



The Power of Oral Culture in Education

Theorizing Proverbs,
Idioms, and Folklore Tales

Edited by
Ardavan Eizadirad · Njoki Nathani Wane

palgrave
macmillan

The Power of Oral Culture in Education

Ardavan Eizadirad • Njoki Nathani Wane
Editors

The Power of Oral Culture in Education

Theorizing Proverbs, Idioms, and Folklore Tales

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Ardavan Eizadirad
Faculty of Education
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, ON, Canada

Njoki Nathani Wane
Department of Social Justice
Education
University of Toronto
Toronto, ON, Canada

ISBN 978-3-031-18536-6 ISBN 978-3-031-18537-3 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-18537-3>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

FOREWORD

Power of Oral Culture in Education: Theorizing Proverbs, Idioms, and Folklore Tales is a timely and relevant response to calls for anti-racist and anti-colonial approaches to education. It challenges hegemonic knowledge and coloniality in schooling that privilege one way of knowing and one truth, concepts that serve the interests and worldviews of the white, settler, imperialist, capitalist state. Legitimizing multiple and often silenced ways of knowing and being acknowledges the fluidity and diversity of global, interconnected knowledge systems, contexts, histories, politics, spiritualities, and onto-epistemologies. Through the power of oral culture, the editors and authors in this book open possibilities for dreaming different educational futures with beautiful pedagogical invitations that include pre and post activities and lesson plans. This book, while essential for pre-service and practicing educators, is also useful for families, community leaders, and people who engage with children and youth that are committed to centering the power of oral cultures.

In following the editors' path in Chap. 1, I intentionally refrain from citations and references to honor orality. When I consider the power of oral culture, I immediately remember stories, idioms, proverbs, and folklore tales I learned from my parents and grandparents, as well as elders, community leaders, and spiritual teachers. I remember sitting on the floor massaging my grandmother's feet, while my grandfather would share stories about life in Zanzibar and growing up in India. These stories, filled with lessons and values of non-violence, spirituality, where we come from and who we are, gave me a sense of self, home, community, and belonging. I remember my father sharing "words of wisdom" that often centered

ideas from South Asian philosophers and eastern spiritualities that I simply did not have access to in school or society. I remember my mother sharing life lessons through idioms and proverbs that were often a mix of Hindi, Trinidadian Creole, and English, and often had an element of searing truth and honesty about the complicities, complexities, and failings of the human experience. These ideas gave me access to entirely different thought systems that helped me make sense of myself in this world and the language and concepts to speak back to ideas and injustices I was experiencing and noticing. I think about idioms I learned from community and spiritual leaders that often included lessons and learnings from the natural world, the more-than-human. These lessons come back to me, again and again, each time with a different resonance, a different meaning, and a deeper experience of embodied knowing. I also think about the power of poetry, chanting, and prayers that are central to so many cultures and transcend generations, geographies, and communities. They have taught me about the importance of the relationship between the speaker, the listener, and the space in-between that both suspends and expands time and space.

In retrospect, this was necessary learning for me as a young person who often felt invisible in school and experienced the psychic split that many racialized and marginalized students face in schooling, resulting in the “Vidya” at school and the “Vidya” at home. This learning was far removed from what I was learning in school, yet so fundamental to my development as a young person. I often think about the ways in which students and educators are educated *away* from themselves through mechanisms of schooling that have very narrow conceptions of education. I think about the ways in which oral cultures share concepts and possibilities that invite us into ourselves and our experiences in ways that simply cannot be accessed in an English-only classroom that replicates the logics of power by privileging one way of knowing and one truth. Oral culture reconnects us to our families, our communities, our histories, ourselves. It opens up possibilities for radical connection and deep understanding when experiences, values, and ways of knowing and being are shared across cultures. These experiences allow us to laugh together, to question together, to illuminate together, and to reflect together in ways that a hyper-focus on the written word, which is privileged in white supremacy culture, does not make possible.

From a spirit of fierce love, I also invite us to consider the limits of orality and oral culture, as an invitation to ongoing commitments to criticality, community, relationality, and justice. I invite us to remember that stories,

folklore tales, proverbs, and idioms are not neutral. On the one hand, we want to honor the ways in which oral culture makes visible often invisible or silenced peoples, cultures, and knowledges. On the other hand, we must acknowledge the ways in which cis-hetero-patriarchy, settler colonialism, white supremacy, ableism, imperialism, capitalism, and other forms of oppression may be operating in and through how we story ourselves. I invite us to consider how we might make oral cultures and pedagogies more inclusive of, for example, deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, or how we might acknowledge silence as a form of orality and oral culture. I think about students who may not have access to stories, idioms, and folklore tales from their communities and cultures for various reasons, such as communities that have been forcibly removed from ancestral Indigenous ways of knowing and from stories of their lands because of various acts of political and psychological warfare. This includes survivors of residential schools in Canada, enslaved Africans, people fleeing war, and more. How might we expand our understandings and expressions of orality to be more inclusive? Finally, I consider the ways in which we are continuously making and remaking culture in every space we are in, given that culture is not static. Therefore, while we must acknowledge the power of timeless learning through oral culture, we must also make space for the co-creation of meaning and knowledge that becomes possible with every relation (human, land, waters, the more-than-human) and every new configuration of community.

I have such deep gratitude for Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad and Dr. Njoki Wane whose commitment and vision in reclaiming the power of oral culture in education has resulted in this offering. I also have deep gratitude for the authors who share of themselves, their families, and communities globally, and offer pedagogical possibilities for oral culture. May this book invite us to divest from the ways in which we are storied by the white, settler, capitalist, imperialist gaze, and re/turn, re/story, re/claim, and re/connect on our terms and with our voices, centered on our ever-evolving ways of knowing and being.

Faculty of Education, York University
Toronto, ON, Canada

Vidya Shah

DEDICATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this book to all elders who as knowledge keepers continue to pass on vital wisdom, life lessons, values, and cultural practices to next generations through oral culture and storytelling. Storytelling through proverbs, idioms, and folklore tales has been an instrumental tool in many cultures and it has tremendously contributed to my growth. I vividly remember stories my grandparents would tell me as a young child and all the proverbs and idioms my parents would use to teach me values and life lessons whether at the dinner table or after a teachable moment. I strive to pay it forward by centering and legitimizing oral culture as part of my pedagogy and practice as an educator and a community activist.

Ardavan Eizadirad

I dedicate this work to my ancestors who have paved the way for us for many generations past and those to follow.

Njoki Wane

CONTENTS

1	The Power of Oral Culture in Education: Remembering, Documenting, and Revitalizing Oral Teachings	1
	Ardavan Eizadirad and Njoki Wane	
Part I	Identity: Knowing and Understanding Who You Are, Your Roots, Lineage, and Cultural Customs and Practices	17
2	“Mtu Akikuita Mmbwa Usibweke”/When Someone Calls You A Dog, Don’t Bark Back!	19
	Wairimu Njoroge	
3	Stories and Counter-Stories	39
	Rabia Khokhar	
4	Strength through Resistance: Drawing Critical Connections between Malalai of Maiwand and Malala Yousafzai to Counter Western Narratives of Muslim Girlhood	61
	Zuhra Abawi	

5	Theorizing the Power of African Oral Culture for Identity Formation	79
	Osholene Oshobugie Upiomoh	
Part II	Culture: Customs and Traditions with Symbolic Meanings Associated with a Particular Nation, People, or Social Group	95
6	<i>'Soulful Listening': Rumi's Story of the Parrot and the Merchant</i>	97
	Soudeh Oladi	
7	The Persimmon Tree: A Japanese Rakugo Tale	117
	Cathy Miyata	
8	Importance of Proverbs in Caribbean Culture	135
	Natasha Burford and Lachmi Singh	
9	Maintenance of an Iranian Identity through Oral Culture and the <i>Shahmameh</i>: "The Shame Is Not In Asking, Shame Is In Not Knowing"	147
	Ardavan Eizadirad	
Part III	Power: The Ability or Capacity to Influence Change Which Can Manifest in Different Ways Through Ideas, Individuals, or Institutions	163
10	Pedagogies of Resistance in the Palestinian Folktales: <i>Nus-Nsais</i>	165
	Huda Salha	
11	<i>Nanny's Dolly</i>: Using Storytelling to Explore the Residential School Experience with Young Learners	193
	Jennifer M. Straub	

12	Remembering a Goan Folktale in the Midst of a Global Pandemic	211
	Kimberly L. Todd	
13	Teaching and Learning from Our Elder’s Feet: Decolonizing Education Through Embu Proverbs	229
	Njoki Wane, Madrine G. Muruatetu, and Sein Sheila Kipusi	
Part IV	Community: A Collective Group or Geographical Space That Attends to the Needs of Its Members with Love, Respect, and Reciprocity with a Unified Vision or Common Interests	249
14	Lessons from the Legend of the No Face Doll: Haudenosaunee Origin	251
	Heather Watts	
15	The Story of Ni3mah: A Palestinian Folktale	267
	Aida Al-Thayabeh	
16	The Power of Service in Building Inclusive Communities	279
	Sheliza Jamal	
17	Addressing the Elephant in the Room	289
	Alysha Damji	
	Index	303

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Zuhra Abawi is Assistant Professor of Education and program coordinator of the Masters of Educational Leadership program at Niagara University Ontario's College of Education. She is the recipient of the 2022 Scholar Award by the Association for Independent Liberal Arts Colleges of Teacher Education. Prior to her faculty position, she was an elementary teacher and an early childhood educator. Her work focuses on the ways that discourses of race, equity, and identity are negotiated, mediated, and socialized in education. She is particularly interested in teacher hiring practices and is the author of two books: *The Effectiveness of Educational Policy for Bias-Free Teacher Hiring: Critical Insights to Enhance Diversity in the Canadian Teacher Workforce* and *Equity as Praxis in Early Childhood Education and Care*.

Aida Al-Thayabeh (Ida Thibeh Wiese) is an Afro-Palestinian Muslim educator with WRDSB (Waterloo Region) in the elementary division in Ontario, Canada. She has been a community advocate for over 15 years, working passionately with racialized and marginalized children. Al-Thayabeh work in advocacy and research spans the Black, Palestinian, and global Indigenous communities. She holds an MEd and is completing her PhD in the Department of Social Justice Education at OISE, University of Toronto. Her research focuses on anti-Blackness in the Muslim and Arab region using a non-western lens and tools of analysis to explore the impact of white supremacy, imperialism, and colonialism.

Natasha Burford is a union executive director in Toronto District 12. She has been teaching for over 15 years in the Toronto District School

Board. She received her doctorate from the University of Toronto and she is a sessional lecturer at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). She is also a community advocate and has worked on community projects throughout Toronto's west end. She is the founder of In Brilliant Company, a tech-tutoring organization, and as of 2006 started a women's mentoring organization. She is an educator, scholar, entrepreneur, mother of three amazing boys, wife, and learner.

Alysha Damji is a teacher in the Waterloo Region District School Board. She has taught in many contexts including Germany, United Kingdom, and Canada. For over 10 years, she has taught students from Grade 4 to Grade 12 and conducted workshops for university students on the themes of Islamophobia and anti-racist education. Although Damji was born and raised in Canada, her parents were not. In 1972, her parents had a life-changing experience of fleeing Uganda and arriving in Canada as refugees. While listening to and learning from stories in Kutchi and Swahili, she navigated a system to learn English as her school's first, Canadian-born English language learner. Since then, Alysha holds storytelling and the power of oral culture deeply in her heart.

Ardavan Eizadirad is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. He is the author of *Decolonizing Educational Assessment: Ontario Elementary Students and the EQAO* (2019), and co-editor of *Equity as Praxis in Early Childhood Education and Care* (2021), and *Counternarratives of Pain and Suffering as Critical Pedagogy: Disrupting Oppression in Educational Contexts* (2022). His research interests include equity, standardized testing, oral culture, community engagement, youth violence, anti-oppressive practices, critical pedagogy, social justice education, resistance, and decolonization. Eizadirad is also the founder and director of EDication Consulting (www.edication.org) offering equity, diversity, and inclusion training to organizations.

Sheliza Jamal is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Social Justice Education at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She holds a Master of Education from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. Her doctoral research interests include race bias and racism in teacher education. As an educator for over 14 years, she uses theatre pedagogy to create awareness and embodied empathy on issues of social inequality. She is the founder and executive director of Curated Leadership Inc. (<https://curatedleadership.com/>), an organiza-

tion that works with communities to provide training and development on fundamentals of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Rabia Khokhar is a teacher with the Toronto District School Board and an education and equity consultant at Rabia Teaches. She is also a PhD student at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning. Khokhar is passionate about ensuring that schools are inclusive spaces where all students are reflected, represented, included. Khokhar is the recipient of the Elementary Teacher’s Federation of Ontario’s 2021 Anti-Racist and Equity Activism Award. She enjoys sharing her teaching and learning on her twitter platform @Rabia_Khokhar1 and her website www.rabiakhokhar.com

Madrine King’endo Dean of Education and senior lecturer, University of Embu, has a Bachelor’s degree in Educational Sciences (2000) and Masters in Educational Psychology (2003) from the Pontifical University “Auxillium” Rome. Her doctorate in Special Education (2010) is from Kenyatta University. She visited the University of Toronto in 2017, Department of Psychology and Institute of Child Studies and schools in Ontario. She has written on children with behavior disorders and inclusion. She participates in school boards in Kenya. She is an external examiner at the University of Kwazulu Natal and Moi University.

Sein Kipusi received her doctorate in Social Justice Education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Her doctoral work investigated financial literacy education amongst Black entrepreneurs in Toronto using anti-Black racism, anti-colonial, and African Indigenous knowledge frameworks. Her current postdoctoral research at the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus looks at the pilot Transitional Year Program focusing on the challenges and success of curriculum development, recruitment, and inclusive diversity.

Cathy Miyata has been a professional storyteller for over 35 years. She has facilitated hundreds of workshops and courses in storytelling to teachers, business people, storytellers, academics, children of all ages, public speakers, and therapists at universities, festivals, professional development sessions, and as a key note speaker. Her telling has brought her to Serbia, Mexico, the United States, Portugal, Sweden, Malaysia, across Canada, into many Indigenous Communities, and several visits to Egypt, Germany,

and Japan. Miyata is also an award winning writer and an Assistant Professor of Literacy at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Wairimu Njoroge is an Indigenous-African Kikuyu woman. She holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in Social Work and is currently pursuing her PhD in African spirituality studies, journeying in the becoming of a humane-scholar and ultimately a healer. As a psychotherapist, Njoroge capitalizes on Indigenous African knowledges and wisdom, incorporating evidenced-based modalities in her interventions with individuals, families, and communities. Njoroge takes a holistic approach to wellness, centering people's stories within the context of their ancestral and diverse collective histories and collaboratively working to strengthen people's sense of dignity. Njoroge is committed to therapeutic practices invested in restoration, healing, and recreation of dignified, meaningful, and sustainable living.

Soudeh Oladi is Assistant Professor (Teaching Stream) in the Social Justice Education Department at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education (OISE). Her work centers on immigrant schooling experiences in Canada, decolonial education, spirituality in education, and Rumi.

Huda Salha is a Palestinian Canadian multidisciplinary artist and researcher. Her work explores the historical, cultural, and psychological sense of place. She is intrigued by how identity and memory are interwoven with place through political and cultural boundaries. Her research investigates cultural production and oral histories as resistance and anti-colonial critical pedagogies. A PhD student at the University of Toronto, Salha holds an MFA in Interdisciplinary Art Media and Design from OCAD University. She has received numerous awards and her artworks were published in online galleries, newspapers, and art books. Her short film, "It's a Matter of a Phone Call" was screened at Toronto Palestine Film Festival and internationally. You can learn more about her work at: <https://www.hudasalha.com/>

Lachmi Singh currently works at the University of Toronto and has over 18 years of experience working in higher education across undergraduate and graduate programs in the United Kingdom and Canada. Lachmi has a doctorate in law and her research expertise is in the areas of education, equity, diversity, inclusion. quality assurance, and program evaluation.

Jennifer M. Straub is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is a proud Métis and bilingual (French/English) educator and researcher. She holds a PhD in Education Studies from the University of New Brunswick. Her research interests include teacher education and, more specifically, Social Studies, Citizenship, and Indigenous Education in Initial Teacher Education programs. Understanding how pre-service teachers develop as educators to improve student achievement in K-12 has always been at the root of her practice.

Kimberly L. Todd is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Social Justice Education at OISE, University of Toronto. Her research interests include education, decolonization, spirituality, dreaming, and teacher praxis. She was a part-time professor at Seneca College in the Department of English and Liberal Studies and is currently a teacher development manager at Teach For Canada. She is a certified Ontario Certified Teacher who has taught in South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, and in a First Nations community in North West Saskatchewan. She has also designed curricular resources for the David Suzuki Foundation and Amazon Watch.

Osholene Oshobugie Upiomoh is an African Indigenous educator, storyteller, cultural consultant, African Indigenous Homeschool Program Coordinator, the founder and Executive Director of Meritah Wisdom Education Center for Children and Families, and most significantly, an initiate of Meritah's (Africa's) Traditional Ancestral Education and Wisdom School of the Dogomba (Dogon) bloodline, where she learns at the feet of traditional African elders, network of priesthood, and kingship in Western Africa. As a traditional woman, Upiomoh writes stories that honor Africans' Indigenous Ancestral lineage, culture, tradition, and spirituality. She is pursuing a PhD degree in Social Justice Education at OISE, University of Toronto.

Njoki Wane is Professor at the University of Toronto and the Chair in the Department of Social Justice Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). An accomplished educator and educational leader, she also served as the Director for the Center for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies (CIARS) at OISE from 2006 to 2014. She is a recognized scholar in the areas of Black feminisms in Canada and Africa, African Indigenous knowledges, anti-colonial, decolonizing educa-

tion, and African women and spirituality. She has co-edited 14 books, 33 chapters, and 24 articles in refereed journals, and presented at over 300 conferences both locally and internationally.

Heather Watts is Mohawk and Anishinaabe from Six Nations of the Grand River. Education has been a central part of her work over the past 10 years, graduating from various institutions including Syracuse University with a degree in Inclusive Education, Columbia University Teachers College with a degree in Literacy Coaching, the Harvard Graduate School of Education with a degree in Education Policy and Management, and working as an elementary school teacher. Watts is a doctoral student at the University of Toronto in the Social Justice Education program. Her research centers reconciliation and reclamation of Indigenous ways of knowing in modern-day education systems.

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 10.1	“My grandmother was the best storyteller”, Illustration, 2022. Huda Salha	166
Fig. 10.2	Who Am I? Where is Home? Acrylic on Canvas, 36” × 36”, 2018. Huda Salha (This work connects to the idea and the state of unbelonging in the new spaces, away from home; the feeling of being out of place; and the permanent status and label as refugee)	168
Fig. 10.3	Migrating Bodies, Acrylic on Canvas, 36” × 36”, 2017. Huda Salha (Although displaced people move to a new place with their bodies, their minds and thoughts remain in their homeland. My family and I have always felt in exile and out of place. The bodies and identities belong to their specific place where they originated, and the notion of belonging is deeply rooted in the collective national identity)	169
Fig. 10.4	From Within, Oil on Canvas, 40” × 28”, 2001. Huda Salha (A painting illustrating the theme that freedom comes from within. The oppressed should overcome their fears, resist, struggle and work toward their own liberation)	181
Fig. 10.5	“That is how I imagined the ghoul,” Illustration, 2022. Huda Salha	184

Fig. 10.6 These Are Not the Keys, Cast Bronze, Aluminum and Iron, Dimensions Variable, 2020. Huda Salha
(Keys mark Palestinians' forceful displacement from their homes in 1948. They are a symbol encapsulating the lost homes and homeland and everything left behind. Keys as artifacts are mnemonic devices connected to the displaced bodies. Consequently, keys are dominant in the Palestinian oral tradition)



The Power of Oral Culture in Education: Remembering, Documenting, and Revitalizing Oral Teachings

Ardavan Eizadirad and Njoki Wane

Objectives

- To create awareness about the importance and power of oral culture in education
- To outline how oral culture and storytelling through proverbs, idioms, and folklore tales can be an effective educational tool
- To discuss oral culture as a medium to engage students and to mitigate systemic barriers and inequities in education

A. Eizadirad (✉)
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON, Canada
e-mail: aeizadirad@wlu.ca

N. Wane
University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, Canada
e-mail: njoki.wane@utoronto.ca

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature
Switzerland AG 2023

A. Eizadirad, N. N. Wane (eds.), *The Power of Oral Culture in
Education*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-18537-3_1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the importance of oral culture in education from theorizing to its applications in local communities and via daily interactions with others. By theorizing oral culture, the authors Ardavan Eizadirad and Njoki Wane, discuss its significance and impact as a universal language across generations and different geographies and spaces, particularly how it has helped maintain cultures, traditions, and languages through elders, the family unit, and other key figures in the community. With intentionality, the authors do not use any citations or references to honor and centre orality as a powerful medium for teaching and learning. Through a back-and-forth dialogical conversation, Ardavan and Njoki discuss their identities, professional, and lived experiences with orality and how they have grown in different ways from exposure to a variety of proverbs, idioms, and folklore tales. The chapter concludes by outlining how oral culture can be used in education to engage students through storytelling and on a larger scale to address and take actions towards systemic inequities.

The remainder of the chapter is a conversation between the two book co-editors, Ardavan Eizadirad and Njoki Wane, about their vision for the book and why such collection of works examining oral culture through the use of proverbs, idioms, and folklore takes across different countries and continents was much needed and overdue to demonstrate the power of oral culture in education and beyond. The conversation was recorded over a remote meeting and then transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. Yes, there may be some grammar errors throughout the conversations documented, but we have kept it to maintain the authenticity of the oral conversations that took place and show how the power of oral culture is more about its impact rather than its semantics associated with “proper” form of expressing ideas. The key questions posed to guide the discussions have been placed in italics to help the reader navigate the conversations. The subheadings throughout the chapter reflect the big ideas in the guiding questions.

POSITIONALITY AND LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE AUTHORS
WITH ORAL CULTURE AND STORYTELLING

Ardavan: *So anything you want to share about yourself and tell us what is the importance and power of oral culture in your life given your identity and lived experiences.*

Njoki: Whenever I think of oral culture or anything to do with orality, I cannot help it, but what comes to mind is my upbringing in rural Kenya. My parents did not have straight conversations with us, but everything was framed around proverbs, or wise sayings or stories. We would sit around the fire when dinner was being made or around a fire outside on our homestead. My father used to have a pit fire and we would sit around it as he narrated or shared his experiences of the wars that he had participated in, especially the Second World War. At the end of each story, or experience, he would share with us what the lessons he learnt. With time, we had mastered his style of teaching, and we knew that at the end of his story-telling, he would ask us; What did we learn? His style of story-telling was full of examples. For instance, he would say: he did not just say, you children just sit there I'm going to tell you ABCD. He will normally say I'll give you an example; then he would proceed in giving that example. He always had a talking stick that he would wave around when he was sharing his stories with us. That's how my evenings were spent while growing up in rural Kenya. I still remember the various events like it was like yesterday. I'll give you one example. We had been told by our parents never to go to the river because of crocodiles and currents. But many times we disobeyed. When we came home, instead of being spanked, my dad will say, OK, you know what you guys have done? And we would nod our heads. He would then say: By going to a river that is invested with a lot of crocodiles and river currents, you will either be eaten by the crocodiles or be swept away and you'll be dead. I still remember those moments and the stories outside on our courtyard. I still see my mother in the kitchen cooking dinner using firewood and narrating stories. What these forms of teaching inculcated in me was the importance of listening. That was my life growing up in a village in Kenya.

Ardavan: Great thank you for sharing. For me, you know, I was born in Iran and immigrated to Canada when I was in elementary school. But very similarly, uh, during social gatherings during educational or teachable moments my grandparents and my parents would use proverbs and idioms and sometimes folklore tales to really open the conversation, especially when it was about tough conversations. Those statements and the type of storytelling as the medium was so universal, you were able to understand. You wouldn't take it personal and it was so common given the traditions and practices and what's unique, and I'm sure very similar in Africa, as different parts of Iran have their own subcultures from mannerisms to traditions to even food and how they speak. These proverbs and idioms,

they are universal and accepted by the various subcultures, and you know, at a time when you know the literacy rate was low, it was really foundational in maintaining teachings across generations, across spaces, and across communities. So for me I always remember them similar to you, having these conversations at home, on walks going from one place to another when I would walk with my parents and grandparents, and we'd have these deep conversations where either at the start, middle, or end it involved a proverb or an idiom. I think it has become part of many Iranian households who also have migrated all around the world. Oral culture has become a way to maintain who they are and connect to their roots. In the chapter I wrote, I talk about how you know, given the extensive history of the Persian empire, you know the stories were mixed with mythology and captured in a book called *Shahnameh* which helped maintain the Farsi language separate from Arabic. So I think oral cultures and traditions, because they are so accessible, become universal and it travels across continents and spaces and even though they have their, you know unique adaptations, the message is the same, and people of all ages from all walks of life, whether they have formal education or not, whether they're elders or children, they can relate to it, and that's the power of theorizing it, and in a way legitimizing it and centering it.

Njoki: Wow, that's so like my life. This goes on to show what I shared with you; I totally agree with you about the universality of proverbs, idioms and folk tales. This last Christmas my nanas came to my home and they all wanted to hear about stories about Africa, growing up in rural Kenya and I found myself asking them to sit around me; and to repeat aha while I was narrating the stories. They all did that and couldn't wait for me to start my story. Hopefully one day I'll take them so there is that notion that no matter where you are, you can use this system of oral teachings. At the end of each story, I asked them what they thought the meaning was. It was interesting to listen to their different opinions and interpretation of the stories or proverbs. I find that this form of teaching engages children and brings their minds to a particular focus, a particular centering of their mind, which is very important when it comes to the intellectual stimulation or cultivation of young children's minds.

Ardavan: Agreed! So I think it's a good transition to the next question, which you've already started kind of discussing. *Why is it important to theorize oral culture and particularly what is its importance in the education system, whether historically or when you think of social issues happening now?*

SIGNIFICANCE OF THEORIZING ORAL CULTURE: DISRUPTING COLONIAL LOGIC

Njoki: When I think of theorizing, proverbs, and folklore tales, what comes to mind is the colonial logic. The colonial logic and its ideologies displaced our oral culture. There was no place for non-Eurocentric form of teaching and orality sort of challenged the status quo. Oral culture was viewed as a waste of time and had no place in formal education. Thinking about all this, I always wonder why I did not embrace orality sooner or more publicly. I do use stories while teaching, if for nothing else, to draw from something that is familiar to me. It legitimizes my own ways of knowing. It legitimizes my Indigenous ways of teaching and knowing. It's a way of disrupting the colonial mindset. We have to be forceful in showing that, there are multiple ways of delivering education. This anthology gives us a chance to decenter the only way that has dominated our education system—Eurocentric paradigms. We cannot sit on the side and allow the erasure of other ways of knowing because of our silence. We would be allowing the erasure of teachings that had been passed to us from generation to generation. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o talks about it in his book *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986); has voiced over and over about the disconnect between the stories my parents would tell us in the evening and what we learnt in colonial schools. The colonial education drove to create a total colonial separation from our own reality, and we were supposed to consume that silently. We must reclaim and recenter our oral ways of knowing. That does not mean that we must dislodge the Eurocentric ways of knowing, not at all.

Ardavan: I agree with everything you've said. I think theorizing oral culture centers its importance. We have been very intentional in the authors we have gathered for this collection to make sure we have representations from different continents and from different identities because it speaks to how people were impacted by oral culture universally. It also speaks to how authors felt rejuvenated reflecting on their interactions and learnings from oral culture and how retelling became a form of revitalizing. To be able to tell these stories and for it to come together across spaces and continents around the collective message of its importance reflects education as a community project. You know we commonly hear it takes a village to raise a child and within that community everyone has a role whether siblings, parents, coaches, or teachers. Centering orality is important to dismantle the hierarchy which we often see in traditional

schooling and even at post-secondary institutions. The way the system is set up, where there is a big power imbalance rooted in inequities of policies and practices. With the oral culture, you know, everyone is there coming to the table with a growth mindset kind of going back to the stories I remember when I was young. I would love to hear scary stories from my grandmother and you know it was good but also it was so engaging. I would also then have a hard time sleeping, but I loved spending that time with her listening to the stories she shared. Thinking about centering oral culture in the academia, it's a way of disrupting the hegemonic citational practices that have such a strong hold on what can be published and in what ways. For example, when I am writing various chapters for books, if I'm using a proverb, the publisher will ask me, well, this needs to be cited for its original use. But I try to push back and say, well, nobody owns the proverb's right to citation because nobody knows its original source since it has been passed down through generations and generations. So I think that's one example of why it is so important to center these oral knowledges and teachings: not in a way of claiming it as if someone owns it, but the importance of sharing it to continue its impact in a way that is valued and legitimized in the education system, not as a superficial add on, but within the official curriculum because it's impactful and I think it also connects to maintaining and valuing different identities. For even myself when I came here to Canada, even though I still speak my first language of Farsi fluently, I struggle more when it comes to writing and reading it due to lack of exposure, and so oral culture through conversations at home with my parents and family members was a way for me to stay connected to my cultural heritage and roots. It was also a way to learn my family history, to want to go back home to Iran and visit the country and learn about spaces and places and lived experiences of people in the community. So I think oral culture is almost a tool as much as a pedagogy to keep people engaged and make education a community project.

Njoki: I would like to add to what you have said; I still remember one particular song that, my grandmother and my own mother sang to me while growing up. I sang to my children and now my own daughter sings to her children. The song had teachings about how to deal with an enemy; friends and how to be obedient. I was surprised when one of my grandchildren asked me to sing it to her. The songs which I learned before as a young child growing up, I still remember and unknowingly, I've passed them on to my children; who have passed them to their children.

Ardavan: Those are great examples! *I think it speaks to the next question that explores how is oral culture passed and shared intergenerationally.*

ORAL CULTURE AND STORYTELLING AS A MEDIUM AND TOOL FOR RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING INTERGENERATIONALLY

Ardavan: For me, I see it influencing us in many ways. As you mentioned, even through lullabies. I also see it in music. We see it in many traditions where we have folklore dancing and singing. We have folklore ceremony which you know many elders and knowledge keepers are involved with. For example, every time my dad, who's away from his home country of Iran, when he gets homesick he watches films in Farsi language and listens to folklore music. When he sees or hears cultural references to places or food or dance relating to his community in Iran, it gives him a boost of energy. It's food for the soul, uh, even with food. I mean food is a big component of Iranian culture, and so I think a lot of these conversations and sharing of teachings happen over food when people come over or they host events. The elders playing a key role with the sharing of teaching through oral culture is common across many continents where people go to elders for their advice and insights. It's a form of respect to tap into their lived experiences. But you know in the Western hemisphere lived experiences is not as valued. Maybe perhaps a little bit more in this, you know, quote unquote woke culture, but still you could see the binary and superiority affiliated with quantitative versus qualitative research, even in educational institutions we work in such as universities. Lastly, I think...

Njoki: Before you go to the next question...

Ardavan: No, go ahead. We're on the same one.

Njoki: Ohhh ok. Go ahead then finish.

Ardavan: I think lastly oral culture is a tool for relationship building. That's how I see it. It allows relationships to grow. When you think of your positive experiences with a meaningful teacher, a caring adult or a coach, a lot of times it was the oral conversations that initiated and maintained that relationship. So I think the beauty of oral culture is it allows for you to make relationships and it's very similar to when you travel to a new country or a new community you listen and learn and you ask questions and through that oral sharing, particularly even if you don't know the

language, you're able to kind of figure it out and put things together to contribute to your knowledge and insights gained.

Njoki: The question of maintaining and passing down oral culture intergenerationally; is done in such a way that, we do not even know it is being done. The example I provided above is a proof of this point. Yes, I never thought my children or paid attention when they were growing up about the songs I would sing while cooking or doing other work around the house. I remember one of my children saying to me how I would tell them a proverb when they had done something I was not happy with. You can clearly see; how generationally this information is passed on which I believe is critical to the maintenance of a culture. What we are doing by writing this book is showing that you cannot forget its importance. This is something that each family should cultivate in their home. I hope this book will be reawakening to not those who have contributed to the book but others who will read it or use it in their own classroom! We are awakening a discourse that we should never forget oral culture. Even if you don't have young children find a way of telling stories. The notion of remembering and not forgetting relates to learning who you are, as you have articulated it so clearly you know as an Iranian. It's the same thing with me as a Kenyan, how I'm a Kenyan from a particular group of people. It's what makes me who I am as a Black woman in this continent in this point in time and in the academia.

Ardavan: Beautiful and so powerful! As you said, it's a form of revitalizing who we are in a way where people are not ashamed of their culture and ways of life including traditions and ceremony, but in a way that they're proud and willing to teach others about it through oral culture and sharing. That's what it means to center it! Oral culture has touched every corner of the world due to migration and displacement, sometimes you know due to tragic events and systemic oppression, but everybody for example has heard the saying don't judge a book by its cover. We don't know who said that originally, but that's something someone at some point in their life is gonna hear as part of a teachable moment. I think this is a good segue to our next question and we've kind of talked about it a little bit, but we're gonna discuss it even more by relating it to current events. The question is *why is oral culture important and how can it be used to tackle current social issues and inequities in education?*

POWER OF ORAL CULTURE IN MITIGATING SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES IN EDUCATION

Njoki: Researching education, the inequities in education can be very exhausting. I would like to emphasize, after highlighting the inequities in our education, we should move to the next step of sharing about the cultures from around the world. If I'm sharing something from the continent of Africa and you're sharing something from the Iranian culture, and when we compare notes there are similarities in that, then why can't we do the same thing with education? Why can't the mainstream listen to the voices from other cultures in the world? What are they masking? We need to ask those questions. Because if they're willing to unmask, then they can actually benefit from the richness of it especially here in Canada. If we gave equal value to the knowledges coming from every corner of our world. However, there has to be people who are willing to listen and willing to do the work to shift the ways education is delivered in our classrooms. I think that's where the problem is, unwillingness to change. Yes we have all the answers to create a just world. The solutions are there, but I think the current makeup of education, the current makeup of how education is delivered, how education is theorized unless there is a way of going back to the drawing board, there will always be inequities within the educational system.

Ardavan: I agree! I think the root cause of many of the systemic inequities in education and outside of it is the intersection of power, privilege, and profit. I call it the three P's, and when they intersect it often leads to inequitable power relations and inaccessibility to opportunities where identities from equity deserving groups are disadvantaged. Because at times even though racialized and minoritized identities work twice or ten times as hard, they can't get access to certain opportunities and that's a major problem. Connecting what we are discussing to some of key influential scholars is important both within and outside of Canada. I think of, you know, Kimberly Crenshaw and the concept of intersectionality. I think of Gloria Ladson Billings and the importance of socio-culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies and teachings. bell hooks and teaching for community and rest in peace to her who died recently. And more recently, the works of Django Paris around culturally sustaining pedagogies; we want to teach social culturally relevant skills like learning the English and French language in Canada but if it's at the expense of forgetting your cultural roots and home language, then the process is harmful and

detrimental. So we have to look for ways to sustain who we are and help others and ourselves heal from the traumas and oppressions we experience, historically and currently in new forms and modalities. Oral culture is the platform and the tool that can facilitate that. It allows listening. It allows learning through storytelling and growing as a community. It allows to move away from looking or judging others from a colonial deficit lens, of grading learners as a A,B,C,D letter grade or product, and instead meet them as an educator wherever they are at. It is about meeting learners where they are at holistically and helping them progress and grow. And that means recognizing and reinforcing that success is different for everybody depending on who they are and where they come from, but the goal is to get better and continue to grow. It's about having a growth mindset and I think yourself [Njoki Wane], you know, Carl James, George Dei you have been pioneers in the Canadian context for having these important discussions and advocating to disrupt the colonial logic. Through your work, advocacy, scholarship, and teachings you've made students feel valued and seen. We know many students from equity deserving groups don't feel valued, where they constantly experience microaggressions in meetings and classrooms. So when they are seen, when they're able to have someone who speaks their language who understands their lived experiences, who listens and ask questions instead of making assumptions from a deficit lens, it is powerful. That's when education becomes engaging, empowering, inclusive, and people commit to advocacy and activism as part of the teaching and learning process. Connecting these ideas to residential schools we see how cultural genocide impedes the transfer of culture, language, and traditions from one generation to the next. Fear and confusion are created leading to self-hate and internalized oppression in the next generation. Some people stop being proud of who they are and their roots and instead internalize stereotypical representations of who they are due to accepting colonial logic. I know for example, many people in Iran who have nose surgeries due to having long noses. Similar to many other people in different cultures, they are trying to alter their physical look because of the media representations affiliated with stereotypical thinking and hegemonic discourses of what is ideal beauty often associated with Eurocentric ideals of being white and skinny. Oral culture allows people to accept who they are, to question the metanarratives that are told about the way they should look and behave, and facilitates people finding their own voice and power within their histories, cultures, languages, and traditions.

Njoki: You know Ardavan, remembering is so important. I keep going back to my parents teachings: they always emphasized the importance of listening with your heart. You know when somebody says, listen with your heart, people often make a joke out of it. They say how do I listen with my heart. I listen with my ear. But my parents would always say, when you listen with your heart, you will always remember everything. You will grow up to be a better person. Listening with your heart evokes your emotions, and you pay more attention. Without telling us, what they were doing, my parents were planting seeds of being fair and considerate about others. I'll never forget that. Another thing that they emphasized was; seeing with closed eyes. They explained that when you can see with your closed eyes then you truly feel and see what is happening. They said when you can see with your closed eyes, you'll be able to cross a river. Again, teaching the centrality of a connected mind, body, and soul in relation to the land. My parents also talked about ceremonies and elements of ceremonies, not necessarily telling us to take part in a ceremony, but their importance in cleansing the body, the earth, and the community. My parents always emphasized a form of cleansing. I was surprised to see sage and tobacco used by Indigenous communities and people in North America. I grew up with that, again showing the global universality of some of the Indigenous ways of knowing or Indigenous tools of cleansing.

Ardavan: When you said to listen with your heart it reminded me of a saying that I constantly heard growing up: you have two ears and one mouth, so you should listen more than you talk. That always reminded me of, you know, the importance of listening. Listening is an art in and of itself, a skill that we try to teach our students to master. Before we go to our last question to wrap up, I want to emphasize a few things about this chapter, how it is written, as well as the vision for the book. With intentionality we are not citing anybody for this chapter to disrupt citational practices rooted in colonial logic, and that was important to both of us. Also, the reason why we decided to have a standardized lesson plan for the various authors to come up with in activity is to be very intentional with how we can use these stories to capture and share oral culture. We want everyone including parents, elders, youth, and all other community members from all walks of life to bring these stories to life in their households and communities. I'm sure there are other unique stories that can further be mentioned and shared. This body of work and collection of proverbs, idioms, and folklore tales is just the tip of the iceberg and the starting point. We hope we can add and contribute many many more to further