

Collecting Kurdish Folklore in Iran as a strategy for language revitalisation and heritage bridges

Abstract:

Kurdish folklore-collecting initiatives in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran have become increasingly popular over the past decades. Today's collectors perceive it as an important step toward protecting and revitalising the Kurdish language which stipulates the indigenous knowledge production and cultural revival of the Kurdish minority especially in Turkey and Iran where their language and culture have been suppressed and still are not officially recognised. According to Fishman "reversing language shift is certainly not just about language; it is about adhering to a notion of a complete, not necessarily unchanging, self-defining way of life (2000:14). Accordingly, by reviving folkloric vocabulary, stories, and traditional knowledge practices such as agricultural teachings, folklore collectors revive and promote indigenous knowledge production and enrich their modern culture. In our paper we focus on folklore collecting initiatives in Kurdish cities such as Mahabad, Saqez, Sanandaj, and Bukan, also in Khorasan. The desire to publish and study Kurdish folklore, we observe, also stimulates cross-border links, as it is illustrated in the publication of a Kurdish-Kurmanji folklore collection from Khorasan by the Wardoz Publishing House in Turkey. Similar contacts can be observed between Sorani speaking areas in Iran and Iraq. What bridges the geographical distance and inspires to know each other is the Kurdish national sentiment, but also the shared interest and care for the Kurdish language and culture that cannot be today reduced to mere nationalism. Inspired by Denis Byrne's notion of 'heritage corridors' (2016) we examine these practices as bridging different locations and inventing new policies.

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