

**“SILK ROAD” INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF TOURISM
AND CULTURAL HERITAGE**



A Thesis for the Degree Master of Arts

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**PARABLES OF MULLAH NASREDDIN AS A
SOURCE OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE**

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CULTURAL HERITAGE
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Master's Thesis

Parables of Mullah Nasreddin as a Source of Intercultural Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

MIKITA SHYMCHUK, Parables of Mullah Nasreddin as a Source of Intercultural Dialogue. Guided by Professor Nargis T. Nurulla-Khojaeva.

The inner idea of the presented project is connected to improving intercultural dialogue and communications using the heritage of one of the most renowned heroes and cultural symbols of the Asian region – Mullah Nasreddin Hodja. This project's main goal is to develop original recommendations and new ways of displaying the cultural and historical heritage of the parables of Mullah Nasreddin by making creative performances, art forms, and art products. This research is a literature review with the elements of a descriptive quantitative research.

For this project, a mixed research methodology was utilized combining both primary and secondary research techniques. For descriptive quantitative part, several surveys were conducted and analyzed. Sources of data were obtained using primary data and secondary data. The process of collecting data was performed using field observation, questionnaires, and documentation. The results received from distributing the questionnaires were seen from the characteristics of the students, lecturers and professors on average who responded. In total, international respondents with dominated as much as 60%, and approximately 6% of the total number of respondents consist of lecturers and professors in history and cultural heritage. Based on the results of the survey, Belarusian respondents, in contrast to their international colleagues, are not familiar with the figure and heritage of Mullah Nasreddin. According to the results of the observations, Uzbekistan has already made effort to promote the legacy of Nasreddin internationally; even though these measures could be improved. As per the outcome of the literature review and primary research part, it is important to focus on the cosmopolitan meaning of Nasreddin, on his international links, and on making creative modern events, art forms, and theatrical performances for using Nasreddin's heritage in intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: Intercultural Dialogue, Mullah Nasreddin, International Relations, Cultural Heritage

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Every mother reads to her children fairy tales and fables that provide insight into their own homeland. Such tales are usually intriguing and unique, and they are filled with knowledge. An excellent approach to preserving information about ordinary life, historical events, and natural phenomena is through word-of-mouth transmission from generation to generation. Folklore is believed to be the term for this type of human inventiveness and social action. At the same time, folklore can be used as a source of interculturality, which means utilizing different cultural resources in the process of intercultural communication and exchange.

As a consequence, it is possible to underline the idea that if folklore is considered to be an important part of people's life and upbringing, then it directly or indirectly influences people's life perception, life choices and lifestyle. Folklore heroes become cultural icons that symbolize people and their countries as well as exist as creative representations of them (Haydarov, 2021, p. 1973). Folklore, in general, creates a specific cultural link between generations and nations. This connection cannot be disregarded due to the substantial semantic and cultural imprint that it leaves on individuals when they are infants and children. Afterwards, as long as children are getting older obtaining education and life experience, their cultural background is strongly supported by the impact of the folklore stories, tales, heroes, and scenarios from their childhood. Thus, it is feasible to state that adult people feel the cultural heritage and background that was transferred to them by their parents and grandparents and identify themselves as a part of this concrete set of cultural norms and traditions.

In this case, when an international or intercultural dialogue takes place regardless of the environment or setting, the influence of historical traditions, cultural norms, and folklore scenarios becomes evident. This impact can be found in various spheres including, for example, business, politics, management, arts, and communications. In this situation, it can be stated that folklore plays a crucial role in a person's actions and decisions concerning different fields, including intercultural and international dialogue and relations. Thus, it is necessary to investigate how folklore and various art forms based on folklore can positively influence the processes of intercultural dialogue on the example of Hodja Nasreddin and his parables and stories.

1.2. Preface

The principal idea of the presented thesis is related to intercultural dialogue and communications utilizing the legacy of one of the most prominent heroes and cultural symbols of the region – Mullah Nasreddin Hodja. Hodja Nasreddin is considered to be a legendary figure in

Muslim tradition from the Balkans to China, as well as the protagonist of comedic short tales and sarcastic anecdotes. Hodja Nasreddin is believed to be a substantial part of folklore and cultures of Central Asian region and beyond. He represents a historical and cultural figure that proved to be important since it is possible to find various statues, monuments, and other art forms dedicated to Hodja Nasreddin. This study journeys across the vast geographical expanse from the Balkans and Belarus to Italy (through Central Asia), unraveling the tales of Mullah Nasreddin Hodja, a cherished figure weaving through many cultural narratives. Mullah Nasreddin, while rooted in Muslim legends, transcends boundaries as an emblem of humor, wisdom, and insight. Through his stories, we'll traverse this vast landscape to understand how such shared tales can bridge disparate cultures, facilitating dialogues and deepening intercultural connections.

1.3. Significance & Motivation

The significance of the issue and the modern international relations paradigm incorporate the necessity of representing the cultural heritage and rich historical background of the Central Asian countries in a new, original, and creative manner. Nowadays, it is possible to state that Central Asian nations need to improve their ways of communicating with foreign guests, partners, and tourists due to the fact that little is known globally about the historical and cultural identity of the Central Asian region and namely Uzbekistan. The motivation to make the research can be explained by the existence of a potential opportunity to fulfill the abovementioned gap of knowledge and awareness.

By introducing creative and original ways of interpreting the parables and anecdotes of Mullah Nasreddin, one of the known mystical characters of Central Asian culture, it is feasible to enhance knowledge regarding history and culture, boost communication processes and intercultural dialogue, and generate new art forms, events, and symbols linked to Mullah Nasreddin and showcase them on the global arena. In this project, a specific emphasis will be put on the intercultural dialogue between two Eurasian countries: Uzbekistan and Belarus involving the heritage of Hodja Nasreddin and his parables.

1.4. Aims & Objectives

The main goal of the project is to elaborate new recommendations and ways of displaying the cultural and historical heritage of the parables of Mullah Nasreddin by developing creative settings, forms, and art products. It is necessary to use the anecdotes of Nasreddin as a source of new and original intercultural dialogue methods, particularly for the countries of Central Asia and other nations that share the common heritage of Nasreddin's figure. Considering the research question, it is important to define the level of recognition of Nasreddin in non-Asian countries (Belarus to be used in the research) and develop creative ways of promoting Nasreddin as a source of intercultural dialogue worldwide. Ultimately, as the result of this paper, it will be

possible to create specific recommendations on how to interpret the history and heritage of Hodja Nasreddin and the content of his parables. These interpretations and perspectives should be realistic, attainable, and creative in order to apply them to the processes of intercultural dialogue and international relations.

1.5. Methodology

The research methods that are to be used in the project have to be diverse to obtain information and data from various sources and thus make the result more objective. For this research project, it is proposed to utilize a mixed research methodology. As the name implies, the mixed method approach combines aspects of both primary and secondary research. The mixed method approach will combine the two to provide a more complete and all-encompassing vision than either a primary or secondary study would alone. In fact, secondary data analysis and literature review are to be integrated into the research project as the main tools for studying the material on Hodja Nasreddin and his heritage. However, it is essential to mention that the author of the paper was able to conduct small primary research in the city of Bukhara connected to the topic of Hodja Nasreddin as a source of intercultural relations. The judgements and conclusions derived from this primary research observation are to be included in the paper in order to enhance the understanding of the object and subject of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Interculturality and Intercultural Dialogue

To start with, the importance and significance of theme can be formulated by initially analyzing the concept of interculturality, intercultural dialogue and its features. In general, intercultural dialogue implies that greater knowledge of the other's perspective on the world may be gained via an honest and polite exchange of ideas between individuals and groups from various cultural backgrounds. In other terms, intercultural discussion usually happens when people from various cultural backgrounds who have divergent viewpoints and presumptions interact with one another while recognizing their actual differences. Based on this information, it is feasible to state that during an intercultural dialogue one should be capable of emphasizing how he or she is different from others by paying additional attention to the background and history. Concerning the culture and history of Uzbekistan, Hodja Nasreddin might be seen as a figure that is distinctive and unique for the eastern part of the world, which can become a great focus. Consequently, in order to improve intercultural dialogues from the side of Uzbekistan, for example, it is possible to use the parables of Hodja Nasreddin.

2.2. Gathering and Selecting Literature

Regarding the literature review section, it was essential to search for relevant, reliable, and trustworthy sources of literature for this paper. In fact, the literature review part is designed with the purpose of identifying and forming the theoretical background that should support the arguments, discussions, and conclusions of the thesis project. The theoretical background of the work generally consists of the basic principles, ideas, theories and practices surrounding the subject matter of this exact project. In addition, it is obligatory to include the findings and conclusions of previous studies and researches on the topic that is identical to the paper's or is related to one of its close spheres. Moreover, literature and studies are to be incorporated into the thesis that are connected to the initial questions, problems, and objectives of the paper. In fact, it is needed to include examples of previous relevant studies, which should be described and included in a critical discussion, which analyze and show awareness of different arguments, theories and approaches.

In general, it is feasible to emphasize the utilization of the Prisma flow method as a separate conception for the search, identification, and filtration of scholarly articles and web pages as resources. Within the context of this work, it is the approach utilized to create procedures for literature searches in addition to other studies' usage of research techniques. According to the results of deploying the Prisma flow methodology for reviews, it is possible to state that 15 sources (namely scholarly articles) were initially found and recognized as the ones

that correlate with the topic of the literature review. In fact, a substantial amount of filtration activities was compulsory due to the presence of repetition and duplication factors in the resources. In addition, several scholarly articles were not possible to be accessed via scientific databases. In overall, considering the assessment, filtration, and selection procedures with the resources, which had to be no older than 10 years, 5 resources in total were highlighted as appropriate for inclusion.

As per the abovementioned information, it is reasonable to state that concrete features of literature use in the paper can be detected. For instance, it is possible to highlight a major prevalence of scholarly journal articles inclusion in comparison with web pages and public portals, as well as books. Five relevant scholarly articles from reliable journals and databases were identified and utilized both for the literature review and the whole paper. As a matter of fact, one scholarly article used in this paper does not satisfy the initial conditions of the article filtration and selection process regarding the year of publishing.

2.3. Literature Included

The article "The Educational Value of Nasreddin Hodja's Anecdotes," authored by Asilioglu, was specifically selected for incorporation into this research despite not aligning with the predetermined temporal criteria for source selection. Upon evaluation, the author of the present thesis found Asilioglu's work informative and germane to the study at hand. Moreover, the author opted for deliberately including older scholarly materials focused on Hodja Nasreddin and intercultural dialogue. This strategic choice enables a more comprehensive and objective analysis by facilitating the examination of the subject matter through a multifaceted lens and an extended historical framework.

Moreover, in order to make the thesis paper more complex and provide a more thorough analysis and discussion, it was decided to include additional sources for the literature review except for scholarly articles only. In fact, it was necessary to find and determine a book resource for the paper since the project implies working with the heritage of Hodja Nasreddin, including his stories. Thus, the author of the paper included and analyzed one book that consists of popular and interesting stories and parables of Mullah Nasreddin Afandi. The stories and parables of Hodja Nasreddin would be discussed, interpreted, and analyzed subsequently in the discussion section of the paper. Furthermore, it was discovered that the figure of Hodja Nasreddin in reality has different links with particularly European folklore and historical characters and individuals. One of them, named Giufa, is considered to be an Italian and Sicilian folklore hero that impersonates Hodja Nasreddin in a different location and culture (The Giufà Project, 2023). Therefore, it is imperative to investigate the literature and resources related to Giufa, his historical origins, and his ties to Hodja, as such an examination could hold significance for

fostering intercultural dialogue and enhancing international relations.

The basic principles, ideas, theories, and practices connected to the subject matter of the project consist of both theoretical information on the history and heritage of Hodja Nasreddin and practical implementation of his heritage in art and other spheres. In this situation, it is important to review creative approaches on interpreting Hodja Nasreddin and his stories for intercultural dialogue. Consequently, the total of ten resources selected for this work are to be described and presented in the literature review section.

Hodja Nasreddin, or as he is also known, Mullah Nasreddin Afandi is mostly well-known and popular for multiple parables and anecdotes that have him as the main character. As centuries passed by, different authors from various countries all over the world created fabulous original stories dedicated to the mysterious and wise character of Hodja Nasreddin. In addition, many of the stories often have no author since they represent a true piece of folklore art. Another significant aspect that can characterize the complexity and inner depth of art and cultural heritage related to Hodja is linked to collections of Nasreddin's parables. Some authors attempted to make creative texts and books by both including already existing folklore stories about Hodja and adding to them their own elaborations and parables (Illax, 1968). A great example of writing a collection of stories and parables dedicated to Hodja Nasreddin was demonstrated by Idries Shah, who was Afghan writer, thinker and teacher of the Sufi tradition. He was the author of a collection of stories about Hodja Nasreddin, which was called "The tricks of the incredible Hodja Nasreddin."

In this case, as per the topic of the project and the research question, it is necessary to include stories and parables of Hodja Nasreddin in order to determine potential creative ways of interpreting them for intercultural relations. One rather short but wise and curious simultaneously parable was found in the book written by Idries Shah. The stories were taken from a book of a Russian-language publication; thus, the stories were translated into English.

The allegory set for presentation and analysis is titled "What for do we need a flashlight?" within the anthology (Illax, 1968):

- By the way, I can see in the dark, - Nasreddin boasted in the tea house.
- If so, then why did we meet you on the street with a flashlight more than once?
- Well, this is so that no one runs into me in the dark.

Judging by the structure and content of this exact story, it is possible to state that, in general, the figure of Hodja Nasreddin is depicted as a grown man, an adult, who is wise, clever, and sometimes foxy enough to communicate with different people in a unique manner. In this parable Mullah Nasreddin starts a small conversation, or a small talk, by himself. By doing that, he initially ensures that he is the person who controls the dialogue and chooses the topic of

discussion by creating an informational occasion or cause. If the occasion or cause is created and told by him, he becomes the character that can guide the dialogue and provide a direction for its development. In other words, Hodja Nasreddin, by saying "I can see in the dark," makes an interesting and unusual statement that can definitely make other people curious since these statements, as in the example, often imply Hodja having magical senses, extraordinary abilities, or him facing totally unusual and rare situations and circumstances.

Consequently, the character of Hodja Nasreddin is illustrated as a smart, inventive, nimble, and quick-witted person that tends to let his opponents or partners in conversations firstly guess his intention, next action or word. He enjoys playing with people in a proactive and intriguing way of improvising and creating puzzles and brainteasers. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that this model of behavior entails the presence of a provocative way of speaking and communication, which adds to the initial game of Hodja. In fact, he utilizes a combination of a provocative try-to-guess communication style and his rich life experience, background, knowledge and wisdom about the world and about people.

Furthermore, in order to create a more sophisticated and objective image of Hodja Nasreddin, it is crucial to find another story and comprehend it carefully. The parable that is to be inserted and creatively interpreted and analyzed was called "Why not?" by the author of the collection of stories (Illax, 1968).

Hodja Nasreddin came to a junk dealer (a hoarder) and began the dialogue:

- Hey, do you have nails?
- Let me see... Yes, Hodja, I do have them.
- And do you have leather? I mean, really good leather?
- Yes, I do.
- What about strong threads?
- Yes, sure, I do.
- And maybe different paints?
- Yes!
- Then, for heaven's sake, answer my question: why don't you make a nice pair of boots?

This exact story concerning Hodja Nasreddin Afandi and his marvelous adventures is different if comparing to the previous one analyzed above. In this case, Hodja is not trying to brag and provoke his interlocutor or companion by exclaiming unusual and sometimes seemingly unrealistic words and expressions. Here Mullah, in contrast to the beforementioned parable, is not focusing all the attention to himself and his personality by telling an instructive and enlightening story related directly to him. Vice versa, Hodja is behaving and communicating in a succinct and coherent manner, speaking directly to the person and concentrating on the

subject of the conversation.

The story, additionally, has similarities with the previous parable due to the presence of the figure of Hodja: in both of the stories, Hodja is attempting to take control of the conversation and guide its tendency and direction. However, Hodja is the one that asks questions in the second parable, whereas the hoarder is exclusively answering his questions, which eliminates any chances for him to change the subject of the dialogue or at least to make his own statements. The final phrase from Nasreddin “why don't you make a nice pair of boots?” is a well-formulated question with characteristics of a good life lesson. In fact, Hodja already knew in advance where he was going and to what person. He, as it fits his nature and extraordinary essence, came to the hoarder to give him a life lesson, or at least give him a solid reason to think about his life and actions. Nasreddin, choosing the style of pure questioning, in this parable tries to demonstrate his interlocutor the valuable resources that he possesses and the corresponding opportunities the hoarder does not make use of.

To summarize the analysis of the two stories about Hodja Nasreddin and his adventures, it is feasible to state that both of them have one similar style and background. Hodja acts as a smart, quick-witted and sometimes even arrogant sage who knows how not only to give people advice, but also to get out of difficult situations in an original way with his non-standard thinking. In the first story, Nasreddin appears to the reader as a boastful provocateur who immediately sets the tone for the conversation, knows how to create mental structures and surprise his interlocutors with his quick mind and creativity. In the second story, Hodja Nasreddin relies on inquiring and questioning as a way to get through to a person whom he considers not smart or not using his full potential. Therefore, the parables of Hodja contain substantial opportunities for discussion, creative thinking, and original interpretation. These cases, as well as other stories, can become sources of a huge amount of interesting and instructive material and content. This content can be interpreted afterwards utilizing creative thinking techniques in order to enrich the sphere of intercultural dialogue with original performances, events, and products dedicated to Hodja Nasreddin.

The scholarly article “The educational value of Nasreddin Hodja's anecdotes” by Asilioglu was selected as the first source of information. Although the humor in Nasreddin Hodja's stories, who resided in Anatolia in the 13th century, has always drawn audiences, this discussion additionally concentrates on examining the stories' educational worth (Asilioglu, 2008, p. 1). Teachers who participated in this study claim that Nasreddin Hodja's humorous tales and parables encourage students' interest in foreign cultures and languages, provide a comfortable learning environment, and promote positive thinking (Asilioglu, 2008, p. 2). In this case, it can be stated that the author if the article specifically highlights the connection between

Hodja Nasreddin's stories and improved education for children. He points out that the use of stories can accelerate thinking processes among children and assist them in exploring foreign cultures, languages, and history. Thus, since for intercultural dialogue proper education and awareness of different cultures' heritage and history are important, the findings derived from this research are relevant for the topic of the thesis.

Considering the abovementioned usage of humorous stories in education and specifically education of children, it is additionally essential to comprehend the concept of humor and laughter, its cultural features and impact of education. The most prevalent definition of laughter ties it to the relief experienced at the temporary removal of one of the numerous constraints imposed by the physical and social surroundings (Corrao, 2016, p. 19). This benefit provided by humour and presence of laughter can generate significant advancements of the level of education which will eventually influence the quality and the content of intercultural dialogue. Comical collections are widely available in Arabic and Muslim literature, and a substantial portion of the content of these works is comprised of comical stories that readers have found to be extremely entertaining (Corrao, 2016, p. 20). In other words, Muslim tradition, to which Hodja Nasreddin belongs, is full of collections of humorous stories and satirical anecdotes. In fact, the presence of this widely-spread content in educational settings might be beneficial for educational purposes, including the possibility of creating a strong and diverse picture of the world.

As a matter of fact, various scientists and researchers believe that the historical figure of Hodja Nasreddin has its roots in modern Turkey. Even though it is impossible to identify the nationality of Hodja, Turkish official bodies and scientific organizations attempt to investigate his legacy and background, as well as try to promote his character as a part of Turkic tradition. In this case, it is important to study the findings from Turkish authors that can portray the contribution of Hodja's heritage to the intercultural dialogue of Turkey. It is unambiguous that Nasreddin Hodja folklore, with its richness and Turkish cultural features, may be utilized in the process of cultural transmission (Sallabas & Goktenturk, 2018, p. 266). Additionally, it has been claimed that Nasreddin Hodja students may aid in developing creative thinking abilities and active vocabulary for Turkish language and culture learners (Sallabas & Goktenturk, 2018, p. 266). Consequently, the Turkish paradigm of understanding and interpreting Hodja Nasreddin concentrates on using his legacy for developing creative thinking and improving teaching methods.

Another important resource that should be highlighted and included to this paper is a book that was written by a Tajik-Russian author Timur Zulfikarov, which is called "The wanderings of Khoja Nasreddin in the 21st century." In this book, Zulfikarov emphasizes the role of Hodja Nasreddin as an immortal character, a character that can be present in culture and

poetry for many years and centuries, remaining relevant. Hodja Nasreddin is a cultural wanderer of the Millennium for our history (Зульфикаров, 2021). He is an immortal sage, poet, wit, defender of the poor, hero of the folklore of a hundred nations - from Spain to China (Зульфикаров, 2021). In addition, in this book Zulfikarov attempts to put the figure of Hodja in different scenarios that are currently evolving, including modern politics, international relations, modern history, social problems, communications. This material represents a content type with distinctive post-modernism characteristics. At the same time, if omitting politics, the case of this book makes it clear that Hodja's character can be eternal and his qualities can be relevant nowadays. In other words, Hodja's parables and stories can be adequately adapted to modern realities and integrated into the process of intercultural dialogue by using creative tools and approaches.

2.4. Nasreddin's Connections Internationally

As a part of this paper, it is especially crucial to analyze the link between historical Hodja Nasreddin and a historical character named Giufà, who is considered by many as the Italian version of Hodja. Giufà, alternatively known as Giucà in other parts of the nation, is a figure from Italian literature (The Giufà Project, 2023). In reality, according to academics, Nasreddin, a Turkish folk hero, may have inspired the creation of the character Giufà (The Giufà Project, 2023). It is said that during the time Sicily was ruled by Islam, tales about this person, known as Juha in Arabic, were assimilated into Sicilian oral tradition (The Giufà Project, 2023). Afterwards they were changed to serve as examples of cultural standards, and finally spread across southern Italy. Hence, the heritage of Giufà and his historical connection to Hodja can be used as a factor of influence for intercultural dialogue.

To summarize, Hodja Nasreddin and his stories are to be creatively interpreted in order to improve intercultural exchange. The ways of doing so are to be developed and reviewed further in the discussion part of the paper. In actuality, the Turkish paradigm for comprehending and interpreting Hodja Nasreddin focuses on utilizing his legacy to foster original thought and enhance instructional strategies. The inclusion of Hodja-related information in educational contexts may be advantageous for educational goals, including the potential for developing a solid and varied understanding of the world. Additionally, Giufà's ancestry and his relationship to Hodja in the past might be used as a motivating factor in cross-cultural communication.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

3.1. Methodology

To start with, it was initially decided to use a mixed research technique or approach for this particular paper. The mixed method technique contains elements of both primary and secondary research, as the name suggests. In comparison to either primary or secondary studies conducted separately, the mixed method approach will integrate the two to offer a more comprehensive and all-encompassing picture. In reality, the research project will incorporate secondary data analysis and literature reviews as the primary methods for examining the information about Hodja Nasreddin and his historical background.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Hodja Nasreddin's role as a source of intercultural connections was the subject of a small of primary research that the paper's author was able to perform in the city of Bukhara. The primary research part of the project included observing the main sights and historical monuments of the city of Bukhara in Uzbekistan in order to elicit actual links to the historical figure of Hodja. The aim of this investigation was to assess the demand related to Hodja, his popularity and role in the history and culture of Uzbekistan, as well as his importance for the tourism sphere of the country.

At the same time, since this project is made under the aegis and under the name of the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, it is necessary to gather more data on the cultural part. In fact, the majority of the Master's degree students in the "Silk Road" University are international students that represent multiple nationalities and ethnicities, especially a huge number of them represent Asian countries. Thus, it was decided by the author of the paper to conduct several surveys using Google-forms aimed at targeting different audiences and respondents in order to obtain additional quantitative data for the research. An online survey is a tool for gathering data from a person or a group of people regarding a crucial topic or research question. A survey, or a questionnaire, can be useful during the research process in terms of gathering opinions and thoughts from different people on a specific subject or topic. In this case, the whole project can become more objective and an opportunity to analyze everything from a different point of view arises.

3.2. Surveys

Firstly, a survey for the Master's degree students of the "Silk Road" University in Uzbekistan was elaborated. Then, since the paper focuses on investigating Hodja Nasreddin from a perspective of international relations and intercultural dialogue, it was decided to expand the profile of respondents. Based on the research question, it was needed to involve participants and respondents from Belarus since Belarus was selected in this paper as a country-example for

promoting the heritage of Nasreddin through intercultural dialogue. Considering the research question, it was initially essential to identify the level of recognition of Nasreddin in non-Asian countries (Belarus in this case) and to design methods for promoting the heritage of Hodja and his parables. Hence, as for the target population for the survey it was decided to choose both students and teachers of the Belarusian State University, which is one of the strongest educational establishments in Belarus. Moreover, a special emphasis was put on students and lecturers related to the field of oriental studies to increase the effectiveness of the survey. The two groups of respondents, teachers and students, can provide us with a more sophisticated and detailed perspective and view on the problem.

Do you know who is Hodja Nasreddin and what is he famous for?

41 responses

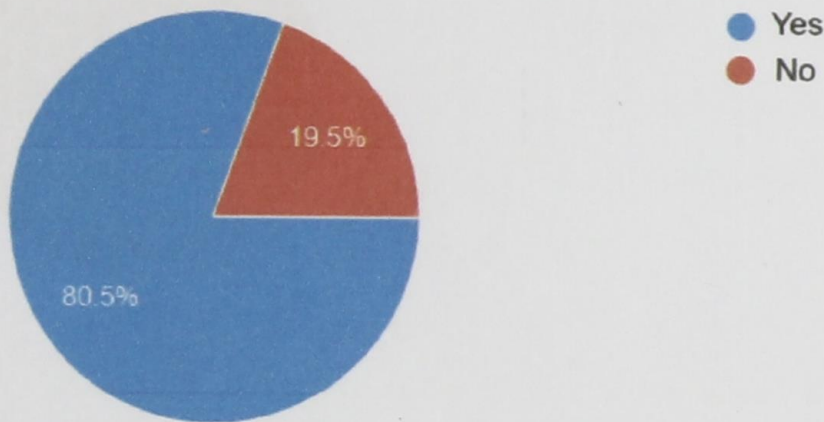


Figure 3.1: Survey among international Master’s students in Uzbekistan concerning the figure of Hodja Nasreddin

Source: author’s survey results

First of all, it is suggested to analyze the numerical data and results of the survey conducted for Master’s degree students in Uzbekistan. Firstly, it was crucial to evaluate the level of knowledge about Hodja Nasreddin and his cultural importance among international Master’s degree students in Uzbekistan. As it can be derived from the answers and seen in the Image 3.1., the vast majority of the respondents (more than 80%) are familiar with the figure of Hodja Nasreddin and know what he is famous for. In other words, it can be interpreted by stating that roughly only every fifth international Master’s degree student does not know who is Hodja Nasreddin.

It is essential to make a remark: the question was formed first of all to find out whether international Master’s degree students indeed know who is Hodja Nasreddin, so that they can provide at least a short definition of him as a cultural figure. In this situation, the remaining number of respondents (19.5%) could have heard the name “Hodja Nasreddin” or “Mullah

Nasreddin Afandi” before, but they were not able to respond who this character was and what was his cultural influence. Therefore, for this question, the judgement can be made that, in general, international Master’s degree students possess knowledge on the figure of Hodja Nasreddin. This result can be connected to the fact that the majority of them represent Asian countries, where the figure of Nasreddin is a priori more well-known. Additionally, it can be linked to the notion that the students of the spheres of tourism, history, and cultural heritage have profound knowledge in this field.

Have you noticed the use of the figure of Hodja Nasreddin as a source of intercultural dialogue anywhere (except for the events in the "Silk Road" University)?

41 responses

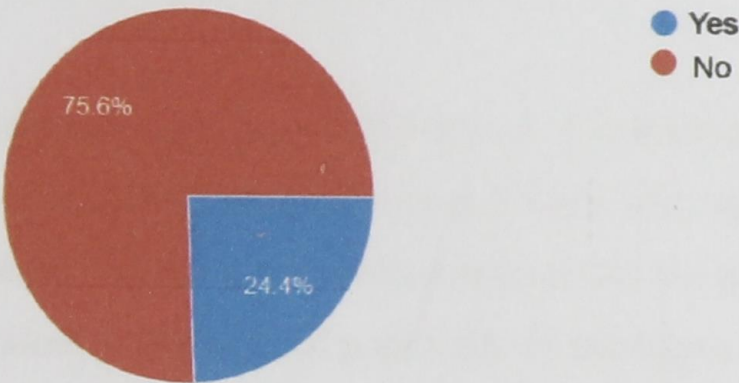


Figure 3.2: Survey among international Master’s students in Uzbekistan concerning the role of Hodja Nasreddin in intercultural relations

Source: author’s survey results

Another question that was created for the Master’s degree students of the “Silk Road” International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage was related to aspects of promoting the figure of Hodja. It was needed to identify whether the respondents faced the use of Nasreddin’s character and/or his parables for cultural, historical, and tourism purposes anywhere, except for the “Silk Road” University. This information could assist the project in analyzing the general situation on the frequency and quality of using the character of Hodja and his legacy within the paradigm of intercultural dialogue. As per the results extracted from Image 3.2., a huge majority of respondents (75.6%) have not noticed the inclusion of the character of Hodja in intercultural relations or its presence in different cultural forms. This means that for the respondents the heritage of Hodja is not popular and is underrated due to the lack of creative solutions on how to use the parables of Nasreddin in international relations and culture.

How can you subjective assess the popularity of Hodja Nasreddin in Belarus?

Насколько вы субъективно оцениваете известность Ходжи Насреддина в Беларуси?

25 responses

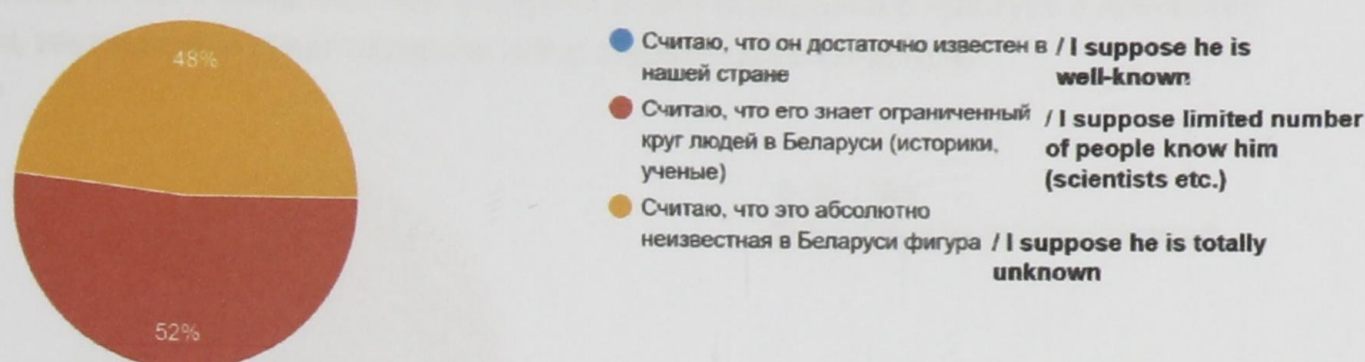


Figure 3.3: Survey among Belarusian students on the popularity of Hodja Nasreddin in Belarus:
is he well-known?

Source: author's survey results

In order to make the project more complex and diverse, it was needed to conduct surveys for various groups of people that have different background, history, and social environment. In this case it is essential to consistently refer to the research question and the aim of the paper. Due to the fact that it was critical to identify the level of popularity of the figure of Hodja Nasreddin in non-Asian countries for the research (Belarus was selected as an example), the author of the paper created a questionnaire for a Belarusian target audience. The population for this survey includes Belarusian students (aged 18-22) that study in Belarusian State University and are related to the Department of Oriental Studies. Regarding the question on evaluating the rate whether the figure of Hodja Nasreddin is known or well-known in Belarus, Belarusian students demonstrated unusual results comparing to their international colleagues in Uzbekistan. According to Image 3.3., it was revealed that absolutely none of them (0%) assume that Hodja Nasreddin is a well-known character in Belarus. In fact, the respondents fell into two major categories, or two halves: approximately a half of them presumes Hodja is only familiar to a limited number of people that includes mainly scientists related to the field, whereas the second half considers Hodja as a totally unknown figure for Belarus or for average Belarusians. Consequently, the responds for this question exhibit a significant lack of knowledge about Hodja Nasreddin in Belarus.

Have you encountered the demonstration of the figure of Hodja Nasreddin in culture and art (exhibitions, theatrical performances, literature, etc.) in Belarus?

Сталкивались ли вы с отображением фигуры Ходжи Насреддина в культуре и искусстве (выставки, театральные представления, литература и т.д.) в Беларуси?

25 responses

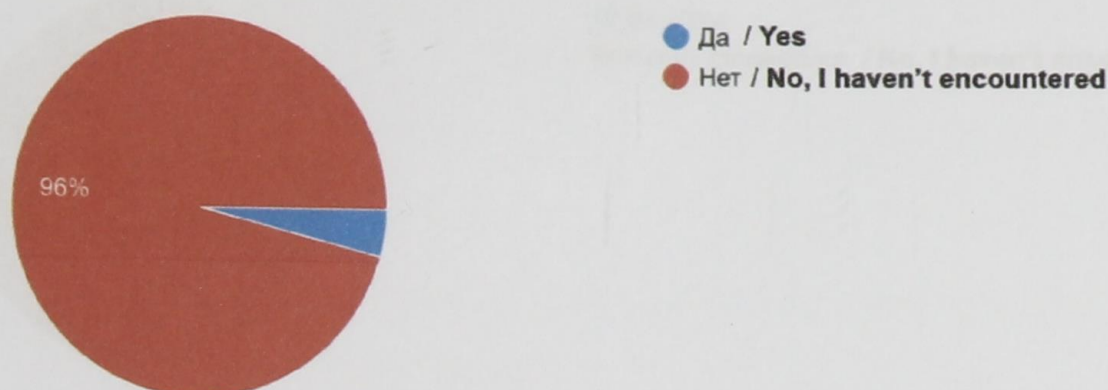


Figure 3.4: Survey among Belarusian students on the presence of the figure of Hodja Nasreddin in art and culture in Belarus

Source: author's survey results

Moreover, it is important to analyze another question from this survey among Belarusian students. The respondents were asked to answer whether they personally have ever noticed various expressions or demonstrations of the character of Hodja Nasreddin, for example, in cultural or artistic performances, in Belarus. As per the data displayed in Image 2.4., it is feasible to state that the vast majority of respondents or practically all of them (96%) have never ever encountered a representation of Hodja Nasreddin Afandi in cultural, historical, or art events, performances, and products. In other terms, it was impossible for them to get acquainted with the figure and the heritage of Hodja Nasreddin and his parables somewhere in Belarus. Therefore, people did not have a chance to enrich their knowledge about the world and about the historical and cultural legacy of our world, in this situation namely of Central Asia. These results illustrate a lack of using Hodja and his parables as a source of intercultural dialogue, for instance, with regard to Belarus.

Have you encountered the demonstration of the figure of Hodja Nasreddin in culture and art (exhibitions, theatrical performances, literature, etc.) in Belarus?

Сталкивались ли вы с отображением фигуры Ходжи Насреддина в культуре и искусстве (выставки, театральные представления, литература и т.д.) в Беларуси?

4 responses

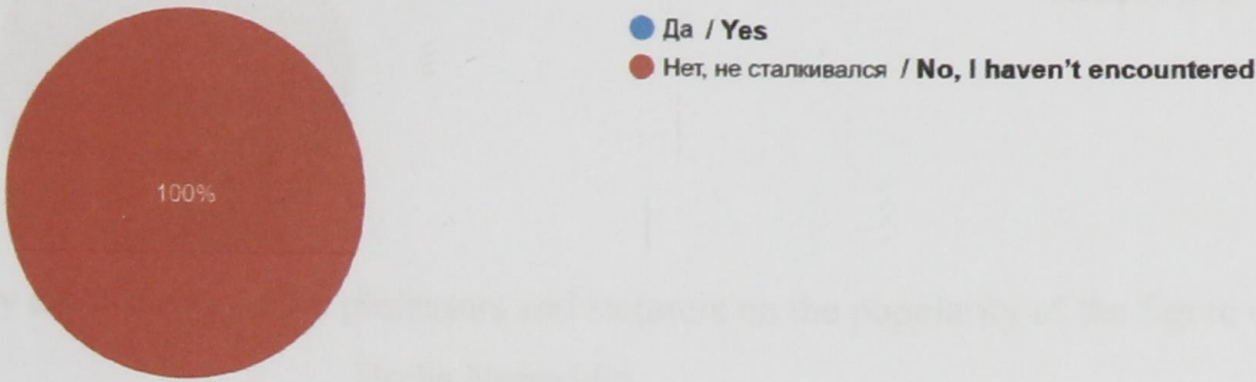


Figure 3.5: Survey among Belarusian professors and lecturers on the presence of the figure of Hodja Nasreddin in art and culture in Belarus

Source: author's survey results

Finally, the third questionnaire was designed to reach another audience in Belarus: Belarusian lecturers and professors from the Belarusian State University. These lecturers and professors focus on the fields of history, cultural heritage, and international relations; thus, their opinion on the topic of the project is valuable. Based on the answers on the first question that can be derived from Image 3.5., all of the respondents (100%) unanimously responded that they have never encountered a demonstration or a representation of Hodja Nasreddin and his parables in Belarus, including art, cultural, and historical events, performances, and products. This question is identical to the question asked to Belarusian students and, if making a comparison between them, the results are almost the same: 100% and 96% in the abovementioned survey for the option “No encounter” correspondingly. Overall, both groups of respondents marked almost a total absence of Hodja and his parables in terms of cultural and art exchange in Belarus.

Have you ever heard the name of Hodja Nasreddin before?

Слышали ли вы когда-нибудь имя Ходжи Насреддина ранее?

4 responses

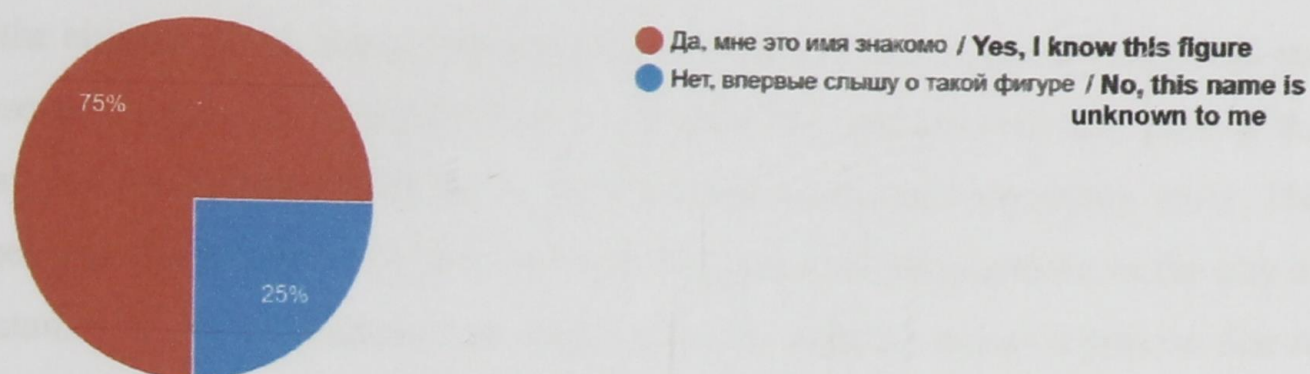


Figure 3.6: Survey among Belarusian professors and lecturers on the popularity of the figure of Hodja Nasreddin

Source: author's survey results

The other question that was answered by Belarusian lecturers and professors was connected to the popularity of Hodja. In other words, it was designed to elicit whether the teachers are actually familiar with the name of Hodja Nasreddin. The results revealed that even though professors and lecturers in the spheres of history and cultural heritage are believed to know this character, there was one Belarusian lecturer that was unfamiliar with Mullah Nasreddin as per Image 3.6. Consequently, it is possible to state that even professionals or young professionals in history and cultural heritage from Belarusian State University can potentially be unfamiliar with the creative heritage of the character of Hodja Nasreddin and with great scenarios from his parables. This aspect can prove the need for promoting the knowledge regarding Hodja Nasreddin, including promotion aimed at professionals in history and cultural heritage.

All in all, summarizing this chapter, it is firstly feasible to underline the fact that this paper encompasses various research techniques and approaches. For example, a mix of literature review with secondary data analysis, surveys and questionnaires designed to gather data from different people, and primary observations provides this project with a complex and balanced perspective on the background of the paper, its stated problem and possible future recommendations and solutions. According to the survey and questionnaire part, it was determined that the majority of Master's degree students from "Silk Road" University, a significant part of whom represent Asian countries, are familiar with the character of Hodja Nasreddin. In contrast, Belarusian students and Belarusian lecturers and professors as respondents demonstrated a substantial lack of knowledge about Hodja Nasreddin and his heritage. Hence, the survey proved the necessity of promoting the figure of Hodja Nasreddin as a source of intercultural dialogue in foreign countries in order to boost creativity and improve intercultural exchange.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Primary Research Part

To begin the chapter of this paper dedicated to the results of the research along with the discussion of these outcomes, it is possible firstly to describe the primary research part of the whole project that was conducted in addition to the literature review and surveying parts. The author of this paper was able to conduct a small primary research with observations in the city of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. The city of Bukhara was selected for the primary research section due to the fact that this place is renowned for its connection to Mullah Nasreddin. For instance, in the city of Bukhara it is feasible to find a huge monument of the legendary Hodja Nasreddin, as well as other places and symbols linked to the folklore hero. Moreover, Bukhara is located on Uzbekistan, which is a country that not only recognizes Nasreddin's cultural heritage, importance, and his contribution to its history, but also attempts to protect the legacy of Hodja and promote his character worldwide.

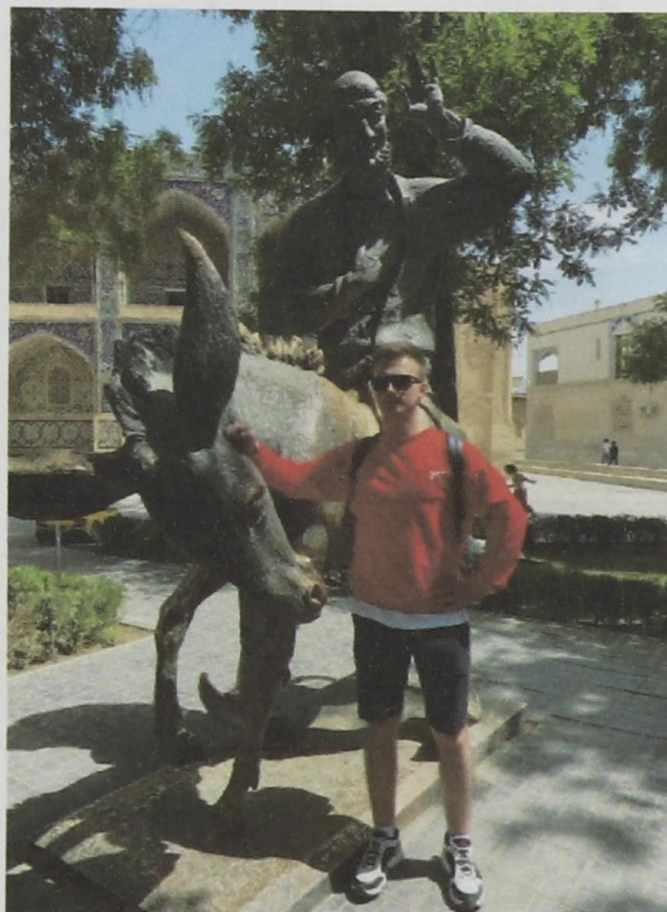


Figure 4.1: Monument to Hodja Nasreddin in the city of Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Source: author's primary observation

In general, it is important to mention that Uzbekistan, as a country, recognizes the figure of Hoja Nasreddin and his historical and cultural impact on itself and Muslim tradition. The Republic of Uzbekistan emphasizes the relationship between Hoja Nasreddin and its own culture and history, which can be proved using several real examples. The first example case is related to the considerable monument of Nasreddin located in the city of Bukhara.

On Bukhara's main city square, not far from the Lyabi-Khauz ensemble, lies the bronze statue of Hodja Nasreddin, as per Image 4.1., Sculptor Yakov Shapiro, who is Honored Sculptor of Uzbekistan and Honored Art Worker, was the creator of the bronze work of art, which was mounted on a rectangular platform. The sculpture of Hodja Nasreddin was installed in 1979, and it is placed in the city's historic area. According to the observations, made by the author on that location, the monument itself is a popular sight in the city center. The monument of Hodja Nasreddin in Bukhara is in great demand among both local residents and tourists and guests of the city. For example, in order to take a picture at the monument to this legendary oriental sage, it is needed to wait for a considerable queue. In particular, the whole monumental ensemble is popular among children, who are also attracted by the donkey of Hodja. Hence, it is possible to state that the monument of Nasreddin in Bukhara not only plays a crucial role in promoting and popularizing the heritage of Mullah, but also represents one of the most important sights of the old city.



Figure 4.2: Souvenir shop in the center of Bukhara: printed matter dedicated to Hodja Nasreddin

Source: author's primary observation

Furthermore, it is essential to highlight the fact that the monument dedicated to Hodja Nasreddin is not the only place in the city of Bukhara where people can find links to him. As a matter of fact, during observing and investigating the historical center of Bukhara, the author noticed various souvenir shops with printed postcards and small gifts, as depicted in Image 4.2.

These souvenirs were diverse: for instance, some of them illustrated the beauties of Bukhara in terms of architecture and nature. At the same time, it was possible to find printed matter and postcards related to Hodja Nasreddin and/or with his image on a donkey. These souvenir shops were located in crowded touristic locations of Bukhara, so that people's attention could be easily attracted due to the presence of bright and colorful souvenirs. Therefore, foreigners can get familiar with Hodja's legacy while traveling to Bukhara by attending popular sights in the city center.



Figure 4.3: Storybooks related to Hodja Nasreddin in the center of Bukhara in four languages: English, German, Spanish, and Japanese

Source: author's primary observation

In addition, it is worth mentioning that among the various souvenirs that can be purchased in Bukhara's main sights and locations, it is possible for people to read and buy different storybooks connected to Hodja Nasreddin. The crucial factor in this case, as it is visible in Image 4.3., is that the storybooks about Hodja were published in different languages. For instance, several collections of stories and jokes about Hodja Nasreddin were found in four languages: English, German, Spanish, and Japanese. These four languages are believed to widely spread all over the world and tourists that speak these languages can visit Uzbekistan and purchase such souvenirs.

4.2. Results

From this exact case, it is possible to conclude that in order to use Hodja Nasreddin and

his parables as a source of intercultural dialogue, it is firstly obligatory to ensure that there are tools and resources for making him an object of international discussions and events. As it was found in this small primary research part of the project, creating short collections of Hodja's most interesting stories in different languages can assist in spreading the legacy and knowledge of Nasreddin among foreigners and tourists. As a result of the primary observations in Bukhara, this major action can be emphasized as the first step in creatively using Hodja's heritage for intercultural communications: making this heritage available for people worldwide. For example, as in this situation, creative content can be produced based on Hodja's parables that would be understandable to people from different places and of various backgrounds.

In addition to presenting and discussing the results of the primary research on Hodja Nasreddin, it is necessary to include the results of the survey part and literature review. In fact, based, on the results of the questionnaires, it was discovered that, using the example of Belarus, people that are related to the sphere of oriental studies or are experts in the field stated that Hodja Nasreddin is an almost unknown figure for average Belarusians. According to the outcome, the respondents did not notice any mentioning of Hodja in international or intercultural events, performances, and products in Belarus. Hence, people are generally not acquainted with this prominent character, his heritage and are not interested in this sphere. In this case, as an additional result of the research, it is feasible to conclude that people have a lack or a total absence of interest in the rich cultural heritage of Asian countries. Considering that the figure of Nasreddin and his parables are original and widely known by scientists, the solution of the problem can be reached by creatively interpreting and illustrating the accomplishments, adventures, and wisdom of Hodja in a manner that would be interesting for ordinary people.

The creative ways of interpreting Hodja's legacy can be various and some of them can be extracted and implemented by analyzing relevant literature on the subject. For instance, it is reasonable to review the results of the research article written by Ocón, in which the author analyzed the aspects of portraying antiquity in cartoons. As per Image 4.4., the author provided sources of how the figure of Nasreddin was utilized more than a century ago in different journals, newspapers, and magazines. In accordance with the study, ancient times and pictures with a classical foundation have always served as a source of inspiration for new artwork and concepts, but they have also been deformed by history into metaphorical clichés that express a visual perspective (Ocón, 2021). In this situation, it is mandatory to make sure that the heritage of, for example, Hodja Nasreddin, is interpreted and illustrated using current modern methods without real deviations that can entail political issues and impact, as well as metaphorical clichés.



Figure 4.4: Cover of the magazine Molla Nasreddin in Slavs and Tatars (Ocón, 2021)

Another option to review the opportunity of using Mullah Nasreddin's cultural impact in intercultural relations can be connected to artistic interventions and cartoons. Based on Image 4.5., it is obvious that people utilized their creativity in terms of interpreting Hodja Nasreddin under current conditions or in modern world in order to display his character in real-life situations. At the same time, these examples additionally contained social and economic context, which a lot of people found important for their cultures and families (Jitlina et al., 2020). In this case, various occasions can occur when people can misinterpret or misunderstand the cartoons and images if those were created inappropriately or with actual political sense (Jitlina et al., 2020). In this case, it is important to be focused on historical and cultural aspects of Hodja's legacy and avoid misperceptions and misunderstandings that can lead to consequences that would be harmful for intercultural dialogue. Jitlina and her colleagues suggested these techniques for escaping the huge social and economic pressure that people feel residing in large cities.



Figure 4.5: Landlady: “The apartment is 10 thousand for Russians and 15 thousand for foreigners.” Nasreddin: “I am Russian! I was only away on holidays for a long time” (Jitlina et al., 2020)

In fact, the figure of Hodja Nasreddin is a great character for intercultural relations since the roots of Hodja and his stories can also be considered as intercultural and multicultural due to his links to other folklore heroes, for example, Giufà. Giufà, alternatively known as Giucà in other parts of the nation, is a figure from Italian literature. Over generations of oral tradition, his actions have been repeated and recalled. His personal features might be seen in the folk images of various Mediterranean nations, even if the tales from his life mostly focus on the southern Italian and Sicilian lifestyles (The Giufà Project, 2023). In reality, according to academics, Nasreddin, who is by some scientists believed to be a Turkish folk hero, may have inspired the creation of the character Giufà (The Giufà Project, 2023). It is said that during the time Sicily was ruled by Islam, tales about this person, known as Juha in Arabic, were assimilated into Sicilian oral tradition, changed to serve as examples of cultural standards, and finally spread across southern Italy.



Figure 4.6: Geographical illustration of the international heritage of Hodja Nasreddin and other similar folklore heroes, for example, Sicilian Giufà (The Giufà Project, 2023)

Although being known as the "village fool" for the majority of time, Giufà generally conveys a moral lesson through his words and deeds. At the conclusion of each narrative, Giufà's companions' reactions are evaluated rather than his ridiculous behavior. It is essential to mention that currently different organization and parties actively attempt to research and preserve the history of Giufà and his probable links to Mullah Nasreddin (The Giufà Project, 2023). A special organization called The Giufà Project was designed and established for the reason of studying the scientific roots and connections of Giufà.

The Giufà Project has presented and published a major layer of findings, data, and information that is considered to be relevant and valid in connection to Giufà's. According to the Giufà Project, Nasreddin Hodja, a prominent wise person and thinker who most likely resided in Turkey in the 13th century, was additionally known by his Sicilian name Giufà (The Giufà Project, 2023). He rose to significance as the main character in a number of well-known and age-old tales in Asia Minor (The Giufà Project, 2023). Due to migration, commerce, and wars, his tales were carried by the tide of people from that region to the Balkans, Western Europe, and beyond by means of routes of migration that crossed the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. This factor can assist in using Hodja a source of international relations since his roots and links are found in many different cultures, meaning that the representatives of these cultures are connected to the same root. Hence, these people can understand the uniqueness and value of Nasreddin since their cultures also possess relatable heroes and scenarios.

In order to promote Hodja's heritage and make his character a source of intercultural

dialogue, it is needed, according to the abovementioned results of the research, to elaborate and distribute original, creative, modern, and interesting content on Hodja Nasreddin that would be understandable for people worldwide. As an example of such work, it is possible to mention a theatrical performance in “Silk Road” International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Uzbekistan that was initiated, created, and organized by the Master’s degree students of the specialty “Creative Industry” along with Professor Dr. Nargis Nurulla-Khojaeva. The performance, as per Image 4.7., was a theatrical play, in which the students were able to show what will happen if Hodja Nasreddin and his wife could travel in time and appear in 21st century, discovering in their adventure four different countries: Belarus, Malaysia, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey.



Figure 4.7: Theatrical performance “Hodja Nasreddin” in “Silk Road” International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, 2023

Source: author’s data collection

Such an original and interesting performance was inspired by many popular stories related to Hodja and his adventures, which were translated into English and reinterpreted considering the reality of the current world. The performance was well-promoted, based on Image 4.8., so that a lot of visitors came to see the theatrical show about their favorite folklore hero. This example demonstrates that Mullah Nasreddin and his parables are to be used as a source of intercultural dialogue creatively and in accordance to modern needs and trends in order to increase promotion and make it a popular topic. This solution is to be adapted and retransformed in other spheres of art and cultural heritage to make Hodja and his philosophy more understandable and to show people the great heritage of this wise character.

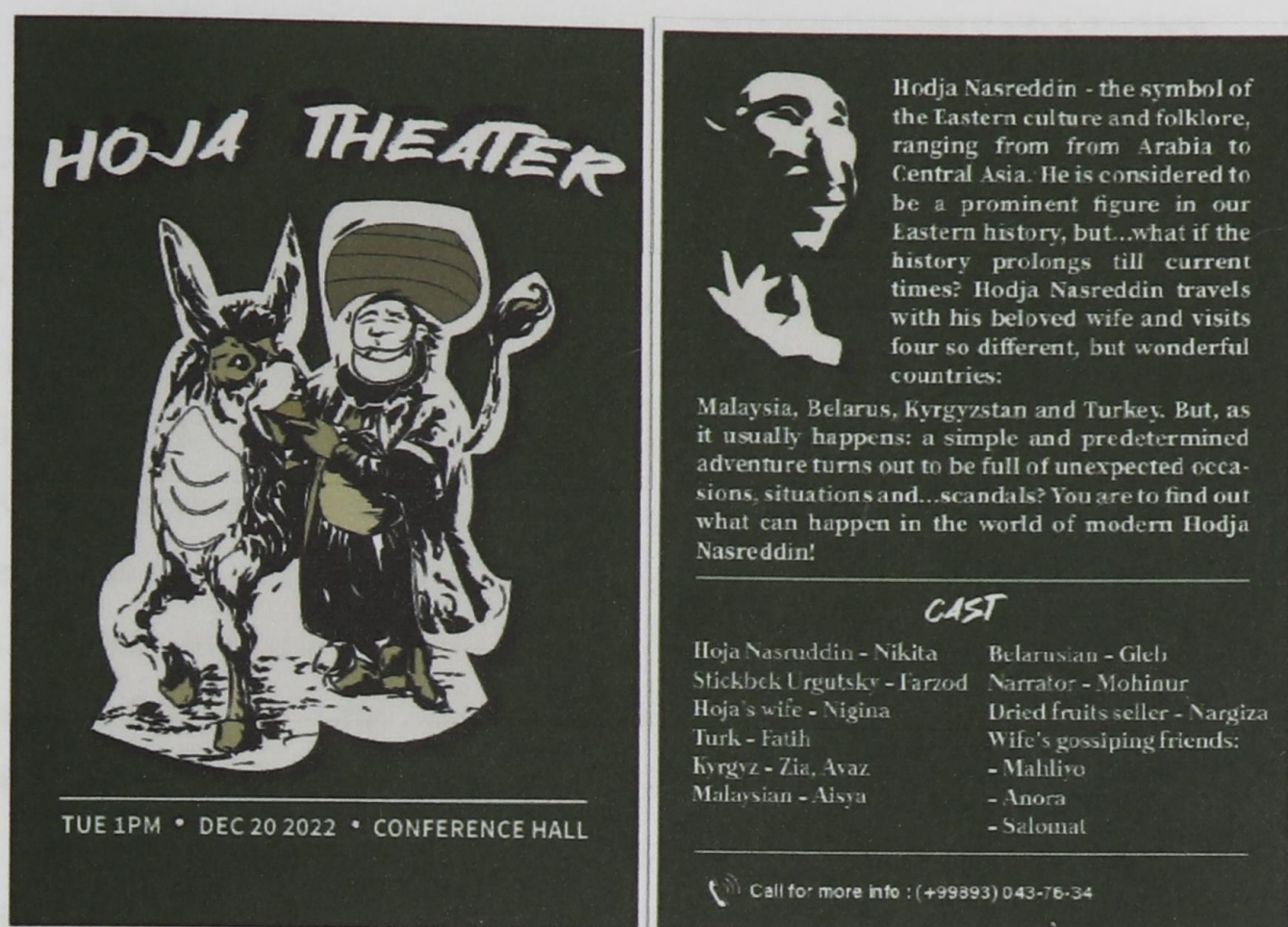


Figure 4.8. Promotion poster of the theatrical performance “Hodja Nasreddin” in “Silk Road” International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, 2023

Source: author’s data collection

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

To summarize, the main goal of the project was to elaborate new recommendations and ways of displaying the cultural and historical heritage of the stories of Hodja Nasreddin. In general, the project concluded that in average people from other countries are not well-informed and familiar with the Image of Hodja and his legacy. The research was conducted to formulate innovative recommendations and approaches for showcasing the cultural and historical legacy embedded in the tales of Hodja Nasreddin by creating imaginative settings, formats, and artistic products. Overall, the project determined that individuals from other nations generally lack awareness and familiarity with Hodja Nasreddin and his cultural contributions. To leverage Nasreddin's anecdotes as a novel medium for intercultural dialogue, the study advocates for making these stories globally accessible through high-quality translations, publication, distribution, and promotional efforts. Additionally, the research proposes the development of unique artistic mediums, such as theatrical productions, that contemporize and popularize the narratives of Hodja Nasreddin for modern audiences. Nevertheless, the study cautions that a meticulous examination and interpretation of Hodja's stories and related illustrations are essential to mitigate risks associated with the potential misuse or undue focus on political and socio-economic elements in newer adaptations.

Recommendations

As for future directions, it is advisable to undertake in-depth research to explore the historical underpinnings of Hodja Nasreddin's tales and examine the modern reinterpretations of these parables created in the past century. Such research would be further enriched by a comparative study involving Hodja Nasreddin and folklore figures akin to him, such as Giufa or El Tonto. Identifying specific thematic correlations could furnish scholars and experts in cultural heritage with additional insights into utilizing Hodja Nasreddin's image effectively in contemporary intercultural exchanges. To enhance the reach and impact of Hodja Nasreddin's legacy, it is recommended to produce theatrical performances and films (as well as other art performances) that encapsulate the essence of these tales. These mediums offer rich, engaging platforms for conveying the narratives to wider, more diverse audiences. For these narratives to be effectively integrated into intercultural communication practices, the interpretations, and perspectives on Hodja Nasreddin's legacy should be not only accurate but also inventive, readily accessible, and adaptively presented through various forms of artistic expression.

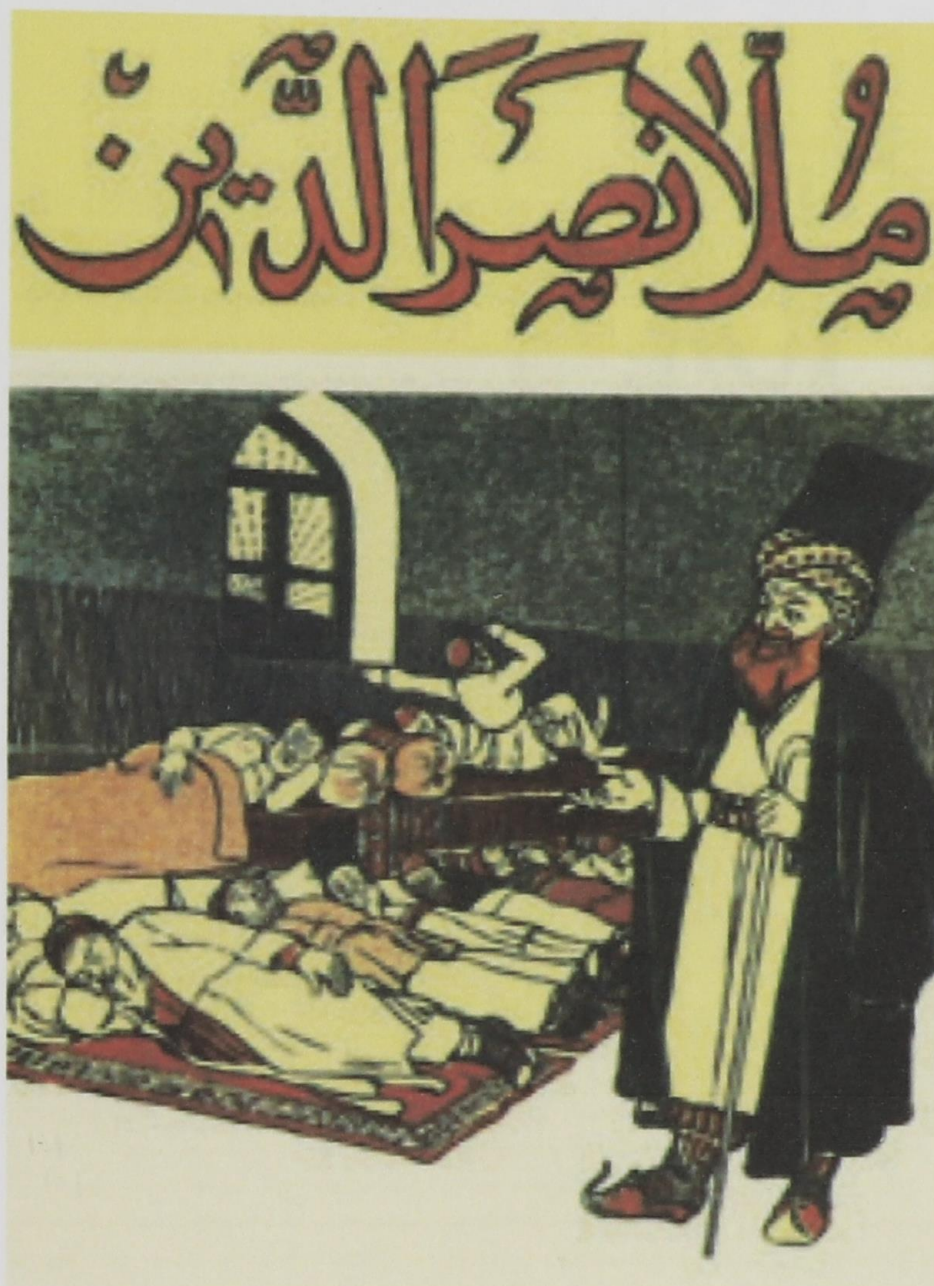
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Cover of the first issue of the magazine Molla Nasreddin, published 7 April 1906 (Ocón, 2021)



APPENDIX B

Main page of the official website dedicated to the heritage of Sicilian folklore hero Giufà (The Giufà Project, 2023)

