypes especially about race became a cultural product with which children engaged in a collaborative manner. The authors report on workshops they developed which capitalized on collaborative story-telling and story production and where children were, at the end of the day, tasked with the goal of producing a different ending to the story, to tell a better, more socially just, story.

Producing stories that disrupt dominant narratives

There are a number of different approaches outlined in Garagozov and Gadirova (2019) of how story-production can be used to challenge narratives that propagate conflict. These are: (a) the multiperspective path (Fritzsche, 2001) which is specific to history textbooks and it is about presenting multiple versions of a historical event; (b) the bridging narrative concept (Pappe, 2006); which favours a de-empahsis of the national history narrative which typically contributes to conflict highlighting instead intergroup commonalities as they can be found in cultural and social life; (c) the personal storytelling path (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004) aiming at toning down the national accounts and place emphasis on personal stories of (conflict) trauma in an attempt to boost compassion, perspective taking/ empathy and trust through being exposed to the suffering of the other; and (d) the model of progressive narrative transformations (Garagozov, 2012) which constitutes a combination of the rest in the sense that it relies on compiling narratives from history textbooks, or from cultural/ social history, or personal stories, which would be more readily consumed by the other side of the conflict.

Constructive storytelling (Senehi, 2002)

This sub-category of story construction/production examines the role of cultural production, specifically storytelling, in the processes of social conflicts. There are two ways in which storytelling can be significant for conflict resolution, peace-making, and peace-building. Because cultural narratives encode the knowledge that everyone in the group buys into, they have *narrative potency* - they can call to action, invite a paradigm shift (Raheja & Gold, 1994). Second, because it requires no special equipment or training, storytelling is technically and intellectually accessible, and therefore potentially empowering.

Constructive storytelling is inclusive and fosters collaborative power and mutual recognition; creates opportunities for openness, dialogue, and insight; a means to bring issues to consciousness; and a means of resistance. Such storytelling builds understanding and awareness, and fosters voice. One such example of constructive storytelling is storytelling practiced amongst oppressed communities thus giving voice to them by uncovering latent issues and making the personal political by sharing.

Storytelling as the spoken narrative of life experience has given a voice of resistance to whole groups otherwise excluded from the "authoritative" discourse of First World journalism, academia, and

literature. Sometimes there is silence or unawareness around conflict issues. Groups sharing a certain difficult situation or set of experiences may literally establish a community-base, and knowledge-base through sharing their stories (Plummer, 1995).

Such community-building is a means of empowering individuals and groups to address problems that were previously latent. In the 1960s, for example, through small consciousness-raising groups, middle-class white women recognised that their individual experiences were not idiosyncratic but were shared by others and shaped in significant ways by social factors. Women saw themselves as connected in a common struggle and were able to mobilize for political and social change. In this kind of process, the personal story becomes the political story. This may change how groups think about themselves, each other, and the world.

Cultural exchange in conflict settings (exposure to Other in a safe environment)

Within the realm of intergroup relations, and long-standing intractable conflicts in particular, story production can be used for perspective taking purposes. Because the process of listening to a story involves walking in the narrators' shoes and because stories translate well across cultures, mutual recognition is fostered when people listen to each other's stories even across cultural divides and in the context of social conflicts.

Mutual recognition does not refer to a universalising view where one party embraces another party as essentially the same as the self. In fact, claims of a common humanity can rationalise an assimilationist position that subordinates particularities to dominant prototypes (West, 1990). Rather, the concept of mutual recognition encompasses the willingness of parties to engage in dialogue. This should include a struggle to articulate and examine differences. While developing understanding across boundaries of cultural difference may never be complete or unproblematic, it seems that trusting relationships require a desire on the part of all parties to recognise the dignity and experiences of the other. In the case of long-standing inter-communal conflicts, developing a shared historical narrative may be a means for bridging conflict and developing a shared identity that encompasses diversity without erasing it (Kelman, 1998).

Dan Bar-On and others (2000) have brought people from different sides of divides together in seminars called "To Trust and Reflect" where persons' shared their personal experiences and listened to those of others. Evaluations of these seminars emphasized the value of the storytelling that this space made possible as this quote indicates: "Hearing the stories of the 'other' and learning more about their pain and suffering, something that left an impact on me. Storytelling and the care, support, safety and protection of the TRT group to others which made it easy to open up and trust".

The specific case of folktales

Folktales constitute a specific kind of stories which come with affordances that are pivotal for the promotion of better intergroup relations. We outline them in this section with support from literature which has documented them. There are, however, also dangers that folktales engender precisely because of their nature, and we share them too to raise caution. Folktales furthermore are susceptible to issues of contested ownership as we also exemplify in the section which can also lead to backlashes when folktales are used as a window to a certain culture, assuming that they are uncontested products

of that specific culture. Finally, as we live in an increasingly digital world, oral storytelling with live audiences is slowly dying out. We conclude this section with what challenges this entails.

Affordances

As noted earlier, folktales as an example of stories used to promote more positive intergroup relations have been used predominantly in formal or informal education to expose children to different cultures through these cultures' cultural products. This contributes to an advancement of knowledge about these cultures.

Prior literature has identified the following affordances of folktales:

- Identifying universal values: through folktales children can learn to recognise universal moral values partly by being exposed to the common fate of humans regardless of their group affiliation (e.g., mobility folktales). According to Magos (2018) "upon realizing the universality and timelessness of folktale motifs, children [can come to] understand the common traits and common trajectory of human life, beyond and despite ethnic, religious, or language differences" (p.29).
- Reflection on similarities and differences: Elbaz-Luwisch (2001) regards folktales as a "cultural passport" (p. 81) and therefore the means for transcending cultural borders. The contact with other cultural frames can naturally lead to comparisons to trace the similarities and differences between the Other and the Self.
- Empathy: through folktales, readers/ listeners are exposed to the moral dilemmas the protagonists face and are thus invited to contribute/ engage with the story, in the form of casting their judgment on the heroes' choices, whatever those may be (Magos, 2018). To do that, the audience has to enter the protagonists' shoes. This constitutes training in empathy and perspective-taking exercised towards someone who is not a member of one's ingroup.
- Tackling stereotypes and discrimination: according to Amour (2003) the fact that folktales can entail racial, religious and gender stereotypes, this can form an opportunity for the audience (children in the edutainment context) to engage (examine and question) and question prejudice, inequity and injustice. Angelides and Panaou (2012) make a similar point by suggesting that teachers can use folktales in order to encourage students to analyse and discuss their stances towards 'difference', establishing connections between stories and contemporary experiences of social justice in multicultural societies.

The dangers of folktales

Despite the various benefits of being exposed to folktales of one's own or other groups, there are also dangers in using folktales as a way to find out information about the Other. We outline some of the dangers below.

- **Reinforcing stereotypical group images and negative beliefs:** in the same way that a guided (as done in the edutainment context) exploration of the Other through their stories can form an avenue of challenging stereotypes held about that group, folktales can backfire if the audience is entirely left to their own devices to consume them. The reason is that folktales often contain views that may be considered as backwards (think of the Greek Cypriot folktale where the main character is called black, and he is searching for god to help change the colour

of his skin). As such, exposure to such tales may contribute to a negative evaluation of the group that shares them. Furthermore, the protagonists of folktales can be rather simple, often caricatured and exaggerated characters, which exemplify more than nuance stereotypical images of a culture. This too can contribute to stereotype formation or consolidation. For these reasons, folktales can easily be misused to justify violence against an entire group of people within or outside a community (Malimabe-Ramagoshi et al., 2007). This is especially important when children from a majority cultural group are taught stories about marginalized groups.

- **Illusion of knowledge and the danger of single story:** exposure to stories that convey rich information about a culture can provide a false sense of knowledge about other groups and their cultures (see de Bruijn, 2019). Moreover, folktales of *the cultural other* embedded in educational programs are often selected based on availability: stories available in published folktales collections are most likely to be selected for such programs (ibid.). However, such collections are usually created by members of the cultural majority, hence they are not diverse enough. This can lead to what Adichie called the danger of a single story-a stereotypical, biased portrayal of the cultural other (Adichie, 2009). Thus, instead of strengthening their intercultural sensitivity, children can easily construct an essentialist representation of the cultural outgroup.

Ownership issues

Cultural practices and artifacts are important markers of group identity, which makes the ownership over them a delicate issue for intergroup relations, especially if the relations are already fragile. In the 2003 documentary called "Whose is this song", the author follows a trail of a folk song being claimed to be Serbian, Bulgarian, Bosnian, Greek and Turkish – the same song in slightly different arrangements being embedded in the cultural heritage of all those Balkan countries. In the other part of the world, there exists a similar, albeit more formal, legal dispute about the ownership of the now worldwide famous song "Guantanamera" which originates from Cuba (Manuel, 2006).

There are instances of competing ownership claims over other cultural artifacts, as well: according to Kaschl (2003), *dabkeh*, a traditional Arab dance was transformed into *debkah*, a defining element of the newly constituted state of Israel. This did not go unchallenged: Palestinian response was to start performing *dabkeh* as a specifically Palestinian cultural practice, as a way to reaffirm their presence in the tense ethnic relations in the region.

Struggles over cultural practices could be institutionalised and translated into educational policies and population-level measures. In Northern Ireland, for example, there are institutionalised efforts to preserve the Gaeltacht as a quintessential marker of Irish ethnic identity, while the number of Gaeltacht speakers continues to decline (McCubbin, 2010; O'Rourke, 2011). Similar, albeit more successful educational and administrative policies put in place to preserve Basque language have also been documented (Arzoz, 2015).

Similar to folk songs, dances, and even language practices, folktales are typically perceived as belonging to communities - indigenous and/or minority groups (Noyes, 2006). They constitute a part of intangible cultural heritage and are therefore constantly recreated and modified by community members (UNESCO, 2003). As such, folktales were an important part of national identity building in

the 19th century (Xue, 2022) and continue to be a significant part of the collective identity and cultural capital of communities today (Noyes, 2006). Having in mind all illustrated complexities, if a community claims ownership over a folktale it does not imply that other communities cannot claim it as well – the same or similar folktale could thus be shared among different groups, even if it is perceived as central to the collective identity.

Folktales today: alive but different

The rise of new urban settings has changed the cultural context of the folktales. Folktales and storytelling are slowly disappearing from our increasingly modernized and digital world. The expansion of urbanization and rapid socio-demographic changes create new challenges for modern folk storytelling. Storytelling has taken on a more digital format, changing the dynamic between the narrator and the listener.

In their paper Storytelling in a Digital World, De Fina and Perrino (2019) note five main challenges in the storytelling tradition today: (i) recontextualizing and transforming stories from oral formats to digital formats; (ii) the anonymity of the narrator and listener afforded via the internet; (iii) the tensions created by the change in the dynamic between the narrator and the audience; (iv) the different structures via which the audience can participate in the story today, and lastly (v) the issue of authorship and ownership of tales, which becomes increasingly complex in a digitized world. Creating folklore using these new formats and within the current social and geopolitical contexts is a difficult task.

Even more, the suppression of storytelling can also happen as a premeditated means to erase identity. For example, the erasure of Cambodian folklore and culture during the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970's was performed systematically and was key to eradicate any link to past cultural identity in order to make place for a government controlled social structure (Spagnoli et al., 2003). Preventing certain social groups from gathering and sharing weakens their social identity and stops the continuous and ever-changing process that is folktale storytelling.

Yet, that is not to say that storytelling is no longer alive. New storytellers take on different styles and methods of storytelling, and often attempt to re-adapt into formats suitable for new urban environments. Today, the main keepers of folklore are librarians, the elderly, religious/community leaders, and artists (MacDonald et al., 1999).

Lessons for DigiFolk

DigiFolk uses folktales as a window to the marginalised communities inhabiting a civic context with the main purpose of advancing other groups' knowledge of these communities in way that promotes the idea of common humanity without compromising the important ways in which cultural groups differ. Exposure to the stories of cultural others can also contribute to prejudice reduction via the promotion of empathy and perspective taking. Folktales, as the literature has documented, are stories that have the potential to advance all the positive intergroup outcomes. But there are dangers and challenges as well; we identify the two central ones to elaborate on in this section and deliberate on how DigiFolk can tackle them.

The first challenge concerns that mere exposure as opposed to a guided introduction to the tales of a different culture, can contribute rather than reduce negative stereotype formation or consolidation. In DigiFolk we envision to share folktales of marginalised communities without situating this in a curriculum, thereby in an unguided fashion without any mediation, facilitation, from an agent. As such the danger of reinforcing stereotypes is real and cannot be overseen.

The second challenge concerns issues of authenticity and ownership as these were presented in the relevant section above. DigiFolk aims at collecting stories that have not been previously registered and thereby not 'labelled' as stories of a certain group. How do we then know that the stories we collect are authentic stories of this group?

In our view, these challenges are predominantly methodological challenges pertaining to how stories are collected, curated, and shared. We deem that one way of tackling both of these challenges is by registering the story behind the story at the story collection phase, and make sure this information becomes part of the stories' curation and digitisation after that.

What the story behind the story can do is to qualify the story which can come in the form of: (i) humanising an exaggerated protagonist by pointing out features of theirs that can contribute to stereotyping and explaining how these features came to be; (ii) providing a context about when the story was told and to whom to buffer against the formation of negative beliefs about the community sharing them (e.g., for being backwards); (iii) acknowledging how the story could exist in different version in other cultural groups with which their own group has historically interacted; (iv) pointing out why this story is important for the group that shares it this highlighting key values of the group. We deem that the story behind the story can be accommodated using digital technology. That is to say that the digital world apart from challenges may also come with opportunities for nuancing the stories which are shared as part of this project.

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