

Charting the Uncharted: Significant Gaps in the Academic Record of Kurdish Oral History

I. Introduction: Defining the Terrain of Kurdish Oral History

Kurdish culture, over centuries, has predominantly relied on oral transmission for its continuity, a characteristic shaped significantly by historical and political circumstances that often limited the development and dissemination of a unified written tradition.¹ This rich oral heritage encompasses a vast array of forms, including epic poems known as *lawj*, the poignant songs of mourning (*stran*) performed by traditional bards or *Dengbêjs*, intricate storytelling, proverbs, and other verbal arts that form the bedrock of Kurdish cultural memory.² Consequently, oral history in the Kurdish context transcends mere folklore; it functions as a vital mechanism for the preservation of collective memory, the articulation of identity, and the narration of historical experiences, particularly in the persistent absence of consistent statehood or unified, state-supported written historical canons.³ The academic pursuit of Kurdish oral history, therefore, involves the systematic documentation, analysis, and interpretation of these spoken traditions, encompassing personal accounts, narratives, testimonies, and memories that offer unique insights into Kurdish life and history.⁵

This report aims to critically examine the existing academic record pertaining to Kurdish oral history to identify and analyze significant gaps in research, documentation, and scholarly analysis. It will explore the multifaceted causes and profound implications of these lacunae, drawing upon a range of scholarly works, descriptions of oral history initiatives, and critical assessments of the field. Addressing these identified gaps is of paramount importance. It is crucial not only for achieving a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Kurdish history, diverse cultural expressions, complex social dynamics, and the enduring impact of political realities on Kurdish communities across various regions, but also for contributing to the broader scholarly endeavor of decolonizing knowledge production. This involves centering Kurdish voices, perspectives, and experiences that have historically been marginalized or silenced within dominant national narratives and academic discourses.⁶ The methodological approach of this report involves a synthesis and meta-analysis of information derived from a curated selection of academic articles, project descriptions, and book excerpts to construct a critical overview of the current state and deficiencies within the study of Kurdish oral history. The very definition of "Kurdish oral history" itself presents a foundational complexity that may contribute to existing gaps in the academic record. The term can encompass a wide spectrum of practices and materials, and its interpretation often varies significantly depending on the disciplinary lens through which it is viewed—be it folkloristics, political history, literary studies,

anthropology, or sociology. The available evidence showcases diverse applications and interpretations of Kurdish oral traditions: as folklore rich in traditional narrative structures and motifs¹; as powerful political testimony bearing witness to conflict, persecution, and displacement⁵; and as a profound source of inspiration for modern Kurdish literature.¹ Each of these disciplinary approaches brings its own methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and research priorities. A folklorist, for instance, might focus on the structural elements and performance contexts of traditional narratives, while a political historian might prioritize oral accounts that illuminate specific conflicts or political movements. This divergence in focus can lead to certain types of oral history—such as narratives of everyday life, non-event-based memories, or non-narrative forms of oral expression—being less academically valued, documented, or analyzed if they do not align neatly with established disciplinary molds. Consequently, a significant gap may exist in the development and application of robust interdisciplinary approaches capable of capturing the multifaceted nature of Kurdish oral history in its entirety.

Furthermore, the predominantly "oral" character of much of Kurdish historical transmission is not an incidental cultural trait but a direct consequence of enduring historical and political factors. Chief among these has been the systematic suppression of written Kurdish in various forms and the chronic lack of state-supported institutions dedicated to the preservation and promotion of Kurdish language and culture within the nation-states encompassing Kurdistan.¹ These policies severely limited the development and widespread adoption of a standardized written tradition for many Kurdish communities. As a result, oral transmission became the primary, and often sole, means for ensuring cultural and historical continuity across generations. This context transforms Kurdish oral history from merely a collection of cultural artifacts into a profound expression of resilience and a form of resistance against cultural assimilation and erasure. The academic study of Kurdish oral history is, therefore, intrinsically linked to a deep understanding of these shaping political dynamics. It necessitates not just the collection of stories, but a critical analysis of the conditions under which these oral traditions were produced, maintained, and transmitted, often under duress. A potential deficiency in the current academic landscape may be the insufficient theorization of Kurdish oral history *as a product of these specific politico-historical conditions*, rather than solely as a repository of cultural content.

II. The Current State of Academic Engagement with Kurdish Oral History

The academic engagement with Kurdish oral history, while facing numerous challenges, has seen several important initiatives and has established certain areas of study. A survey of these efforts provides a baseline for identifying where significant gaps persist.

A. Survey of Major Documented Collections and Research Initiatives

Several institutions and individual scholars have undertaken the crucial task of documenting Kurdish oral histories. Among the notable efforts is the **Kurdish Oral History Project** at Binghamton University Libraries, which emerged following the acquisition of the Vera Beaudin

Saeedpour Kurdish Library and Museum Collection. This ongoing project gathers interviews in English and/or Kurdish with individuals of diverse ages and backgrounds from various parts of Kurdistan. The narratives collected provide deeper insights into Kurdish culture through personal accounts focusing on themes such as migration experiences, persecution in Kurdistan, the resilience of Kurdish identity in diaspora, and the maintenance of ties with the homeland.⁵ Featured interviews within this collection include those with individuals such as Jotiyar Taha, Ridwan Zebari, Hawar, Halima Taha, Snur Shukri, Midya Khudur, and Avras Taha, whose testimonies offer personal windows into these broader themes.⁵

Another significant initiative is the **Kurdistan Memory Programme**, which focuses on collecting personal testimonies primarily related to experiences of conflict, genocide (such as the chemical attack on Halabja and the Anfal campaign), displacement, and trauma.⁸ While these testimonies are invaluable for understanding the impact of profound violence, the program's specific focus might inadvertently lead to less coverage of other dimensions of Kurdish oral history, particularly those related to everyday life beyond conflict.⁸

Beyond these dedicated projects, some **academic programs** incorporate elements of Kurdish oral history within their curricula. For example, programs focusing on Kurdish language and literature may include practical projects such as documenting spoken traditions and folktales, thereby contributing to the preservation and study of oral narratives.¹³ Furthermore, **individual scholarly works** have played a role in bringing oral texts to academic attention. Khanna Omarkhali's "Kurdish Reader: Modern Literature and Oral Texts in Kurmanji," for instance, includes recordings of historical information based on the personal experiences of speakers, making it a relevant resource for oral history studies.¹⁴

B. Key Achievements and Established Areas of Study

Despite the challenges, scholarship on Kurdish oral history has made notable achievements in several areas:

- **Folklore and Traditional Narratives:** There has been a long-standing academic and popular interest in Kurdish folklore, including epic poems (*lawj*) and, particularly, the traditions of the *Dengbêjs*—the revered Kurdish bards.¹ The *Dengbêj* tradition is increasingly recognized not just as an art form but as a significant repository of social memory, offering alternative historical perspectives often absent from official records.³
- **Testimonies of Conflict and Persecution:** A substantial body of work is dedicated to documenting Kurdish experiences of violence, political oppression, and forced displacement. This is especially true for major traumatic events such as the Anfal campaign in Iraq and other instances of state-sanctioned violence.⁸ These testimonies are crucial for historical accountability and understanding the profound impact of conflict on Kurdish society.
- **Diaspora Narratives and Intergenerational Memory:** Research has begun to explore how collective memories, particularly those of a violent past, are transmitted to subsequent generations within the Kurdish diaspora. These studies examine the formation of evolving "diasporic memories" and "diasporic consciousness," investigating concepts such as inherited trauma and the active role of second-generation individuals in preserving and reshaping community memory work.¹⁶

- **Women's Stories of Struggle and Resilience:** Initiatives such as Houzan Mahmoud's edited volume, "Kurdish Women's Stories," represent a vital effort to collect and amplify the voices of Kurdish women. These projects gather self-written or self-told narratives from women across different regions of Kurdistan and the diaspora, focusing on their experiences with political oppression, war, imprisonment, gender-based violence, activism, and personal struggles for education and independence.¹⁸
- **Oral Tradition's Influence on Modern Literature:** Scholarly attention has also been paid to the ways in which modern Kurdish writers, such as Mehmed Uzun and Mehmet Dicle, draw upon, reinterpret, and "heritagize" Kurdish oral traditions, especially the performances of the *Dengbêjs*. This engagement is seen as contributing not only to literary innovation but also to the revitalization of the Kurdish language.¹

The geographical and institutional locus of these documented collections and research initiatives merits closer examination. While valuable, many prominent collections appear to be concentrated in Western academic institutions or are led by diaspora-based initiatives, such as the Kurdish Oral History Project at Binghamton University in New York⁵ and the "Kurdish Women's Stories" project published by Pluto Press (London) as part of the Culture Project, founded by diaspora Kurds.¹⁸ This concentration has several implications. Western academic funding, for instance, often comes with specific ethical guidelines, research priorities, and prevailing theoretical frameworks that can influence the types of narratives collected, the methodologies employed, and the selection of interviewees (e.g., those more readily accessible in diaspora communities, or those whose stories align with fundable themes such as human rights, trauma, or migration). This situation raises important questions about power dynamics in knowledge production: who ultimately decides what aspects of Kurdish oral history are preserved, how they are interpreted, and for whom they are made accessible? A resulting gap, therefore, is in the comprehensive understanding of the extent and nature of oral history initiatives being undertaken *within* the various regions of Kurdistan, potentially led by local institutions, grassroots organizations, or community scholars. Furthermore, how these local efforts differ from, complement, or are perhaps overshadowed by diaspora-led or Western-based projects remains an under-researched area. The impact of this external locus of preservation on the narratives themselves—in terms of language, thematic focus, and interpretation—also warrants more critical scrutiny.

Moreover, the "established areas of study" within Kurdish oral history, while undeniably crucial, often revolve around themes of conflict, trauma, political struggle, and persecution.⁵ These themes are frequently more visible on the international stage and resonate with global concerns for human rights, justice, and conflict resolution, thereby potentially attracting more research interest and funding. However, this thematic concentration, however important, might inadvertently create a "hierarchy of suffering" within the academic record. Narratives of everyday life, cultural joy, economic activity, local traditions, community celebrations, or non-politicized social interactions may be less documented or perceived as less academically significant in comparison. Such an imbalance risks a one-dimensional portrayal of Kurdish life and identity, primarily through the lens of victimhood or resistance. This creates a substantial gap in understanding the full spectrum of Kurdish lived experiences as captured through oral

history. Indeed, the Kurdistan Memory Programme's testimonies, while profound, are noted for not detailing daily life *beyond* the context of conflict.⁸ The broader implication is that the academic archive of Kurdish oral history might be skewed towards narratives of suffering and political strife, potentially missing crucial insights into the multifaceted nature of community resilience, which is often manifested in everyday practices, cultural continuity, and social cohesion that persist *despite* conflict and oppression.

III. Thematic Deficiencies in the Academic Record

While existing scholarship has illuminated certain facets of Kurdish oral history, significant thematic deficiencies persist, leaving vast areas of Kurdish experience under-researched or altogether absent from the academic record.

A. Under-researched Narratives of Daily Life and Social Fabric

A notable imbalance exists in the current academic focus. While testimonies of conflict, persecution, and political upheaval are prominent and essential⁸, there is a discernible scarcity of oral history projects dedicated to capturing the nuanced tapestry of everyday existence in Kurdistan. This includes the mundane yet vital aspects of social customs, local traditions, family life, community organization, and the rhythms of daily work and leisure that unfold beyond the immediate shadow of violence and political strife. Journalistic accounts may offer glimpses into markets, tea cafes, and festivals¹⁵, and some archival initiatives acknowledge this gap for their collections⁸, but systematic, in-depth oral history research into these domains remains limited.

The academic tendency to gravitate towards "significant events," often defined by political turmoil or large-scale violence, means that the ordinary, everyday practices that constitute the bedrock of social reproduction, cultural continuity, and local knowledge systems are frequently overshadowed. However, a comprehensive understanding of societal resilience, cultural vitality, and the lived realities of Kurdish communities necessitates a deeper engagement with these seemingly less dramatic aspects of life. A significant gap, therefore, lies in the lack of dedicated academic projects focused on the oral history of everyday life. This includes, for example, oral histories of traditional agricultural practices, artisanal crafts, child-rearing customs, local governance systems beyond formal politics, inter-community relations during periods of relative peace, and the evolution of social norms and values over time.

B. Economic Oral Histories

The economic dimensions of Kurdish life represent another critical but under-explored area in oral history scholarship. While 20th-century Kurdish historiography has, in general, relied more on state archives than on oral sources, with a primary focus on political events often concentrated in the first half of the century²⁰, the recent "archival turn" in Kurdish studies signals an intention to broaden this scope to include social and, importantly, economic history.²⁰ However, specific oral history projects systematically dedicated to documenting economic life from the perspective of ordinary Kurds appear to be scarce. While some studies touch upon the use of oral traditions for broader nation-building narratives²², they do not typically delve into the specifics of economic history through oral testimonies.

Economic transformations, land tenure relations, traditional livelihoods (such as pastoral nomadism or specific agricultural techniques), local and regional trade networks, experiences of labor migration (beyond the general context of diaspora displacement), and the direct economic impact of political decisions, conflict, and environmental changes on Kurdish communities are all critical aspects of Kurdish history and society. Oral histories can provide invaluable grassroots perspectives on these issues, offering insights into how economic policies, resource exploitation (such as oil exploration), sanctions, or conflict have affected the livelihoods, coping strategies, and economic well-being of individuals, families, and communities. These personal accounts can complement, challenge, or enrich the narratives found in formal economic data or state archives. The current gap lies in targeted oral history research designed to specifically investigate these economic dimensions from the ground up, capturing the lived economic realities of the Kurdish populace.

C. Oral Histories of Specific and Marginalized Groups within Kurdish Society

Kurdish society, while often viewed as a minority group within larger nation-states, is itself diverse, comprising various internal social distinctions. The oral histories of several specific and often marginalized groups within this broader Kurdish identity remain significantly under-documented.

1. **Women's Diverse Roles and Experiences:** While pioneering projects like "Kurdish Women's Stories" ¹⁸ have made invaluable contributions by bringing women's narratives of struggle, political involvement, and experiences of violence to the fore, there remains a potential gap in documenting the broader spectrum of women's oral histories. This includes their roles in the intergenerational transmission of culture and language, their contributions to household and local economies, their knowledge of traditional healing practices, their artistic expressions (e.g., in weaving, music, or storytelling), and their everyday forms of social influence and leadership within families and communities, beyond the framework of overt political resistance or victimhood. The observation that some women have historically been reluctant to share their stories, deeming them unimportant, hints at both internal societal pressures and external factors that may have silenced or devalued their narratives.¹⁹
2. **LGBTQ+ Individuals:** A particularly stark lacuna exists concerning the oral histories of Kurdish LGBTQ+ individuals. Scholarly work has highlighted that Kurdish experiences are "notably absent" from the broader field of Queer Studies in the Middle East.⁶ The explicit call for the development of "Kurdish Queer Studies" and the collection of "queer oral histories" ⁶ underscores this significant void. While activism and discussions about the need for interlocal conversations among Kurdish LGBTQ+ individuals are emerging ²³, dedicated oral history collections documenting their lives, experiences, struggles, and identities are not yet widely established or accessible in the academic record. The intersection of Kurdish identity and LGBTQ+ identity often entails a dual marginalization, rendering these oral histories particularly vulnerable to silence and erasure, and thus critically important to uncover. The absence of these narratives means that a significant dimension of Kurdish social experience, identity formation, and internal diversity is missing from scholarly understanding. This gap is not merely a lack of stories but also

reflects a historical absence of appropriate analytical frameworks within Kurdish studies to engage with these experiences.

3. **Religious and Ethnic Minorities within Kurdish Society:** While Kurds themselves constitute a minority in the states they inhabit, Kurdish society is not monolithic and includes various religious and ethno-linguistic groups. Sources mention the presence of Yazidis, Assyrian Christians, and different Islamic sects within Kurdish regions.¹⁵ Oral histories that specifically focus on the unique experiences, traditions, cultural practices, and inter-communal relations of these groups *within* the broader Kurdish social and political context may be underdeveloped. Understanding these internal dynamics is crucial for a complete picture of Kurdish societal fabric.
4. **Children's Oral Histories:** Narratives concerning childhood experiences, education (both formal and informal), play, and the impact of conflict or displacement on children are often relayed by adults reflecting on their past. Oral history projects that directly engage with children (using appropriate methodologies) or that specifically focus on adult recollections of childhood from a child's perspective, rather than an adult retrospective, might be lacking.

D. Specific Oral Traditions and Performance Arts

While the *Dengbêj* tradition has, rightly, received considerable scholarly attention as a cornerstone of Kurdish oral performance and historical memory¹, other local or regional oral performance arts, distinct storytelling genres, musical traditions, or ritualistic oral practices across the diverse regions of Kurdistan might be less systematically documented or academically analyzed through an oral history lens. The process of "heritagization" itself—how communities engage with, adapt, and perceive the value of their oral traditions in contemporary contexts¹—could also be a rich and underexplored area for oral history research.

The thematic gaps identified—ranging from the everyday to the economic, from the experiences of specific marginalized groups to distinct artistic traditions—are often interconnected. They frequently stem from a dominant academic or funding focus that has historically prioritized political conflict, macro-level historical narratives, or more "sensational" events. This prioritization can create a "trickle-down" effect where topics perceived as less overtly political or less immediately relevant to conflict studies receive diminished attention and resources. Consequently, the oral histories of, for example, a Kurdish farmer discussing generations of agricultural change (economic history), a woman recounting traditional weaving patterns and their meanings (daily life, women's roles, artistic expression), or a member of a smaller religious community describing unique rituals (minority experiences) might be deemed less urgent or less fundable than a testimony of political imprisonment or armed struggle, even though all such narratives hold immense historical and cultural value. The broader implication of this imbalance is that the academic record may inadvertently reinforce a portrayal of Kurdish life and identity that is heavily weighted towards political action or victimhood, thereby obscuring the rich complexity of Kurdish societies, their diverse internal dynamics, and their vibrant cultural practices that extend far beyond the political sphere.

Furthermore, the "silences" surrounding the experiences of certain groups, such as LGBTQ+ individuals or those women whose stories do not fit conventional narratives of heroism or suffering, are not accidental omissions. These silences are often actively produced and maintained by an interplay of intersecting factors. These can include internal societal norms and patriarchal structures within some Kurdish communities that may discourage the sharing of certain experiences, as well as external pressures or a historical lack of interest from dominant academic frameworks that may not have possessed the conceptual tools or the inclination to explore these experiences.⁶ Political suppression can further exacerbate this by creating an environment of fear where discussing sensitive or non-conformist topics becomes risky. Therefore, addressing these gaps requires more than just the passive collection of whatever stories might surface; it demands a critical interrogation of the power structures—both internal and external—that create and perpetuate these silences. This necessitates the development and application of oral history methodologies that are acutely sensitive to these power dynamics and that actively work towards creating spaces for counter-hegemonic narratives to emerge and be heard.

IV. Geographical and Linguistic Imbalances in Oral History Scholarship

The academic record of Kurdish oral history is significantly shaped by geographical and linguistic disparities, reflecting the fragmented political landscape of Kurdistan and the varying statuses of Kurdish dialects. These imbalances lead to an uneven representation of Kurdish experiences and traditions.

A. Uneven Research Distribution Across Historical Regions of Kurdistan

The Kurdish people reside across a vast territory divided primarily between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, with significant diaspora communities in Europe and elsewhere.¹ The conditions for conducting research, the level of cultural autonomy, and the political climate vary dramatically across these regions, directly impacting the scope and nature of oral history documentation.

- **Turkey (Bakur):** This region, home to a large portion of the Kurdish population, has been subjected to prolonged and severe policies of linguistic and cultural assimilation aimed at suppressing Kurdish identity.¹ While some important research on oral traditions, such as the *Dengbêj* performances and the influence of oral narratives on modern Kurdish literature, has emerged from or about this region,¹ comprehensive oral history work faces immense political and practical challenges. The phenomenon of "Kurd-less" queer studies in Turkey, for instance, points to a broader issue of Kurdish invisibility or marginalization within national academic discourses⁶, which likely extends to oral history.
- **Iraq (Bashur):** The existence of the autonomous Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI) has generally provided a more permissive environment for cultural expression and academic research compared to other regions.⁹ This has facilitated oral history initiatives, although much of the documented work, such as that by the Kurdistan Memory Programme, understandably focuses on experiences of profound trauma like the Anfal

genocide.⁸ While crucial, this focus might leave other aspects of oral history in Bashur less explored.

- **Iran (Rojhelat):** Kurds in Iran have faced decades of Persianization policies and restrictions on Kurdish cultural and linguistic expression.² The Iranian Oral History Project based at Harvard University, which primarily documents the accounts of Iranian political elites²⁶, does not clearly indicate the extent of its inclusion of Kurdish voices or oral histories from Rojhelat.²⁶ There appears to be a significant gap in accessible, systematic oral history projects originating from or focusing comprehensively on this region.
- **Syria (Rojava):** Historically, Kurds in Syria endured Arabization policies that suppressed their language and culture.⁹ The period following 2011 has seen a revival of Kurdish language and cultural activities in areas under the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.²⁷ This changing context might create new opportunities for oral history documentation. However, systematic academic recording and analysis of these emerging oral history efforts or broader oral traditions from Rojava seem to be in nascent stages or are not yet widely reflected in international academic publications.²⁷
- **Diaspora:** Kurdish diaspora communities have played, and continue to play, a critical role in cultural preservation, activism, and the documentation of oral history.¹ Oral history projects undertaken in the diaspora, such as the one at Binghamton University⁵, are relatively more visible in the academic sphere. However, the immense diversity within diaspora communities—originating from different parts of Kurdistan, speaking various dialects, and having diverse migration experiences—may not be evenly covered, potentially leading to an incomplete picture of diasporic oral histories.

B. Disparities in Documenting Oral Histories in Various Kurdish Languages and Dialects

The Kurdish linguistic landscape is rich and diverse, comprising multiple languages or dialect groups, including Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish), Sorani (Central Kurdish), Southern Kurdish (which encompasses varieties such as Kelhuri, Feyli, and Kirmashani), Gorani, and Zazaki (also known as Kirmancki or Dimili).¹ The academic documentation of oral histories does not appear to be evenly distributed across these linguistic varieties.

- **Kurmanji and Sorani:** These two dialects generally appear to be more dominant in terms of literary development, media presence, and, consequently, are likely to be better represented in existing oral history documentation.¹ This is partly due to their larger speaker populations and more established written traditions.
- **Zazaki (Kirmancki/Dimili):** This language has been designated as "vulnerable" by UNESCO.²⁸ Historically, Zazaki relied heavily on oral tradition, particularly through performers known as *deyrbaz*, for its survival in the face of assimilationist pressures.²⁸ While there are contemporary revitalization efforts focusing on translation, standardization (e.g., through the Vate Group), and literary production²⁸, specific, large-scale oral history *initiatives* dedicated to systematically documenting the rich oral traditions in Zazaki are not prominently detailed in the available scholarly materials. This suggests a significant gap in preserving the oral heritage of Zazaki-speaking

communities.

- **Gorani (Hawrami):** Gorani and its varieties, particularly Hawrami, are described as "under-documented, endangered varieties" spoken in the Zagros mountains.⁷ A forthcoming academic volume aims to represent the "state of the art of Gorani's historical and socio-linguistics, documentation, and literature".⁷ The very need for such a volume implies that current documentation, including that of its oral traditions, is sparse. The available description of this upcoming work does not explicitly highlight a focus on oral traditions⁷, leaving the status of Gorani oral history documentation uncertain but likely deficient.
- **Southern Kurdish Dialects:** The provided research material offers less specific information regarding the state of oral history documentation for the various Southern Kurdish dialects, such as Kelhuri, Feyli, or Kirmashani. This lack of visibility in the surveyed literature may itself indicate a potential area of neglect.

The political and demographic dominance of certain regions and the larger speaker populations of dialects like Kurmanji and Sorani likely translate into their greater representation in academic research and oral history collections. This leaves smaller, more marginalized linguistic communities and their unique oral traditions critically under-documented and at a higher risk of irreversible loss. Since language is intrinsically linked to culture, worldview, and historical memory, the erosion or neglect of these dialects means the concomitant loss of unique oral expressions, indigenous knowledge systems, distinct historical perspectives, and rich cultural narratives embedded within them. The academic effort to document these less-documented linguistic traditions is therefore not merely an act of preservation but a crucial step towards capturing and acknowledging the full linguistic and cultural diversity of the Kurdish people.

These geographical and linguistic imbalances are not simply matters of academic oversight or logistical difficulty; they are often direct outcomes of decades, if not centuries, of state policies aimed at fragmentation, suppression, and assimilation.⁹ The political borders imposed upon the Kurdish homeland have created vastly different conditions for cultural survival and academic access across regions. As one source explicitly states, "political borders became barriers, enabling state authorities to enforce linguistic policies aimed at assimilation and control".⁹ The varying types and degrees of suppression implemented by Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria⁹ have directly impacted the ability of Kurdish communities to maintain and transmit their oral traditions, as well as the capacity of researchers to access these communities and their linguistic heritage. For instance, the relative autonomy enjoyed in Iraqi Kurdistan (Bashur) might allow for more open and extensive research compared to the more restrictive environments in parts of Turkey or Iran. The result is an uneven and fragmented academic landscape where knowledge about Kurdish oral history is often compartmentalized along these political and linguistic fault lines. A significant implication of this fragmentation is that comparative oral history research across these imposed borders, or research focusing on shared traditions that may transcend these divisions, becomes exceptionally challenging, thereby hindering a holistic and integrated understanding of Kurdish oral culture as a whole. The Kurdish diaspora, while a crucial site for the preservation and continuation of oral

traditions¹, also presents a complex picture regarding comprehensive documentation. Oral histories collected in diaspora settings are inherently subject to processes of memory transformation, reinterpretation, and a potential attenuation of connection to the original homeland context over time and generations.¹⁶ Sources note that diasporas gradually form collective memories that "may align with or differ from the narratives of those who stayed in their home countries" and are "ever evolving".¹⁶ While the study of these diasporic memory processes is valid and important in its own right, it also means that oral histories reflecting the contemporary realities and historical memories of those communities *remaining* in less accessible or under-researched regions of Kurdistan might become underrepresented if diaspora narratives become the primary or most accessible source for scholars. Furthermore, diaspora communities themselves are not homogenous; they are diverse in terms of regional origin, linguistic background, socio-economic status, and political orientation. Research might inadvertently focus on more established, organized, or accessible diaspora groups, potentially creating internal gaps within the documentation of diaspora oral history itself. A clear gap exists in understanding the overall representativeness of current diaspora oral history collections and in developing innovative methodologies to bridge the experiential and memorial gap between diaspora narratives and homeland memories, especially for those regions of Kurdistan that remain difficult for researchers to access directly.

V. Methodological, Ethical, and Archival Hurdles

Contributing to Gaps

The gaps in the academic record of Kurdish oral history are not solely due to a lack of interest or thematic oversight; they are profoundly shaped by a range of methodological, ethical, and archival hurdles that researchers frequently encounter.

A. Impact of Political Instability, State Suppression, and Conflict

The political environments in many regions where Kurds reside are characterized by instability, ongoing conflict, and varying degrees of state suppression. These conditions directly impede the ability to conduct oral history fieldwork, often endangering both researchers and participants, and fostering an atmosphere of pervasive fear and distrust that is inimical to open sharing of memories and experiences.⁹ The historical and ongoing suppression of Kurdish language and culture means that many oral traditions may have been forced underground, may be deliberately hidden from outsiders, or may be subject to self-censorship by community members wary of repercussions.⁹ Conducting research in militarized or heavily securitized zones presents unique and often insurmountable challenges to gaining access, ensuring safety, and collecting reliable data.³⁰

B. Challenges of Researcher Positionality, Trust-Building, and Ethics

The identity and background of the researcher—including their ethnicity, gender, class, political stance, and institutional affiliation (insider versus outsider status)—significantly impact every stage of the oral history process, from gaining access to communities to the nature of interactions and the interpretation of data.²⁵ Building trust, particularly in communities that have experienced trauma, oppression, and betrayal, is paramount yet

exceptionally difficult and time-consuming.³⁰ Researchers face complex ethical dilemmas, including the tension between a desire for social engagement or advocacy and the academic need for critical distance. Ensuring the physical and psychological safety of participants, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity where requested or required, and obtaining informed consent in volatile contexts are critical ethical responsibilities that can be challenging to navigate.²¹

Furthermore, researchers must be acutely aware of and actively work to mitigate power dynamics inherent in the research relationship, especially when there are disparities in education, social status, or access to resources between the researcher and the interviewee.³⁰ As noted, even the act of interviewing can involve and reproduce relations of social inequality.³⁰ A key methodological challenge is how to avoid imposing external frameworks, introducing bias, or inadvertently reproducing existing structures of domination or marginalization through the research process itself.³⁰

C. The "Archival Turn" and Its Implications

The "archival turn" in Kurdish studies, marked by the increasing availability and scholarly use of diverse archival sources—including state records, private papers, institutional documents, and digital archives—offers new and exciting resources for contextualizing and enriching oral histories.²⁰ These archives can provide corroborating evidence, alternative perspectives, or historical frameworks against which oral testimonies can be understood.

However, this development is not without its own set of challenges. Access to these archives can be highly politicized, uneven across different regions or institutions, and may raise significant issues related to censorship, state control over historical narratives, and property rights, particularly for archives in private hands.²¹ State archives, in particular, often present official narratives that may conflict with, deliberately omit, or distort grassroots oral histories, necessitating a highly critical approach to their interpretation.²⁰ The integration of oral accounts with diverse archival documents thus raises complex methodological and interpretative challenges. It requires careful cross-examination of sources, an acute awareness of the inherent biases and framing of each type of record (oral and written), and an understanding of the power dynamics involved in their production and preservation.²⁰ A significant gap exists in the development and widespread application of robust, critical methodologies specifically tailored for triangulating Kurdish oral histories with these diverse, and often biased, archival sources. This goes beyond simple corroboration to a more sophisticated understanding of how different forms of historical evidence are constructed, contested, and can be used in dialogue with one another to produce richer historical understanding.

D. Lack of Methodological Self-Reflection in Earlier Kurdish Studies

A further contributing factor to some of the existing gaps, or to the questionable reliability of some older documented materials, is the observation that earlier generations of research in Kurdish Studies often focused primarily on political issues without extensive methodological or ethical self-reflection.³⁰ Many foundational works in the field, while providing valuable information, often fail to detail the specific research methods employed in gathering and interpreting data, including oral accounts.²⁵ This lack of methodological transparency makes it

difficult for contemporary scholars to critically assess the reliability, potential biases, and contextual limitations of earlier documented oral accounts, which may then be perpetuated in subsequent scholarship.

The methodological and ethical challenges encountered in the study of Kurdish oral history are not merely incidental obstacles to research; they are, in many ways, *constitutive* of the gaps that exist in the academic record. The inherent difficulty, and often profound danger, of conducting research in many Kurdish regions means that certain stories, traditions, or the experiences of particular groups may be simply too risky to collect, or can only be approached superficially. This leads to unavoidable lacunae in our understanding. This is not just a matter of researchers needing to be more creative or tenacious; it is a fundamental structural limitation imposed by the prevailing political environments in much of Kurdistan. The direct implication is that the "gaps" in the academic record are not randomly distributed. Instead, they are often concentrated in geographical areas or thematic topics deemed politically sensitive by state actors, or in regions where conflict is active or security is precarious. This systematically skews the academic record towards what is perceived as "safe," permissible, or logistically feasible to research, potentially marginalizing more contentious or difficult-to-access narratives.

Similarly, while the "archival turn" holds considerable promise for filling some of these gaps by providing new sources of information, it also carries the risk of inadvertently creating new deficiencies or reinforcing existing biases if not approached with critical vigilance. For example, if newly accessible state archives predominantly reflect official, often nationalistic, narratives, their uncritical incorporation into historical analyses could overshadow, devalue, or even contradict the oral counter-narratives of marginalized Kurdish communities.²⁰ Likewise, private archives, while potentially rich, may primarily reflect elite perspectives, thus not fully representing the experiences of broader society. This creates a potential new gap: ensuring that the "archival turn" genuinely serves to amplify, rather than silence, the diversity of Kurdish voices, particularly those that are not well-represented in formal or official records. A further implication is the pressing need for oral history projects that specifically engage *with* and critically *interrogate* these archives, using oral testimonies as a means to "read against the grain" of official records and to uncover suppressed histories.

VI. The Shadow of Political History: How Suppression and Statelessness Shape the Record

The academic record of Kurdish oral history is inextricably linked to, and profoundly shaped by, the tumultuous political history of the Kurdish people. Decades of state-sponsored suppression, violent conflict, and the enduring condition of statelessness have not only impacted the lives of Kurds but have also directly influenced what oral traditions have survived, how they have been transmitted, and the extent to which they have been documented by scholars.

A. Linguicide and Cultural Erasure

One of the most direct and damaging impacts has been the systematic implementation of policies amounting to linguicide and cultural erasure in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. These

policies have aimed at suppressing or eradicating the Kurdish language in its various dialects and curtailing Kurdish cultural expressions.¹ Tactics have included outright bans on speaking Kurdish in public spaces, schools, and official institutions; forcing individuals to change Kurdish names to those of the dominant nationality; prohibiting or destroying Kurdish books, music, and traditional clothing; and rewriting educational curricula to deny or distort Kurdish history and identity. For example, in Syria, policies included bans on Kurdish names, schools, and businesses without Arabic names, while in Iran, the Kurdish language was at times officially rebranded as a mere dialect of Persian.⁹ In Turkey, the words "Kurd" and "Kurdistan" were outlawed for extended periods, and even the selling of Kurdish music cassettes could lead to arrest.¹⁰

These actions directly impact the transmission and survival of oral traditions, which are intrinsically tied to language. Such policies force oral traditions underground, disrupt their natural intergenerational passage, or lead to their gradual attrition as communities are pressured to assimilate. Linguicide does not merely silence speech; it is an attempt to erase collective memory and dismantle cultural identity. In this context, the very act of preserving and narrating oral history in the Kurdish language becomes a profound form of political resistance and cultural affirmation. The gaps in the academic record are, therefore, not simply passive omissions but are often the result of active, state-led erasures. Documenting the remaining oral traditions, and even the memory of those traditions that may have been lost or suppressed, is thus an act of reclaiming a heritage targeted for obliteration.

B. Impact of Violence, Displacement, and Genocide

The history of Kurdistan is tragically marked by recurrent episodes of extreme violence, including mass displacement, massacres, and acts of genocide. Events such as the Anfal campaign and the chemical attack on Halabja in Iraq, and the persecution of specific groups like the Yazidis, have resulted in an immense loss of life, the wholesale destruction of communities and their cultural infrastructure, and the forced displacement of vast populations.⁸ This legacy of violence not only creates a deep well of traumatic memories that necessitate documentation through oral history but also fundamentally disrupts the social fabric and demographic continuity required for the healthy transmission of oral traditions. The loss of elders, who are often the primary bearers of historical knowledge and traditional narratives, represents an irreplaceable rupture in the chain of oral transmission.

C. Consequences of Statelessness

The enduring condition of statelessness for the majority of Kurds has had profound consequences for the preservation of their oral heritage. The lack of a unified, sovereign Kurdish state means there has been no overarching national institutional framework with the mandate and resources to systematically collect, archive, study, and promote Kurdish oral history on a comprehensive scale.¹ As historian Nilay Özok Gündoğan observed, Kurdish studies have often lacked autonomous institutional settings, frequently being "at the mercy of Arab, Turkish, and Iranian nationalisms".⁶ This has led to the marginalization of Kurdish narratives within broader Middle Eastern studies and a reliance on the efforts of individual scholars, diaspora communities, or international organizations for the documentation and preservation of oral traditions. While these efforts are invaluable, they can be sporadic, limited

in scope by funding or political constraints, and may reflect the specific agendas or priorities of the supporting entities.

D. Internal Kurdish Political Fragmentation

While not extensively detailed in the provided materials specifically in relation to oral history collection, the general knowledge of political diversity and, at times, fragmentation among various Kurdish political groups and factions across different regions could also indirectly contribute to challenges in creating a unified and comprehensive record of oral history.

Differing political priorities or sensitivities within Kurdish society itself might sometimes hinder collaborative efforts in cultural preservation or create environments where certain narratives are favored over others, although this aspect requires more specific research in the context of oral history projects. Broader societal fragmentations along tribal and religious lines have also been noted as a characteristic of the Kurdish landscape.²⁵

The cumulative effect of political suppression and statelessness has created a unique situation where Kurdish oral history often functions as a "fugitive" archive. This is an archive that exists largely outside of, and frequently in direct opposition to, state-controlled narratives and official historical institutions.⁶ This fugitive nature profoundly shapes both the content of Kurdish oral traditions—often emphasizing themes of resistance, the memory of injustice, cultural survival, and longing for recognition—and their modes of transmission, which have historically been clandestine, familial, or community-based rather than institutional. The very act of remembering and narrating in Kurdish, even if the content is not overtly political, can be interpreted as an act of defiance against assimilationist pressures. A potential gap in academic study, therefore, may be the insufficient theorization of Kurdish oral history as a *counter-archive*, along with the development of specific methodologies required to access, interpret, and ethically engage with such fugitive forms of knowledge.

Furthermore, the pervasive trauma resulting from decades of political violence, such as the Anfal campaign and the Halabja attack⁸, not only creates an urgent need for testimonial oral history but also profoundly impacts the *process* of memory and narration itself. Gaps in the academic record may exist not just in the sheer volume of testimonies collected, but in a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which trauma shapes individual and collective memory, induces silences, distorts narrative structures, and influences the intergenerational transmission of these painful experiences.¹⁶ While the academic record might capture the "what" of traumatic events—the facts and figures of atrocities—it may often miss the "how": how trauma is processed, narrated (or, crucially, not narrated), and passed on within families and communities over generations. This points to a gap in the broader application of trauma theory, psycho-social approaches, and memory studies to the analysis of Kurdish oral histories. Such approaches would move beyond simple documentation towards a more nuanced understanding of memory dynamics in contexts of extreme and protracted violence, while also foregrounding the critical ethical considerations related to preventing re-traumatization during the interview and dissemination processes.

VII. Emerging Frontiers and Pathways to a More

Comprehensive Record

Despite the significant gaps and challenges, several emerging frontiers and evolving approaches offer pathways towards a more comprehensive, nuanced, and representative academic record of Kurdish oral history.

A. Kurdish Queer Studies and Intersectional Approaches

A vital emerging field is Kurdish Queer Studies, which aims to make the experiences of Kurdish LGBTQ+ individuals visible, to analyze the complex interplay of sexuality, gender, power, and ethnicity within Kurdish contexts, and to challenge both external Orientalist stereotypes and internal homophobic or transphobic norms.⁶ A core component of this endeavor is the collection and centering of "queer oral histories," which can provide firsthand accounts of lives lived at the intersection of multiple identities and often multiple forms of marginalization.⁶ This field actively confronts the issue of "Kurd-less" queer studies in dominant national discourses and seeks to provide more accurate and empowering representations. The development of Kurdish Queer Studies highlights a broader need and a pathway forward: the application of intersectional analytical frameworks to Kurdish oral history more generally. Just as this field illuminates the experiences of those marginalized based on sexuality and gender within Kurdish society, similar approaches can uncover the oral histories of other groups whose voices may be muted due to intersections of class, religion, disability, regional origin, or political dissent. The success in identifying the profound gap concerning queer experiences suggests that a conscious effort to explore other intersections of identity will likely reveal a wider range of silenced or overlooked voices. The pathway forward involves applying this intersectional lens more broadly to oral history research design, collection, and analysis to achieve a more inclusive and multifaceted understanding of Kurdish societies.

B. Digital Humanities and Archiving Initiatives

The rapid advancements in digital technologies offer powerful new possibilities for the documentation, preservation, cataloging, analysis, and dissemination of Kurdish oral histories and related cultural heritage materials.³² Digital humanities approaches can include the creation of online archives of audio and video testimonies, the digitization of manuscripts, photographs, and other historical documents that contextualize oral accounts³⁴, the development of interactive maps and timelines, and the creation of digital exhibits accessible to a global audience. The Ismaili Special Collections Unit's Oral History Project, for example, while not Kurdish-specific, outlines a model for leveraging digital technology to preserve the diverse narratives and intangible cultural heritage of global communities, emphasizing regional, linguistic, ethnic, and gender diversity.³² Conferences and academic discussions are increasingly highlighting digital archiving initiatives and literary revitalization as key areas for Kurdish cultural preservation.³³

However, the adoption of digital tools also brings challenges, including the "digital divide" (unequal access to technology and digital literacy), concerns about data sovereignty and ownership, the ethical complexities of archiving and disseminating sensitive personal information online, and the need for sustainable, long-term digital preservation infrastructure. While digital humanities offer powerful tools, they also risk creating or exacerbating

inequalities in access and representation if not implemented equitably and thoughtfully. The communities whose oral histories are most endangered or under-documented may also be those with the least access to the resources, training, or infrastructure required to participate in or benefit from digital initiatives. A critical gap, therefore, lies in developing ethical, accessible, and community-centered digital oral history practices that empower local communities, ensure data security and culturally appropriate access, and prevent digital archives from becoming another form of extractive knowledge production. This includes addressing questions of intellectual property, community ownership and control of digital assets, and the long-term sustainability and accessibility of digital archives.

C. Language Revitalization Efforts and Oral History

Efforts to revitalize endangered Kurdish languages and dialects, such as Zazaki ²⁸ and Gorani ⁷, are crucial for preserving Kurdish linguistic diversity. Oral history documentation can and should be an integral component of these revitalization strategies. Collecting oral narratives in these languages not only preserves unique linguistic features, vocabulary, and grammatical structures but also safeguards the cultural knowledge, historical memories, and artistic expressions embedded within them. Furthermore, modern Kurdish literature, by drawing inspiration from and incorporating elements of oral tradition, also contributes significantly to language revitalization and the development of contemporary literary forms.¹

D. Collaborative and Community-Based Research Models

Moving away from traditional top-down research paradigms, there is a growing recognition of the value of collaborative and community-based research models. Engaging Kurdish communities not merely as subjects of research but as active partners in the design, collection, interpretation, analysis, and dissemination of oral histories can lead to more ethical, relevant, culturally sensitive, and ultimately more comprehensive outcomes. This approach can help to address historical power imbalances between researchers and communities, ensure that research priorities align with community needs and interests, and facilitate the return of knowledge and resources to the communities involved. The critiques of researcher positionality and the call for greater reflexivity in Kurdish studies implicitly support such collaborative methodologies.²⁵

E. Interdisciplinary Approaches

The complexity of Kurdish oral history, situated at the crossroads of culture, history, politics, and personal experience, demands interdisciplinary approaches. Combining methodologies and theoretical insights from oral history, anthropology, sociology, linguistics (especially sociolinguistics and dialectology), literary studies, political science, memory studies, and trauma studies can provide richer, more holistic, and nuanced understandings. The suggestion that ethnographic and philological methods, for instance, can mutually benefit each other in the Kurdish context underscores the potential of breaking down disciplinary silos.³⁰

The call for "Kurdish Queer Studies" ⁶ and the intensified focus on language revitalization for specific dialects like Zazaki ²⁸ and Gorani ⁷ represent more than just the filling of academic niches. They signify a potential maturation within Kurdish Studies itself, a move towards addressing "internal" diversity, complexities, and marginalizations within the broader Kurdish

identity. This evolution may reflect a growing space for more nuanced self-representation and critical self-reflection within Kurdish intellectual and activist circles, moving beyond a more monolithic portrayal of "Kurdishness" that was perhaps strategically necessary in earlier phases of struggle focused on achieving basic recognition against overwhelming external oppression. This shift can create opportunities for uncovering oral histories that might have been previously suppressed, overlooked, or considered divisive, not only by external state apparatuses but sometimes by internal pressures for unity or conformity to dominant narratives. The implication for future oral history research is profound: there is an opportunity to explore the multifaceted complexities, and even the contradictions, within Kurdish societies, leading to a richer, more authentic, and ultimately more empowering academic record. This also means being prepared to navigate and document potential tensions between different identity claims and historical perspectives within the diverse Kurdish context.

VIII. Conclusion: Addressing the Silences in Kurdish Oral History

The academic record of Kurdish oral history, while containing valuable contributions, is characterized by significant and multifaceted gaps. These lacunae are not random omissions but are deeply intertwined with the historical and ongoing political realities faced by the Kurdish people, as well as with the evolving methodologies and thematic priorities of scholarly research.

A. Recapitulation of the Most Critical Gaps Identified

This report has identified several critical areas where the academic documentation and analysis of Kurdish oral history are deficient:

- **Thematic Gaps:** There is a notable underrepresentation of oral histories pertaining to everyday life and social fabric beyond conflict, nuanced economic histories from grassroots perspectives, the diverse roles and experiences of women beyond narratives of struggle, the lived realities of LGBTQ+ Kurds, the specific traditions and perspectives of religious and ethnic minorities within broader Kurdish society, and a full spectrum of oral traditions and performance arts beyond the extensively studied Dengbêjî.
- **Geographical and Linguistic Imbalances:** Research is unevenly distributed across the historical regions of Kurdistan, with areas like Iranian Kurdistan (Rojhelat) and Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava) appearing less covered in systematic oral history projects compared to Iraqi Kurdistan (Bashur) or diaspora communities. Critically, endangered Kurdish languages and dialects such as Zazaki and Gorani, along with various Southern Kurdish dialects, suffer from a severe lack of oral history documentation, risking the irreversible loss of unique linguistic and cultural heritage.
- **Methodological and Archival Shortcomings:** Persistent challenges related to researcher positionality, ethical conduct in conflict-affected and repressive environments, and the difficulties of building trust remain. While the "archival turn" offers new resources, there is a need for more critical methodologies to triangulate oral testimonies with diverse and often biased archival materials. Furthermore, a legacy of insufficient methodological self-reflection in earlier Kurdish studies complicates the

assessment of older documented accounts.

- **The Overarching Impact of Political Suppression and Statelessness:** The most profound factor contributing to these gaps is the long history of state-sponsored suppression, linguicide, cultural erasure, violence, and displacement, compounded by the consequences of statelessness, which has precluded the development of unified, state-supported institutions for cultural preservation. These political realities have actively created silences and erasures in the historical record.

The following table summarizes some of the key identified gaps:

Table 1: Summary of Key Identified Gaps in Kurdish Oral History Research

Gap Category	Specific Gap Description	Primary Contributing Factors	Key Snippets Indicating Gap	Potential Impact of Addressing Gap
Thematic	Oral histories of everyday economic life, traditional livelihoods, and resource management	Academic oversight; focus on political conflict; lack of targeted funding	²⁰	Fuller understanding of Kurdish socio-economic history and resilience; grassroots perspectives on development and change.
Thematic	Narratives of daily life, social customs, and community interactions beyond conflict	Focus on trauma and "significant events"; journalistic rather than systematic academic collection	⁸	More holistic portrayal of Kurdish society; understanding of cultural continuity and social fabric.
Specific Group	Oral histories of Kurdish LGBTQ+ individuals and communities	Societal norms; historical absence in Middle East Queer Studies; dual marginalization	⁶	Inclusive representation of Kurdish diversity; understanding of intersecting identities and experiences of marginalization.
Specific Group	Diverse roles of women beyond political struggle or victimhood	Patriarchal norms; focus on "exceptional" narratives;	¹⁹	Comprehensive understanding of women's contributions to

	(e.g., economic, cultural)	women's own reluctance to share		Kurdish society and culture; empowerment of women's voices.
Linguistic	Oral traditions in endangered dialects like Zazaki and Gorani	Political suppression; assimilation pressures; lack of institutional support; smaller speaker bases	7	Preservation of endangered linguistic and cultural heritage; documentation of unique worldviews and knowledge systems.
Geographical	Comprehensive oral history projects from Iranian Kurdistan (Rojhelat) and Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava)	Political restrictions; limited academic access; conflict situations	26	More balanced geographical representation of Kurdish experiences; understanding of regional variations in oral tradition.
Methodological	Critical methodologies for triangulating oral histories with diverse/biased archival sources	Nascent stage of "archival turn" application in Kurdish contexts; complexity of sources	20	More robust and nuanced historical analysis; better integration of oral and written evidence.
Methodological/Ethical	Ethical frameworks and trust-building strategies specific to Kurdish conflict/post-conflict contexts	Volatility of research environments; historical trauma; power dynamics	25	Safer, more ethical, and more effective research practices; protection of vulnerable participants.
Structural/Political	Impact of statelessness and lack of unified national archiving institutions	Division of Kurdistan; lack of sovereign state support for cultural preservation	1	Understanding systemic barriers to preservation; highlighting the role of non-state and diaspora actors.

B. Reiteration of the Importance of a More Complete and Nuanced Academic Record

Addressing these silences and deficiencies is not merely an academic exercise. A more

complete, nuanced, and representative academic record of Kurdish oral history is essential for historical accuracy, providing a counterweight to often biased or incomplete official narratives. It is vital for a deeper cultural understanding, both within Kurdish society and for the wider world. Such a record can serve as a powerful tool for community empowerment, validating lived experiences and preserving cultural memory against forces of erasure. Furthermore, it provides invaluable resources for education, for advocacy on issues of cultural rights and historical justice, and, crucially, for future generations of Kurds seeking to connect with their heritage and understand their past.

C. Call for Future Research Priorities and Collaborative Efforts

The task of charting the uncharted territories of Kurdish oral history requires concerted and strategic effort. Future research should prioritize:

- **Endangered Languages and Traditions:** Urgent documentation of oral histories in Zazaki, Gorani, and other vulnerable Kurdish dialects, integrating linguistic preservation with cultural narrative collection.
- **Under-Represented Themes and Groups:** Targeted projects focusing on daily life, economic experiences, the diverse lives of women, LGBTQ+ narratives, and the oral traditions of religious and ethnic minorities within Kurdish society.
- **Community-Led and Collaborative Initiatives:** Supporting and partnering with Kurdish communities in the design, implementation, and ownership of oral history projects, ensuring ethical engagement and local relevance.
- **Development of Context-Specific Methodologies:** Crafting and refining ethical guidelines and research methodologies that are specifically tailored to the unique political, social, and cultural contexts of various Kurdish regions, particularly those affected by conflict and suppression.
- **Critical Archival Engagement:** Fostering research that critically engages with newly accessible archival materials, using oral histories to interrogate, complement, and challenge dominant archival narratives.
- **Interdisciplinary and International Collaboration:** Encouraging collaborations between scholars from diverse disciplines and across international borders to share expertise, resources, and perspectives, thereby enriching the study of Kurdish oral history.

By consciously addressing these gaps and pursuing these priorities, the academic community can contribute significantly to the preservation and understanding of the rich and resilient oral heritage of the Kurdish people, ensuring that their diverse voices and multifaceted histories are more fully and accurately represented in the annals of human experience.

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