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Published online: 05 Sep 2023.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Gan qey bedenî yeno çi mana' (What the Soul Means for the Body): Collecting and Archiving Kurdish Folklore as a Strategy for Language Revitalization and Indigenous Knowledge Production

Joanna Bocheńska (iD) *& Farangis Ghaderi* (iD)

Abstract

Folklore-collecting initiatives in Turkey and Iran have become increasingly popular over the past decade. In this article we present a historical overview of folklore-collecting practices and focus on more recent developments in this field. While Kurdish folklore has been perceived as a cornerstone of Kurdish national identity and as a source of information on Kurdish history, today's collectors in Turkey and Iran understand its role in a wider context of language revitalization and indigenous knowledge production. Collecting oral traditions in the Kurdish dialects of Kurmanji, Sorani, and Zazaki is appreciated as a step towards protecting and developing the Kurdish language, which is endangered by language assimilation policies in both countries. Reviving folkloric vocabulary, stories, and traditional knowledge practices such as agricultural teachings, folklore collectors revive and promote indigenous knowledge production, and enrich education and research. Drawing on language revitalization theories and indigenous knowledge production, this article offers insights into unexplored aspects of collecting, archiving, and publishing Kurdish folklore in recent years.

Introduction

> Imagine your house is on fire; you will try to save as much as you can. That's how I feel about collecting folklore. (Ehmed Behrî, Kurdish folklore collector in Iran)[1]

The first examples of Kurdish proverbs, legends, and fairy tales were recorded a few centuries ago. In the nineteenth century, Kurdish oral tradition became an object of interest to orientalists and European travellers as part of their study of the languages and literatures of 'The Orient'. Later, at the threshold of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, oral tradition inspired the Kurdish national movement in its striving for their

nation-building project. The idea of heritage-building rooted in folk culture was the main driving force behind cultural initiatives throughout the twentieth century. While this is still the leitmotiv of Kurdish folklore collectors, their approach to collecting and understanding folklore has evolved under the impact of modern education and through witnessing the assimilation and marginalization of their indigenous languages, which has led to a strong desire to hamper this process. While acknowledging the nationalist meaning of folklore collecting for Kurds, our article specifically focuses on the collectors' attention to language revitalization and indigenous knowledge production.

We locate our study within wider discussions of the folklore of indigenous people as expressing the political emancipation of marginalized and oppressed groups. Inspired by postcolonial and subaltern studies (Fanon 1963; Said 1979; Spivak 1988), the debate has merged with the struggles of indigenous people to become equal actors in world politics (Wilmer 1993; Smith 2021). We draw especially on approaches to folklore that acknowledge the philosophical dimension of oral traditions (Gyekye 1995, 1997; Vété-Congolo 2016; Henry 2016) and perceive indigenous knowledge as part of ethics (Wilson 2008) and resistance (Vété-Congolo 2016; Smith 2021).

Additionally, we aim to highlight the importance of indigenous languages. Following Justyna Olko (2018), we believe that applying the heritage language in the research process—in this case by conducting the interviews directly in the indigenous languages—enables researchers to get deeper insight into the subject matter and supports the minoritized languages in their struggle to survive and become recognized tools of modern communication, education, and research. It is all the more important because not only are global conditions for knowledge production undemocratic, but global circulation of knowledge is also limited to a few hegemonic languages, which leads to the loss of knowledges (Trahar et al. 2019, 154). As such, we contribute to the ongoing discussion on whether 'the subaltern can speak' (Spivak 1988). We start our analysis by asking in what language do they actually speak?

n her article 'Archived Voices, Acoustic Traces, and the Reverberations of Kurdish History in Modern Turkey', Marlene Schäfers observed that collecting and archiving Kurdish oral tradition intends to prove Kurdish possession of their own history and to discover its topics that are silenced by official narratives. However, in order to fulfil this goal, Kurdish voices 'risk becoming complicit with hegemonic frameworks of knowledge production' (Schäfers 2019, 469). This is because—she argues—in order to become audible as a form of historical critique, the voices of Kurdish performers and collectors have had to conform to the imposed rules of 'intelligibility'. Hence, they have applied terminology originating in historical research, such as the word *belge* (document), to prove the validity of oral tradition for modern historiographical discourses. Contrary to this, she proposes that it is the neglected sonic dimension of Kurdish voices and its affective social context which need to be studied so that the voices of the subaltern are not subjected to the discipline of the dominating knowledges.

Acknowledging the risks of complicity with hegemonic knowledges, the importance of acoustic and affective aspect of voices, as well as the limits of the subjectivist approach to folklore focusing only on the 'authentic' creation of an essentialized social world by indigenous 'others' (Nygren 1998, 33), we suggest that presenting

Kurdish efforts to write down their folklore and create archives as an erasure of sound does not do justice to the process. Rather, it risks deepening the division between the written or printed world—associated with modern knowledges—and the oral or sonic one representing the indigenous 'other'. On the contrary, we propose to see the collectors' work as more complex and open to oral, sonic, and written aspects of folklore. We note that the idea to create historical documents out of the Kurdish oral tradition was expressed by the interlocutors cited by Schäfers through the Turkish language (Schäfers 2019, 458). Penetration of the dominant languages and knowledges, we argue, constitutes part of the assimilation process and more attention should be paid to initiatives undertaken in mother tongues that focus on the revitalization of indigenous languages.

Taking into account the aforementioned and building on the works of previous generations of collectors, as well as earlier orientalists' interest in Kurdish folklore, we argue that the process of collecting 'Kurdish voices' by the young generation of folklore collectors is directed at challenging the hegemonic frameworks of knowledge production and at offering fresh approaches to what 'knowledge' means. Inspired by Shawn Wilson (2008), we propose that the gathering of folklore by Kurdish collectors is a ceremony designed to rediscover the indigenous tradition as a source of knowledge expressed in their native language. In the context of linguicide and cultural suppression (Skutnabb-Kangas and Bucak 1994; Hassanpour 2020), the Kurdish collectors' prime aim has been to remedy language and knowledge loss and to widen Western-oriented and state-established frameworks of education by reviving indigenous languages, knowledge, and experiences. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's description of ceremony as celebrating survival is also relevant to our research. For her, the term survival 'accentuates the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity in resisting colonialism' (Smith 2021, 166). We found such celebration especially important among the Kurdish collectors and language activists, as it is mainly thanks to their enthusiasm, dedication, and determination to save their native tongues that we are witnessing language revitalization in the region. As Gregory Cajete writes: 'celebration is a way of spreading the lights around' (Cajete 1994, 73). Furthermore, Wilson draws our attention to relationality understood as 'the shared aspect of an indigenous ontology and epistemology' and to relationships as not simply shaping reality but being reality (Wilson 2008, 7). Following this lead, we claim that adopting indigenous languages in the research process helps to establish new relationships, which are crucial in the process of decolonizing knowledge production and education.

We demonstrate that collecting folklore is capable of playfully challenging the hegemonic frameworks of knowledge production, demystifying their gravity and importance, and inviting them into another form of relationship. Building up archives of oral tradition can bring hope that the language, stories expressed in it, and the people who have passed them from generation to generation will be saved from oblivion. Finally, the archives are created not for personal use, but rather with the purpose of serving other people and future generations. As such, the appreciation of the archives should be seen as an affective and relational engagement which cannot be reduced to capitulating to Western knowledges or to reigning ideologies.

Our research is based on twenty-nine interviews with collectors and Kurdish language activists in Turkey and Iran. Seventeen of our interviews were conducted in Kurmanji, five in Zazaki, and seven in Sorani—all of which are dialects of the Kurdish language. We focused on these two countries because, contrary to Iraq and Syria where the state of the Kurdish language has changed in recent decades,[2] Turkey and Iran still do not recognize Kurdish as an official or even a minority language. This situation has made Kurdish activists feel responsible for protecting their language and culture, which has resulted in their launching many cultural initiatives to counteract state rejection and assimilation. While we note emerging folklore collecting and archiving initiatives in the Gorani/Hawrami dialect in Iran, since a significant portion of these archives remain unpublished and inaccessible,[3] we have not included them in this article. However, we hope they could be explored in future research.

The enthusiasm of young folklore collectors from Bakur,[4] students and emerging writers among them, inspired us to conduct this study between 2020 and 2022. The folklore collectors are passionate about their local sources and feel the need both to protect them and to reuse the oral content in modern literary or cinematographic ways. Soon, we realized that recording and writing down oral tradition is an affective process which entails more than national heritage-making and exceeds the necessity of possessing an archive (Schäfers 2019). The pandemic forced us to start our interviews online, using the network of existing contacts, which gradually expanded. Despite its challenges, we soon discovered that online communication offered new possibilities to the respondents and to our research. We prepared a set of questions in Kurmanji, Zazaki, and Sorani and sent them to the collectors, inviting them to choose whether they wanted to write their answers or to meet with us using online communication tools. The collectors were told they were able to add new topics to the questionnaire and we requested detailed information where possible. The majority of participants decided to write down their answers, which allowed them to work on them in their free time as well as to control, rethink, modify, and develop their responses. What followed was that they provided us with meaningful texts inviting new forms of relationship and understanding compared with those envisioned in our questionnaire scheme. We were often immersed in stories, songs, idioms woven into the text, and even cartoon films inspired by Kurdish folklore that were shared with us via a link in order to illustrate a point or consider their metaphoric sense. On other occasions our questions were 'corrected' and 'improved'. The interlocutors seemed to avoid giving us clear-cut answers to the topics we were investigating. Rather, they engaged in building a relationship which would allow us to come up with the answers ourselves. In the case of interlocutors from Iran, the written answers were combined with online sessions organized by Farangis Ghaderi. The easing of restrictions in 2021 allowed Joanna Bocheńska to go to Turkey, meet the activists, and discuss topics that had arisen from previous interviews.

Taking into account the importance of indigenous languages and the fact that our interlocutors often preferred metaphors to straightforward explanation, we decided to name our article following a Zazaki quotation from one of the interviews. In doing so, we wish to celebrate the survival of one of the most minoritized Kurdish dialects

and elevate the role of metaphor and figurative language in the process of knowledge production.

After presenting a historical overview of documenting and publishing Kurdish folklorists' and activists' motivations, we examine two specific aspects of folklore collecting that engage in language revitalization and indigenous knowledge production, which we found were the most significant goals of collectors in Turkey and Iran. Brief biographical information about the activists is provided in the endnotes. Parts of our interviews were published in the online journal *Fritillaria Kurdica: Bulletin of Kurdish Studies* (2022).[5]

Historical Background of Kurdish Folklore Collecting

In the archive of Polish-born Russian diplomat and orientalist August Kościesza-Żaba, we find two documents numbered '41' and '42' that contain fifty-eight Kurdish fairy tales allegedly from the seventeenth century. They were collected and written down by Mela Mûsayê Hekarî under the title *Duru'l Mecalis* (Pearls of meetings) (Pertev 2018, 135). However, even the classical Kurdish literary tradition and poets such as Feqiyê Teyran (1590–1660), Ehmedê Xanî (1652–1707), and Elmas Xan Kendûleyî (1702–76) provide examples of documenting folkloric tradition through applying some of its motifs and content, and by breaking with Arabic scansion (*'arūz*) in favour of syllabic metre.

In the nineteenth century, Kurdish folklore drew the attention of European orientalists and travellers, mainly from Germany and Russia. This was due to the German orientalist tradition, which also impacted Russian academics who treated language as a defining factor for race, culture, and history (Leezenberg 2015). The earliest recorded fairy tales in Zazaki can be found in Peter Lerch's *Forschungen über die Kurden und die Iranischen Nordchaldäer* (Study on the Kurds and the Iranian North Chaldeans, 1857). One of the best-known works, *Receueil des notices et récits de la littérature et des tribus du Kourdistan* (Collection of notices and stories from the literature and tribes of Kurdistan, 1860), offering insight into Kurmanji oral and literary tradition, was the result of cooperation between August Kościesza-Żaba and Mela Mehmûdê Bayazidî, a Kurdish scholar. Importantly, as stressed by Michiel Leezenberg, Bayazidî did not use the notion of folktale as distinct from ordinary tale (Leezenberg 2020). Another important figure who collected Kurdish folklore was an Armenian intellectual, Khachatur Abovian (1809–48). Other works on folklore in the nineteenth century include the collection of tales and songs (1887 and 1890) by Eugen Prym (1843–1913) and Albert Socin (1844–79) and the publication of some folklore texts with German translation by the Viennese Hugo Makas (b. 1857) in 1892 (Kurdo 1976, cited in Ebûbekir 2005, 14). Of the works on Sorani folklore, the best known and most celebrated is Oskar Mann's *Die Mundart der Mukri-Kurden* (The dialect of the Mukri Kurds) (1906), reprinted in Kurdish Sorani script as *Tohfey-e Mozafariya* (The gift of Mozafariya) by renowned Kurdish poet Hêmin Mukriyanî (1921–86) in 1975, a publication which has been widely circulated in Iranian Kurdistan and has inspired generations of collectors (see Figure 1).[6]

At the threshold of the twentieth century, collecting folklore drew the attention of Kurdish nationalists who, inspired by their Armenian and Turkish neighbours, started to perceive oral tradition as one of the main pillars of nation-building and its recording as a means of expanding written sources in the Kurdish language (Klein 2000, 13). This is evident in early Kurdish periodicals such as *Kurdistan* (1898–1902), *Rojî Kurd* (Kurdish day, 1913), and *Jîn* (Life, 1918–19), which touched upon Kurdish language, folklore, and culture (Pertev 2018, 137; Keskin 2018, 25–26). The first collection devoted exclusively to Kurdish oral tradition, *Folklora Kurmanca* (Kurmanji
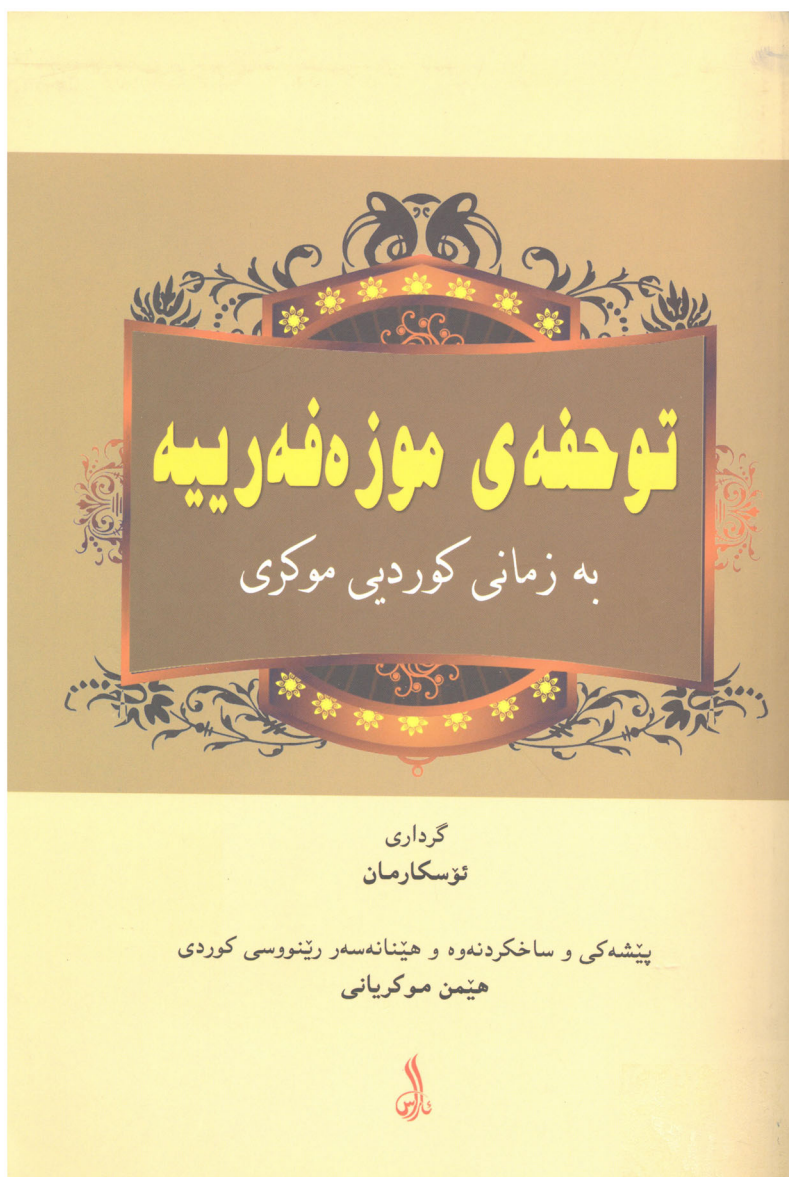

Figure 1. Kurdish Sorani edition of Oskar Mann's *Die Mundart der Mukri-Kurden* (new 2023 edition).

folklore), was created by Heciyê Cindî and Emînê Evdal and published in the mid-1930s in Erivan. It was the first time the word 'folklore' was applied by the Kurds as a calque with regard to their culture (Keskin 2018, 100). It is important to note that the Soviet tradition of Kurdology in the 1920s and 1930s put great stress on oral traditions, which led to the 'folklorization' of Kurdish national identities (Leezenberg 2011). Documenting and printing oral traditions became an integral part of Kurdish publications, including Kurdish journals under the French Mandate in mid-century, such as *Hawar* (Call, 1932–43), *Ronahî* (Light, 1942–45), and *Roja Nû* (New day, 1943–46), edited by Celadet and Kamiran Bedirxan in Damascus and Beirut. Although Kurmanji periodicals faced a Kurdish language ban in Turkey following the establishment of the Turkish Republic, this mission was continued in Sorani periodicals in Iraq. The most elaborate initiative was led by Pîremêrd (1867–1950), who published Kurdish proverbs in rhyme in *Jiyan* (Life, 1926–38) and *Jîn* (1939–50). His works on proverbs were later published as books, making up one of the most comprehensive collections of Sorani oral literature.[7] Another significant contribution was Elaeddîn Secadî's impressive eight-volume collection of oral tradition entitled *Riştey Mirwarî* (String of pearls, 1957–83) (Secadî 2011).

In the journal *Hawar*, Celadet Alî Bedirxan defined the term folklore as *zanîn an zanistiya xelkê* (knowledge of the people) (Keskin 2018, 106), which suggests that from the very beginning the oral tradition was treated by the Kurds not just as a source of national spirit but also of knowledge. This was the driving force of a significant part of documentation efforts in the twentieth century in Iran, such as Mohemed Mokrî's *Gorani Ya Taranehaye Kurdi* (Kurdish songs, 1951), 'Ebdula Eyûbîyan's articles in *Majale-ye Daneshkade-ye Adabiyat-e Daneshgah-e Tabriz* (Journal of the University of Tabriz's Department of Literature, 1961–64), and Qadir Fetah Qazî's collections including *Sheikh San'an* (Shaikh San'an, 1967), and *Sheikh Farokh o Khatu Asti* (Shaikh Farokh and Lady Asti, 1973). In the case of the Zazaki dialect, the first journal that published Zazaki fairy tales, songs, and proverbs was the bilingual *Tîrêj* (Sunbeam), which stressed the significance of documenting folklore from its very first issue in 1978 (Varol 2015, 142).

Komelley Kelepûrî Kurd (The Kurdish Cultural Society) in Silêmanî, Iraqi Kurdistan, published a journal with a focus on folklore entitled *Kelepurî Kurd* (Kurdish culture) from 1996 to 1998 in Sorani. More recent journals and magazines exclusively devoted to folklore are *Asoy Folklore* (Horizon of folklore, 2000–11), published in Sorani in Iraqi Kurdistan, *Folklora Kurdan* (Folklore of the Kurds, 2015–16), and *Folklora Me* (Our folklore, 2019–present), with a focus on both Kurmanji and Zazaki oral tradition. In 2020, the scholarly multidialectal journal *Folklor û Ziman* (Folklore and language) was established with the aim of promoting academic discussion of folklore and language issues. Thus, during the twentieth century, folklore started to be perceived as crucial in both national heritage-making and in knowledge production. This process was fuelled not only by national but also by communist ideology, which in many contexts was not free from nationalism (Bocheńska and Fatah-Black 2021). Importantly, the archiving of Kurdish voices became part of Kurdish radio programmes, such as Radio Yereven's broadcasts organized in 1955 by Casimê Celîl (Yüksel 2014) and on Radio Baghdad (1939–2003) (Bullock 2022). Furthermore, many private archives have been

established in different countries. One of the most impressive archives is Casimê Celîl's library in Eichgraben near Vienna, opened in 2008 by Celîlê Celîl and his wife Birgit Cerha to house an astounding collection of publications and records by the Celîl family (Casim, Ordîxan, Celîl, Camîla, and Zînê Celil). In recent years Celîl edited and published the multi-volume book collection *Zargotina Kurda* (Kurdish oral literature, first volume published in 2014), which is the fruit of the family's century-long efforts to study Kurdish folklore and music.

The Kurdish oral tradition was also perceived as an important historical source to be compared with written sources by early Kurdish chroniclers, especially Mastura Ardalan[8] (Vasilyeva 1990). For Pîremêrd and many Kurdish intellectuals and nationalists, folklore provided inspiration for recreating the Kurdish past (Ghaderi 2016, 2022). This attention to Kurdish tradition was intensified at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, since when Kurdish folk narratives, traditional performers, and oral history have become the focus of scholarly attention. By offering access to marginalized voices and their versions of various events, folktales are seen as resistance to official historical narratives (Yüksel 2011, 2019; Çelik and Dinç 2015; Çelik and Öpengin 2016; Hamelink 2016; Schäfers 2019). However, as we illustrate in the following sections, historical knowledge is not the only aspect of knowledge production which deserves attention in collecting oral tradition. In the context of language loss, promoting an idea of a popular archive is important from the point of view of language revitalization (Austin 2021).

Survival: Preventing the Loss of Language and Indigenous Knowledge

For Bêrîvan Matyar[9] who collects Kurdish songs and many of her young friends who reach out to performers in the Kurdish villages in Bakur, recording songs or stories and publishing them in journals such as *Folklora Me* or in book format is exciting and meaningful (see Figure 2). Furthermore, all collectors we interviewed shared a desperate sense of urgency, as Behrî's quote at the outset of this article demonstrates. Collectors often voiced their concerns that Kurdish language and oral tradition are in imminent danger of disappearing and may be entirely lost in the next twenty to fifty years. Their anxiety is justified, considering the ongoing process of assimilation of the Kurdish people in Turkey and in Iran. Turkey, in particular, was notorious for its ban on the Kurdish language lasting until 1991; its policy has been described as linguicide (Skutnabb-Kangas and Bucak 1994) and ethnocide (Koivunen 2002). Even though the plan for introducing Kurdish as an additional subject in public primary schools was launched in 2012, it was hampered by bureaucratic obstacles from the outset. In 2015 it was almost abandoned following the change in Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's policy towards the Kurdish peace process and the reignition of war in Kurdish provinces. In Iran, Kurdish can be taught only in private schools and institutes. Harassment and episodic arrests of Kurdish language teachers, however, reveal the fragility of this provision and the security gaze of the state on teaching Kurdish, as the case of Zara Mohammadi demonstrates. Zara, a Kurdish language teacher and activist, was sentenced to ten years in prison for teaching Kurdish, later reduced to five years.

Figure 2. Bêrîvan Matyar, collector of Kurdish folklore, Diyarbakir, Northern Kurdistan (in Turkey).
Photograph by Joanna Bocheńska (2021).

She was unexpectedly released from prison in February 2023 when the Iranian regime decided to loosen its cruel grip on people, imposed as a measure to crush protests after the killing of Jîna Aminî by the morality police (September 2022). Mohammadi's case proved that the provision of private courses depends on the whim of the state rather than on any regulations.

Two of the Kurdish language varieties, Hawrami/Gorani and Zazaki, respectively, were classified as 'endangered' and 'vulnerable' in the 2009 UNESCO report on languages in danger (Moseley 2010, 40–46). The Kurmanji dialect was mentioned in the report, but at the time of publication its state was regarded as stable. However, at present in Turkey, Kurmanji must be described as in a highly disadvantaged position. Folklore collectors perceive it widely as 'in danger'. That said, less common Kurdish dialects such as Zazaki, which is spoken only in Turkey, are undoubtedly at greater risk. Zazaki speakers often identify both Turkish and Kurmanji Kurdish as dominating languages, leaving little space for Zazaki to flourish. According to Surya Human,[10] one of the Zazaki folklore collectors:

> In Bakur it looks as if people become Kurd only when they speak Kurmanji. The number of Zazaki speakers decreases day by day. It has hurt me since my childhood. That's why I focused on Zazaki, that's why Zazaki (Kirmancki[11]) draws my attention.[12]

Interestingly, the 2009 UNESCO report gave birth to many new initiatives among Zaza activists and publishing collections of Zazaki folklore intensified after 2009. Indeed, some of the collectors we interviewed directly identified the report as the impetus behind their endeavour to collect and document Zazaki oral tradition.[13]

It is worth noting that in Iran several collectors highlighted the loss of a noticeable number of old performers to COVID-19 over the last two years. Also, they

spoke about anxiety regarding the overwhelming influence of Hollywood and Western media. Loqman Nadirpûr, a teacher and collector of Kurdish folklore, noted his unease with seeing his children immersed in Hollywood animations, yet totally oblivious to their own heritage and stories. That prompted him to act and collect folktales of his hometown, Saqez, for his children and future generations. He said:

> I think about my grandchildren, my father told me those stories, what have I left for my children? An American imposes their ideas via the internet, films, and animations. What shall we do? Don't we have anything of interest? We have all those stories; for instance, Cinderella, we have that story in Kurdish, not with that name but it is very close. Or Snow White, we have that in Kurdish. We have more interesting stories in Kurdish that if they are made into movies or animations, they would be much more fascinating than the likes of Harry Potter. The surreal nature of our stories is striking.[14]

The establishment of modern schools, urbanization, and the arrival of radio and television were noted by several collectors as sounding the death-knell of folklore. Migration from village to city was another significant cause of loss. The link between folklore and village was drawn by many collectors we interviewed. Several of them mentioned their upbringing in villages, or childhood experiences, as an impetus for their interest and engagement in collecting folklore. For Bahoz Baran,[15] folklore and village are 'blood brothers'. He emphasized that when he went to the city to take up his studies, he realized it was 'a bare and empty space'.[16] According to many collectors, receiving state education alienates people from their roots. These roots were not described merely as 'Kurdish', but as linked to village life and many traditional agricultural practices (Ûskan 2018). Nadirpûr and Lotfinîya[17] have even made illiteracy one of the criteria for performers they record. They emphasize they will only record performances that had been learned orally, *sîne be sîne* (from chest to chest), as they put it, and not from written texts and will not record performers who have acquired literacy skills.

Consciousness of the loss of indigenous knowledge alongside the loss of oral tradition is acute among our collectors. For Matyar, collecting folklore means filling in the lack of knowledge and experience which in modern times have been associated with books and science. Yet in the case of Kurdish people it used to be passed down orally and not in written form. As such, her wish to fill in the gap is no longer focused on 'having more written sources', but rather on transmitting indigenous knowledge from oral to written form.

The majority of collectors stressed the role of their intimate contact with their grandparents or parents who used to tell stories or sing. Gulê Şadkam from Khorasan (Iran) emphasized that she loved the stories told to her by her grandmother and when she grew up she always desired to hear them once again and record them.[18] Collectors' willingness to collect stories was stimulated by a sense of responsibility to deliver the endangered language and knowledge from one generation to another. Becoming a bridge between the generations' different abilities and needs (oral versus written form of communication) can be described as fulfilling the 'obligations in the research relationship' (Wilson 2008, 77).

Collecting Kurdish folklore, however, is no longer perceived as a task only for Kurdish people. It is obvious that the collectors see it as an important part of the world's cultural heritage. According to Sadiq Ûskan:

> Folklore and culture of the Kurds are the conscience of the world. Maybe you will laugh at me, but when you dig in the folklore, you forget your own suffering. Kurdish folklore can soften the human soul so that it becomes closer to oneself and one's own being. Generally, someone who gets familiar with the Kurds and their folklore becomes more of a human.[19]

Accordingly, protecting the oral tradition should not only be a task for the Kurds:

> Kurdish folklore does not only belong to the Kurds. It belongs to the world, so the world should treat Kurdish language and Kurdish folklore as its own and feel responsible for it. My macroscale suggestion is this: The United Nations and UNESCO should recognise Kurdish folklore as a world heritage and strive to protect it.

This statement is undeniably a call to the outside world to assist the Kurds in their efforts, yet it also reveals that Kurdish collectors no longer perceive themselves only as the architects of Kurdish nationalism resisting state regimes, but rather as actors preserving universal human values. Collectors in Iran emphasized that their works are in line with international guidelines, as they have adopted the UNESCO Guideline for Collecting Oral Tradition, translated into Persian in 1982. Some of them also codify their collections according to the internationally recognized Aarne–Thompson–Uther (ATU) Index. As the classification system is intended to bring out similarities between tales by grouping variants of the same tale under the same ATU category, these collectors place Kurdish folktales on the world map and make their collections contribute to the world's folk heritage. What is more, they often refer to Ulrich Marzolph's *Classification of Persian Tales*, translated into Persian in 1992, as a guide and inspiration for their publications. However, they lament the absence of Kurds in such a foundational work.[20]

Revitalizing Kurdish Language through Documenting Folklore

Linguists working on minority languages stress that there is no common recipe for language revitalization. Every community and every location faces its own particular challenges and needs to address them in unique ways, even though marginalization and loss of minority languages is a global issue (Hinton, Huss, and Roche 2018; Olko and Sallabank 2021). Unlike other minority languages, Kurdish is still widely spoken in the Middle East, despite the drastic impact of assimilation in the twentieth century. Collecting folklore is related to language documentation, which is believed to be an important part of language revitalization. As stressed by Austin:

> The outputs from language documentation are intended to be a multipurpose record that could give an idea of how a language is actually employed in a range of contexts and situations by a range of speakers (e.g., male, female, old, young). These records could then be used by both current and future speakers and learners as resources to support the minority language, e.g., in mother-tongue education, or to increase its social status, and for learning or re-learning the language, and thereby revitalise it. (Austin 2021, 200)

Collecting Kurdish folklore addresses all these needs, especially since the range of collected materials has grown significantly, encompassing not only the well-known *dastans* (tales), songs, or fairy tales, but also different formulaic expressions such as idioms, proverbs, prayers, and even swearing. However, linguists agree that to save a

language, it must be spoken and applied for modern purposes. In this section we demonstrate that folklore collecting serves as 'documentation for revitalisation' (Austin 2021, 208), which includes the standardization of the language and modern knowledge and culture production. Importantly, as will be demonstrated in the following, oral tradition has proved conducive to teaching Kurdish in private schools.

Between Language Standardization and Protection of Regional Language Varieties

Indeed, from the beginning of the twentieth century, attention to oral tradition by Kurdish intellectuals was closely linked to the question of the Kurdish language. Oral tradition was perceived as one of the main sources of Kurdish vocabulary in different dialects and able to provide some etymology for the collected words. Kurdish language and the process of collecting oral tradition have been united in the widely repeated call for 'collecting and archiving of the rich Kurdish vocabulary' and 'standardising the Kurdish language' so that it can serve modern purposes (Klein 2000, 11–13). Our research demonstrates, however, that these two aims are not necessarily mutually supportive and may even collide with each other. Furthermore, a comparison between the beginning of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century illustrates that the Kurdish language is in a much more disadvantaged position now. Hence, preventing its loss has become a more acute question.

The first Kurdish discussions about standardizing the language did not pay much attention to the diversity of Kurdish languages, but rather promoted the vision of a single modern Kurdish language. Although intellectuals such as Abdullah Jalal Fatah praised the uniquely democratic aspects of Kurdish folklore, they happened to be highly undemocratic when it came to the modern Kurdish language. Fatah believed it was the Sorani Kurdish dialect of Suleymani (Iraq) that would best serve the purpose of a modern Kurdish language, because of being the medium of many poets and intellectuals. He had no doubt that it would be accepted by all Kurds (Bocheńska and Fatah-Black 2021). However, we observe a significant shift in attitudes towards the linguistic diversity of Kurds among Kurdish intellectuals over the last decades. Furthermore, literary standards have evolved separately for Kurmanji, Sorani, and Zazaki, making the idea of 'Kurdish languages' rather than 'dialects' more appealing to many, especially young Kurds. Surya Human stressed that she dislikes the domination of any Kurdish dialect and that, contrary to the domination of Kurmanji, 'when she speaks Zazaki (Kirmancki) she feels more Kurdish'. She also expressed her desire to teach Zazaki in Iraqi Kurdistan to make it understandable in other Kurdish regions. Similarly, collectors in Iran emphasized preserving regional language varieties. The Mukriyani sub-dialect of Sorani has been the dominant Sorani dialect in Iran, and although collecting initiatives in the Mukriyan region are still higher than other regions, initiatives in Sine (Sanandaj), the Laylakh area, Saqez, and Tilako, and efforts to preserve and promote their linguistic diversity are promising.

Furthermore, the collectors of Kurdish folklore in Turkey have widely complained that the imposition of existing language standards by Kurdish publishing houses

undermines their efforts, which they find unacceptable. The oral tradition, they emphasize, should be published in a way that protects its regional specificity. While the collectors were careful to save the local and even personal specifics of the transcribed oral records prepared to be printed as books, the editors appointed by the publishing houses were often requesting the amendment of spelling in order to adjust to the standard of Kurdish they had in mind. These 'misunderstandings' were the reason behind establishing the Wardoz Publishing House, headed by Baran, the prime purpose of which is to take care of folklore, its rich vocabulary, and its regional and phonetic specificities. This view is also shared by the Mezopotamya Foundation and its publishing house which often publishes folklore. However, the foundation is focused on two general tasks: a better thought-out standardization of the Kurdish language and studying Kurdish folklore. According to its general coordinator, Mikail Bülbül, folklore is pertinent when it comes to standardizing the Kurdish language because it can provide information about the different spelling of words. The Foundation's language committee members, who are responsible for language standardization, are expected to make decisions based on negotiation and reaching a consensus, not their own subjective convictions. For example, the committee is expected to establish the most popular form. Furthermore, folklore is considered instrumental in coining new terminology, as it demonstrates language creativity and resourcefulness, and consequently in stipulating the creation of new terms rather than borrowing or translating them. For the Foundation, the issues of language and folklore are tightly intertwined, which is demonstrated in both the collaboration of the folklore and language committees and the scientific journal *Folklore û Ziman* (Folklore and language).[21] It is significant to add that the Foundation was established in 2013 with the prime purpose of creating a multilingual university, which would provide education not only in Kurdish but also in other minority languages of Kurdistan. Although after 2015 this task had to be postponed due to changes in the political situation in Turkey, the Foundation's members believe that working on the standardization of Kurdish, modern terminology, and teaching materials constitutes the basis for the future university and successful knowledge production. Significantly, the Foundation has organized training courses for collecting folklore, which were offered for the first time in 2017 and later in 2020, attracting a growing number of people including many of our interviewees.[22]

From Studying and Teaching Kurdish Language to Collecting Folklore

The group responsible for establishing the journals *Folklora Kurdan* and *Folklora Me* primarily recruited Kurdish language teachers. According to them, teaching Kurdish to the Kurds in Turkey was quite a challenging task and the process often resulted in many pupils dropping their classes. Interestingly, oral tradition proved helpful in attracting the students' attention. It diversified the lessons by offering amusing stories and anecdotes. They were initially shared spontaneously by teachers and students encouraging other students to speak Kurdish. What followed was that they felt invited to tell more of their own experience and life stories when talking about the traditional performers—often

members of their own families.[23] Later teachers encouraged students to collect folklore and to publish the most interesting samples in the aforementioned journals; consequently, many examples of oral tradition entered Kurdish textbooks and dictionaries. To compare, in Iran almost all collectors are teachers of the Persian language themselves, and some have involved their students in the process of collecting folklore. Ibrahîm Ehmedî, author of several volumes of folklore and mythology, explained his motivation for his Kurdish–Persian dictionaries, *Ferhengî Kênaye* (Dictionary of idioms) (2007) and *Mîna, Ferhengî Lêkçiwandin Teşbîh* (Mina, Dictionary of similes) (2009), as 'sensing the absence' of such works in Kurdish, in comparison to 'many dictionaries' on this subject in Persian. In both volumes, Ehmedî drew on folklore and proverbs.[24]

Personalizing Kurdish Speech

According to Margaret Kovach, 'stories originating from oral traditions resonate and engender personal meaning' (Kovach 2009, 94). This experience was visible among the collectors who were obviously applying oral tradition to find their way to speak Kurdish. Matyar compared the modern language to the food industry, which is modified with the help of technology:

> Far from its roots, fabricated and without any taste, it is an artificial, plastic language, the spirit of which has died.

Her view was shared by Evîndar Şevîn (see Figure 3). When she first learned standard Kurdish, which was different from the version of Kurdish she used at home, she had a feeling it was a very mechanical language.[25] Collecting folklore helped them to naturally suffuse their speech with synonyms, and thus helped them express themselves in a richer way. These points of view illustrate that in case of the Kurds, turning to folklore to revitalize the language exceeds the tasks of language documentation. It helps to activate the vocabulary, stimulate the will to converse in the language, and assist in personalizing the speech.

Towards a Living Archive and the Sonic Dimension of the Kurdish Language

What links oral tradition with language revitalization is the production and dissemination of archives. Recording oral tradition and publishing it in book or digital format have received much support during recent decades. Although many collectors complain about the lack of publicly funded institutions designed to collect and archive Kurdish oral traditions, at the same time they often highlight the value of journals, books, and digital platforms, the role of which goes beyond the idle storing of oral recordings. It helps popularize interest in folklore and the Kurdish language because the content is often introduced not just in written form but also through pictures. The photographs in *Folklora Me* assist especially in describing many agricultural practices, but also in presenting a dictionary of different species of plants and animals. This way, the journal becomes more intelligible even for those who are not proficient in the Kurdish language, thus facilitating the learning process. The digital exposition prepared by Zeynep Yaş[26] and other staff members of the

Figure 3. Evîndar Şevîn, collector of Kurdish folklore, Diyarbakir, Northern Kurdistan (in Turkey).
Photograph by Joanna Bocheńska (2021).

Municipal Museum of Diyarbakir (the Cemil Paşa Mansion) introduces the various traditional performers whom the visitor may directly listen to when visiting the mansion (see Figure 4). Even if the voices are detached from their intimate context of home, they help make the monumental empty space of the museum homely and thus build a new intriguing relationship among the Cemil Paşa Mansion, performers, and visitors.

Finally, even though most of the collections are published in written form, the sonic dimension of performance is not simply diluted and absorbed by the text (Schäfers 2019), but keeps inspiring the collectors, such as Baran who drew our attention to the many onomatopoeias in the Kurdish language:

> It has been four or five years since the sounds attracted my attention. Why do we have so many sounds in our language? These are the voices of animals, nature, humans, and things. Thousands of sounds and voices. For example, when you call the chickens it is: *tû tû tû*, but when you call the chicks of the chickens it is: *cû cû cû*. Chasing away the chickens is *kiş kiş kiş* and when the hen lays eggs we say *qireqir*. There are whole systems of sounds, for example *pix, pixîn, pixînî, pixpix* and *pixepix*, which are applied to express the low register of human laughter. But when it becomes louder we say *hîrehîr* or *tîqetîq*. We have expressions to describe the voices and sounds of all animals and humans. There are dozens of sounds to describe water: when it falls on stones it is *xuşxexuş*, if it falls from above it is *şireşir*, when it boils it is *bilebil*, when it drops it is *çipeçip*, and when a man is entering water it is *çelpeçelp*. I have collected hundreds of sounds and voices.

The onomatopoeic dimension of the Kurdish language is reused in the folklore-inspired prose by Mehmet Dicle, the well-known Kurdish Kurmanji writer from Turkey, whose short stories invite being read aloud as audiobooks (Bocheńska 2022).

Finally, revitalizing Kurdish is not an end in itself. Rather, by knowing Kurdish one can enter new fascinating relations with the world.

Figure 4. Zeynep Yaş, collector of Kurdish folklore and music, the Cemil Paşa Mansion, Diyarbakir, Northern Kurdistan (in Turkey). Photograph by Joanna Bocheńska (2021).

'Had Martin Heidegger not gone to Todtnauberg': Oral Tradition as a Source of Kurdish Indigenous Knowledge

The study of folklore is not limited to history, representation of traditional customs, or even its unique lexica. According to Margaret Kovach, oral stories are indigenous methodology because 'they are active agents within a relational world, pivotal in gaining insight into a phenomenon' (Kovach 2009, 94). Interestingly, quite often the Kurdish collectors and writers related folklore to modern philosophy, psychology,[27] or an episteme which enables people to consider not just the meaning of their surrounding world but also what 'knowing something' means.

Celebrating New Relations: Figurative Language as a Source of Knowledge and Ethical Consideration

Ûskan, who treats collecting folklore as inspiration for his literary works and cartoon film scenarios, described the reasons behind his decision to engage in collecting in the following way:

> Had Martin Heidegger not gone to Todtnauberg,[28] I would have never been interested in folklore that much. I was a third-year philosophy student. I decided to return to my mother and father and to conduct research with them. I started recording their stories and experiences.

His answer and the way he addressed our question contains intriguing information. He did not simply tell us about being inspired by Heidegger. Rather, he invited us to discover the sense of a metaphor and thus to learn about Heidegger's life which he

believed to be crucial also in his own. Philosophy was thus presented by him not as a part of a 'hegemonic knowledge production', but rather as an intimate and life-connecting experience which is open to making affinities regardless of the different geographical and cultural contexts. What is more, Ûskan's affinity with Heidegger's experience points to a mystical connection[29] between the two, which in a warm and provocative way plays off the gravity and power of European knowledges by inviting them into a relation of a different kind. Following Wilson, we interpret it as 'research ceremony', because 'bringing things together so that they share the same space is what ceremony is about' (Wilson 2008, 87). Hence, the research ceremony aims at establishing and celebrating new relations. Furthermore, knowledge understood this way is not just interpersonal, but rather is shared with all of creation: the cosmos, the animals, the plants, and the earth (Wilson 2008, 74). Folklore is therefore perceived as a medium in a network of relationships that can enable a better understanding of oneself and the surrounding world, as well as of various ideas. As emphasized by Ersoz:

> I would say what the soul means for the body, oral tradition means for us. That's to say it's the beauty of the rhythm of nature … It's identity. It's to be yourself, knowing yourself and meeting yourself … Briefly it means being at peace with yourself.[30]

And Ûskan:

> Thanks to the Kurdish folklore I realised that in Spring the drops of rain are huge and that the small birds like parrots and sparrows don't walk but jump up. Nature is a witness of a human who should feel shame in the presence of trees. After I had studied the Kurdish folklore and the Kurdish links to nature, I better understood Spinoza[31] and his Pantheism. Because the Kurds resemble avatars. According to the Kurdish belief, the one who hurts nature, will become blind. Following this ontology and thanks to folklore my personality became closer to myself. My 'I' became myself. The source of the Kurdish epistemology is Kurdish folklore.

These reflections suggest that voices scooped by the collectors are not necessarily reduced to representation of agency (Schäfers 2019). The image of the soul offering life to the body evoked by Ersoz points to the body's agency as well as its psychological (and spiritual) well-being. The remarks shared by Ûskan restore the multidimensional immersion into the world, where both the body with its senses and the mind are engaged. What is more, it is thanks to studying Kurdish folklore that the output of Spinoza is understood by Ûskan. Hence, it is local knowledge that conditions his understanding of European philosophy and not the opposite, which challenges the alleged 'hegemony' of the latter.

Folkloric narratives attract attention to metaphor, which is no longer viewed only as a literary figure, but rather as a scientific method. It is because it opens up into various interpretations that should be taken up by the readers (Wilson 2008, 112) and challenges the clear-cut form of a sentence designed to present rational arguments and evidence in Western-centric academic writing (Trahar et al. 2019, 151). What is more, according to Wilson, the use of metaphor and symbolism offers 'concrete' and 'not very concrete' examples which allow 'the audience an easier way to form a relationship with something that may be abstract' and thus they serve to refine the ceremony (Wilson 2008, 124). This view corresponds to Martha Nussbaum's focus on

literary aesthetics treated as a source of philosophical and ethical knowledge. According to her, it allows us to express the world's surprising variety, complexity, and mysteriousness, which cannot be adequately emphasized in a flat philosophical style lacking in wonder, but needs a more allusive language that is attentive to particulars (Nussbaum 1990, 3).

For Nadirpûr, folk stories are like 'Kurdish DNA', specifying the meaning of some important values such as the desire for freedom. Dicle believes it was thanks to the aesthetic of idioms, folktales, and proverbs that the ethical messages of previous generations could reach his ear, having a strong impact on him.[32] Ûskan suggested that Kurdish experience as farmers and shepherds conceals a 'special type of ethical and humanist knowledge'. While Francis Bacon[33] believed that 'knowledge is power', studying the Kurdish oral tradition suggests that 'knowledge is ethics'. This recalls Wilson's grasp of the indigenous research paradigm which intertwines ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology (Wilson 2008, 71).

When conducting interviews and doing our fieldwork we often encountered examples of songs, proverbs, swearing, idioms, and fairy tales, employed by the collectors in order to illustrate or better explain to us a subject. The same strategy has been applied in the journal *Folklora Me*, where stories and the vocabulary scooped in the process of collecting serve the purpose of description and analysis, and not merely as samples of folklore. According to the collectors, this strategy gives the folkloric vocabulary and motifs a new life.[34] When answering our questions Ûskan shared fragments of his literary essays entitled *Payizxêr* (The blessings of autumn) which describe the yearly agricultural practices of a Kurdish village. His aim was to offer us an insight into the human–nature relationship that he was looking for when collecting folklore. Hence, he applied the form of a literary essay rather than simply answering our questions in a flat style lacking in wonder (Nussbaum 1990, 3). The intriguing innovative literary form of *Ferhenga Bişaftinê* (Dictionary of assimilation) by Baran resembles both a dictionary and a collection of stories, riddles, or idioms, and is therefore deeply rooted in the experience of collecting words and stories to revitalize the language. The sad irony of this book is visible in the dictionary entries and explanations attached to them. They reveal the ubiquitous assimilation into the Turkish language. However, by asking difficult questions as well by applying irony and satire, the entries invite the transformation of the people's approach to their mother tongue. For example, under the term *Heywan* (Animal) we encounter the four different 'explanations' of the word in the form of short reflections (I–III) and an anecdote (IV). In the third we read:

> Even if the Kurds are assimilated [into Turkish], their animals will protest it. Is it possible a dog says *hav hav* instead of *ewtewt*? Does one imagine a cuckoo says *gû-gûk* instead of *pe-pû*? (Baran 2017, 40)

This amusing explanation is deeply rooted in folklore. It is built upon the image of the fairy-tale wisdom of animals, who know more than humans, and reveals a continuing intimate relationship with and trust in nature. Finally, it applies Baran's study of sounds in a literary way which inspires what Nussbaum calls the spirit of critique (Nussbaum 2013, 257).

All these different methods, in which the knowledge and experience of the collectors were shared with us, point to the continuing importance of symbolic language and metaphor, which although rooted in the oral tradition are reconsidered in order to serve modern needs.

Becoming Friends

Finally, the method of collecting oral tradition from the performers was also described by referring to the establishing of proper relationships. Ûskan, Matyar, Heciyê, Nadirpûr, Qadir Azmend, and many others emphasized that the purpose is not just to record and collect the performers' repertoire, but rather to become friends,[35] establish fruitful relations,[36] or simply to like each other[37] so that the performers will not feel as if dragged into court.[38] Sometimes this might have required avoiding direct recording with the help of a voice recorder or camera and taking notes instead. At the same time, inviting and encouraging the performer to share songs or stories could entail creating a proper ambience. Collectors from Iran noted that conducting interviews in a room is not often conducive and they have recorded their collection anywhere the performer felt comfortable, be that on their porch, in a park, or on the farm. Indeed, some of their recordings happened in the field, while the performer attended to farming duties. They appreciated the relationship of location and a certain kind of knowledge it engenders. The successful collector is someone who focuses not just on oral production, but on connecting with the people and their locality while properly enacting the knowledge of language and culture they possess.

Conclusions

In this article we have illustrated the ways the collecting of Kurdish folklore serves the purpose of language revitalization and indigenous knowledge production in Turkey and Iran among the native speakers of the three main Kurdish dialects: Kurmanji, Zazaki, and Sorani. Stimulated by the desire to prevent the loss of indigenous languages and their spiritual and intellectual heritage, the Kurdish folklore collectors focus on saving the rich vocabulary and folkloric narratives from oblivion. At the same time, they attempt to discover and discuss the oral tradition's potential for modern culture and knowledge production. Language documentation is imagined as 'documentation for revitalization' because the recovered vocabulary is being introduced into modern writing and applied in the process of teaching Kurdish in private schools. Folkloric narratives may be interpreted with the help of European philosophy. However, these theoretical approaches are quite often treated in a playful way and invited into another form or relationship which challenges the hegemony of Western knowledges. Instead, intimate friendly relationships and 'knowledge as ethics' are promoted rather than 'power'. Undermining the positional superiority of Western-oriented state education and modes of knowledge may mark the beginning of a new era for Kurdish Studies. Needless to say, without incorporating the new awareness of indigenous knowledge into the formal education system and research, the circulation of the Kurdish intellectual

tradition is limited. However, following the collectors' reflection that Kurdish folklore belongs not only to the Kurds but rather to the whole world, which should feel responsible for it, we suggest that more attention should be paid to creativity and resourcefulness that is as yet unexplored in Kurdish folklore. It is crucial to support the resilience of people who are at the frontline of resisting state-imposed assimilation and developing their cultural projects.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] Interview with Ehmed Behrî, October 2021. The translations from Kurmanji and Sorani were done by the authors. The translations from Zazaki were done by Esat Şanlı. Behrî is one of the most prolific collectors in Iran. Born in 1957 in Tepe Resh village in Mahabad, he is a retired teacher of Persian language and literature. Behrî began collecting Kurdish folklore in 1979 and has published a collection entitled *Beyt Gencî Ser be Mor* (Beyt, the sealed treasure) (2013–20) among other works. He is the founder and editor of *Mahabd*, the longest running Kurdish journal in Iran, founded in 2001.

[2] The new Iraqi constitution of 2005 proclaimed Kurdish one of the official languages of Iraq. The civil war in Syria, which erupted in 2011, resulted in establishing the self-governing Kurdish cantons in the north (Rojava). What followed were institutions and education in Kurdish language.

[3] Dr Esmail Shams, pers. comm., February 2023.

[4] Bakur (Kurd.), 'North'; that is, North Kurdistan (Turkey).

[5] See https://www.kurdishstudies.pl/files/Fritillaria_Kurdica_2022_21-2[1].pdf.

[6] Ehmed Behrî dedicated the first volume of his seminal work entitled *Beyt Gencî Ser be Mor* (2013) to Oskar Mann, and the second volume to Hêmin who reintroduced Mann to the Kurds. Several collectors in Iran referred to Mann as their inspiration in our interviews.

[7] The collection was first published in 1982 by Kakey Felah in four volumes entitled *Pendekanî Pîremêrd* (Pîremêrd's proverbs). It was then reprinted in 1988 in three volumes by Fayeq Hoshyar et al., and subsequently in 2007 and 2014.

[8] Masturey Ardalan (1805–48) was a Kurdish poet and chronicler, wife of Xosrow Xan, the ruler of the Ardalan Emirate (today in Iran).

[9] Bêrîvan Matyar was born in Diyarbekir, Turkey. She studied at Kurdî-Der and worked there after her graduation. She completed a degree in sociology in 2017 and participated in a training course for collecting folklore at the Mezopotamya Foundation. She completed her MA in Kurdish language at Dicle University in 2021. Her thesis entitled *Kevneşopiyên dawetê yên gundên Çîçîkayê: di stranên gelêrî yên dawetê da* (Wedding traditions of the village of Çîçîkaas expressed in wedding songs) was written in Kurdish. She is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Folklora Me*.

[10] Surya Human was born in Qumrike village of Lice. She moved to Diyarbakir in 1994 after her village was burned down. She graduated from Ağrı University where she studied in the Turkish Language and Literature Department. She learned the Kurmanji dialect in Kurdi-Der. She taught Turkish between 2016 and 2018. Since 2019, she has been working at the Mezopotamya Foundation and its Publishing House. She prepared her own project on Zazaki folklore at Mardin Artuklu University. She has been collecting Zazaki folklore since 2015 and has published it in many Kurdish journals, including *Folklora Kurdan*, *Folklora Me*, *Vate* (Word), *Folklor û Ziman,* and *Ewro* (Today).

[11] Kirmanckî is another name for the Zazaki dialect used by the Zaza people.

[12] Interview with Surya Human, July 2021.

[13] Interview with Ali Aydın Çiçek, December 2020. Ali Aydin Çiçek was born in Gimgim (Bakur). He applied to the University of Duzce, but was denied the right to study because he had not fulfilled the mandatory military service. After the publication of UNESCO's report about the vulnerable state of the Kirmanckî (Zazaki) language, he took up Kurdish lessons at the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul and the Vate Foundation. Later he started teaching Kirmanckî himself. He is the author of several short story collections (*Teberik*, 2010; *Lêl*, 2014; *Xof*, 2020) and poems, for which he has received numerous awards. He has also published collections of folktales (*Dewrês*, 2020; *Pepûk* [Cuckoo], 2020; *Gulîsinêm*, 2021; *Cindî*, 2021).

[14] Interview with Loqman Nadirpûr, December 2021. Nadirpûr was born in Saqez, Iranian Kurdistan, in 1975. He developed an interest in folktales from childhood by learning many stories from his parents. He began collecting folklore and Kurdish artefacts in 2001. In collaboration with Heider Lotfînîya, he has collected nearly two thousand folktales from the Saqez region and has published four volumes: *Awêney Bêgerd* (Flawless mirror, 2015); *Tîşkî Dêrîn* (An ancient light, 2019), and *Çîrokekanî Bawe Nebî* (Bawe Nebî's stories, 2022), both with Heider Lotfînîya; and *Desê Gol û Desê Nergiz: Komelle Çirokî Folklorî* ('A bunch of flowers, a bunch of narcissus': a collection of Kurdish folklore, 2014), with Mofîde Mezher and Fatime Hicazî.

[15] Bahoz Baran was born in Lice, Turkey, and graduated from Artuklu University. He is a folklore collector and writer. He collaborated with the journals *Folklora Kurdan* and *Folklora Me* as well as with the Mezopotamya Foundation. In 2017, with a group of friends, he established the Wardoz Publishing House (www.wardoz.com) whose main aim is to publish in the Kurdish language and to focus on Kurdish folklore. He is the author of *Rêzimana Kurmancî* (Kurmanji grammar, 2017) and *Folklora Bişaftinê*, *Motik* (Anecdote, 2017).

[16] Interview with Bahoz Baran, July 2020.

[17] Interviews with Lotfînîya and Nadirpûr, December 2021. Heider Lotfînîya was born in 1971 in Têmaqala, a village in Saqez, Iranian Kurdistan. He has taught Persian literature as well as Kurdish language in universities in Kurdistan. He is a prolific writer and researcher and has collected and published volumes on folklore with a particular focus on Kurdish mythology. His publications include *Shahnamey Kurdî* (The Kurdish *Shahnameh*, 3 volumes, 2021), *Hemaseha-ye Qowm-e Kord* (Myths of the Kurds [in Persian], 2009), *Ostooreha-ye Adab-e Kordi* (Kurdish literary mythology, 2019), *Çiroke Kûrdîyekan* (Kurdish stories, 2017), and, in collaboration with Loqman Nadirpûr, *Tîşkî Dêrîn* (An ancient light, 2019) and *Çîrokekanî Bawe Nebî* (Bawe Nebî's stories, 2022).

[18] Interview with Gulê Şadkam, July 2020. Gulê Şadkam was born in 1974 in a village near Quchan in Khorasan, Iran. She moved to Mashhad and completed her studies there. She has been collecting oral literature since 2005 and has worked at the Heritage Institute in Iran since 2012. Her publications include *Paçesor* (Children's stories, 2010), *Sêxiştîyên Kurmancî Xorasanê* (Three-line poetry forms from Khorasan, with Celîlê Celîl 2012, 2018), *Gotina Pêşiyan ji Xorasanê* (Proverbs from Khorasan, 2020), and *Civaknasîya êl û eşîrên Îranê* (Sociology of clans in Iran, 2020, co-written with Elîekber Mecdî and Nesrîn Erebî). She is currently working on a Kurdish–Farsi dictionary.

[19] Interview with Sadiq Ûskan, July 2020. Sadiq Ûskan was born in 1981 in Qûca Heciyan near Qoser, Kurdistan, Turkey. He studied philosophy at Çukurova University. His short stories have been

published in Kurdish journals such as *Nûza*, *Çirûsk*, *W*, *Tîroj*, and *Persona*, receiving literary prizes. He collaborated with Roj TV and Zarok TV writing scenarios for children's cartoon series such as *Ax û Jiyan* and *Pînik û Pîya.* He has published *Payîzxêr* (2017), a study of the Kurdish Kurmanji calendar, and a novel entitled *Şampaz* (Swindler, 2019).

[20] This omission was remedied in Kreyenbroek and Marzolph's edition of *Oral Literature of the Iranian Languages* with dedicated sections on Kurdish oral and written literature (Kreyenbroek and Marzolph 2010).

[21] Interview with Mikail Bülbül, Diyarbakir, July 2021. Mikail Bülbül was born in 1978 in Mardin. He did his MA on Kurdish literature at Mardin Artuklu University and received his PhD from Zahko University (2018). He taught Kurdish grammar at the Mardin Artuklu University. However, in 2017 he was expelled from the university for signing the Academics for Peace Declaration. Since March 2017 he has been working as the general coordinator of the Mezopotamya Foundation. Together with Mustafa Aslan, he is the editor of the peer-reviewed academic journal *Folklor û Ziman.* He has authored and co-authored many books and dictionaries including *Helbesta Cegerxwîn û Îqtidar* (Cegerxwîn's poems and power, 2016), *Rêzimana Kurmancî* (Kurdish orthography, 2008, with Bahoz Baran), and *Tirkî-Kurdî Ferhenga Standart* (Standard Turkish–Kurdish dictionary, 2015, with Ramazan Pertev, Çetin Taş, Rûken Çalıştıran, and Bünyamin Demir).

[22] Interview with activists from the Mezopotamya Foundation, Diyarbakir, July 2021.

[23] Interview with activists from the Mezopotamya Foundation, Diyarbakir, July 2021.

[24] Interview with Ibrahîm Ehmedî, December 2021. Ehmedî was born in Dê Reşîd village, Laylakh area, in Dehgolan (Kurdistan, Iran) in 1954. He did not start schooling until the age of ten but completed five years of primary school in two years. He then moved to Sine (Sanandaj) to continue his education. He developed an interest in Kurdish folktales and mythology from a young age. He worked as a teacher and received his Bachelor's degree in Persian language and literature. His first book was published in 2005, and after his retirement in 2007 he devoted his time entirely to his love of folklore. He has published eight volumes and his works include compendia: *Ferhengî Kênaye* (Dictionary of idioms, 2007), *Mîna, Ferhengî Lîkçiwandin Teşbîh* (Mina, dictionary of similes, 2009), and *Ferhengî Metell* (Dictionary of riddles, 2010).

[25] Interview with Evîndar, Diyarbakir, July 2021. Evîndar Şevîn was born in the village of Bedurli in 1986. She currently lives in Mardin, but also feels very attached to Diyarbakir. She completed her degree in Sociology at Ankara University in 2013. She joined the training courses for collecting folklore at the Mezopotamya Foundation and her collection of folk stories entitled *Meryemnîgarê* was published in 2019. She is a member of the editorial board of *Folklora Me.*

[26] Zeyneb Yaş was born in 1974 in Sêrt (Kurdistan/Turkey). She graduated from Marmara University, where she studied French language and literature. She is a folklore collector and cultural manager. Zeyneb collaborated with the Kurdish Heritage Institute in Silêmanî and Duhok, and she is one of the founders of the Amed Municipal Museum located in the Cemîl Paşa Mansion (Diyarbakir) where she currently works. Her main interest is Kurdish music, on which she has published widely.

[27] Offering analysis based on psychological and sociological theories is quite popular in Iran and includes 'Elîzade's *Dîyarî Tîleko* (Gifts of Tilako, 2015) and Xosrevî and Mohemedzade's *Moqadame-yi bar Taraneha-ye Kar dar Manteq-e Kordneshin* (Introduction to work songs in the Kurdish regions, 2020).

[28] A German village in the Schwarzwald. It became famous because the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) there wrote portions of his work *Being and Time* (1927).

[29] By 'mystical connection' we refer to Emanationism; that is, the flowing of the hypostasis from the Supreme Being or Absolute. The hypostasis may take the form of human incarnations who appear in different eras and are all spiritually interconnected. Ideas of such mystical connection can be found in the Yezidi, Alevi, and Ahle-Haqq religious traditions of the Middle East, which today keep inspiring Kurdish intellectuals.

[30] Interview with Umer Farûq Ersoz, July 2021.

[31] Baruch Spinoza (1632–77), Dutch philosopher of Jewish origin, one of the main representatives of seventeenth-century rationalism.

[32] Interview with Mehmet Dicle, February 2020. See also 'Nûserekî Qewîn: Mehmet Dicle', interview by Çetoyê Zêdo, 2015. https://cetoyezedo.blogspot.com/2015/10/nusereki-qewin-mehmet-dicle.html.

[33] Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was an English philosopher and statesman who contributed to the new understanding of scientific method through inductive reasoning. In his *Meditationes Sacrae* (1597) he stated that 'knowledge itself is power'.

[34] Interview with the editors of *Folklora Me*, Diyarbakir, July 2021.

[35] Interview with Ûskan, July 2020.

[36] Interview with Matyar, July 2020.

[37] Interview with Heciyê, Diyarbakir, July 2021. Heciyê (a pseudonym adopted by the collector) was born in 1974. She grew up in Şemrex but after her marriage she moved to Diyarbakir. She studied Kurdish in Kurdî-Der and became a Kurdish language teacher in 2017. In 2019 she took up collecting folklore and focused on fairy tales and stories from Şemrex, which she is now preparing to publish as a book.

[38] Interview with Ûskan, July 2020.

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