

Preserving Identity, Contesting Narratives: The Most Important Kurdish Archives in Germany

1. Introduction: The Landscape and Significance of Kurdish Archives in Germany

Germany is home to a substantial and historically layered Kurdish diaspora, a presence established through successive waves of migration commencing in the early 20th century and continuing into recent years.¹ Estimates of the Kurdish population in Germany vary, ranging from 800,000 to 1.2 million, with some figures suggesting as many as 1.5 to 2 million individuals, solidifying its status as the largest Kurdish diaspora community globally.¹ This significant demographic footprint and the long history of Kurdish presence in the country underscore an urgent and profound need for archival preservation to document their multifaceted experiences, socio-political struggles, cultural contributions, and the evolution of their community within the German context. The very establishment of this diaspora, often a consequence of individuals and families fleeing persecution or seeking socio-economic opportunities unavailable in their homelands, inherently generates a wealth of historical material deserving of systematic collection and study. Concurrent with the growth and settlement of this diaspora, Kurdish Studies as an academic discipline has undergone what has been termed an "archival turn" since the early 21st century.³ This intellectual shift is characterized by the growing influence and utilization of diverse archival sources, promising a profound renewal of Kurdish historiography. Traditionally, research relied heavily on state archives of former colonial powers or regional states like Britain, France, Ottoman Turkey, and later, Russia, Armenia, and Iran.³ The "archival turn," however, signifies a broadening of this source base to include previously underutilized materials such as personal accounts, institutional documents from diaspora organizations, and, crucially, recently declassified European state archives pertaining to the Cold War era.³ This expansion facilitates the exploration of new dimensions of contemporary Kurdish history, with a particular emphasis on the dynamics of diasporas, the formation and operation of transnational networks, and the intricacies of social, economic, and environmental histories.³ The active engagement with this phenomenon within Germany is evidenced by academic initiatives such as the international workshop "An "Archival Turn" in Kurdish Studies? New sources and approaches to Kurdish diasporas, transnational networks and social history," held at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in February 2025.³ The development of such archives in Germany is not merely an academic exercise; it is often a grassroots imperative, driven by the diaspora's acute need to document its own narratives in a new homeland, particularly when access to archives in countries of origin is restricted, subject to censorship, or when such archives have been deliberately destroyed.⁴ The academic "turn" often follows and provides a framework for these community-driven impulses for self-documentation. Kurdish archives in Germany, therefore, fulfill a dual and often intertwined role: that of preservation and contestation. They are vital conduits for the preservation of cultural heritage, language, collective memory, and distinct identities, especially in contexts where such heritage faces systematic erasure, neglect, or

assimilationist pressures in ancestral Kurdish regions.⁴ Simultaneously, these archives emerge as critical sites for the construction and contestation of narratives. They provide the evidential basis from which official state narratives—both of Germany and of the Kurds' countries of origin—can be critically examined, challenged, and nuanced. In this sense, the very act of archiving, of selecting, preserving, and making accessible certain records over others, becomes an inherently political act, empowering marginalized voices and facilitating the articulation of alternative historical interpretations.³ The diverse history of Kurdish migration to Germany, encompassing various waves such as *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) in the 1960s and 70s, political refugees fleeing turmoil in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq from the 1980s onwards, and more recent arrivals escaping conflicts like the Syrian Civil War¹, has directly shaped the potential archival landscape. Each wave has likely produced distinct types of documentation—from labor contracts and personal correspondence of early migrants to asylum applications, activist materials of political exiles, and digital communications or oral histories of recent refugees³—creating a rich, albeit complex, tapestry of archival resources. This report aims to provide an overview of the most important Kurdish archival materials in Germany, exploring institutional archives, community-based collections, significant confiscated materials, the burgeoning domain of private and personal papers, and emerging digital initiatives.

2. Major Institutional Archives and Research Centers in Germany

Several institutions in Germany have dedicated themselves to the collection, preservation, and study of Kurdish history and culture. These centers often function as pivotal hubs for researchers and the community, housing significant archival and library collections. Their establishment and continued operation reflect a concerted effort to create lasting repositories for Kurdish heritage within the diaspora.

Table 1: Overview of Key Kurdish Institutional Archives and Libraries in Germany

Name of Institution	Location (City)	Established	Primary Focus/Scope	Key Holdings (Types of Materials, Languages, Approx. Size if known)	Accessibility (OPAC, On-site, Services, Restrictions)	Website (if available)	Relevant Source Snippets
Europäisches Zentrum für Kurdische Studien (EZKS) / European Center for Kurdish Studies	Berlin	1999	Interdisciplinary scientific engagement with Kurdistan and Kurds (homeland & diaspora); human	Approx. 17,500-17,707 titles (humanities, social sciences) in German, English, French, Kurdish (Kurmanji,	Reference library (no borrowing). Mon-Fri 11 AM-4 PM & by appointment. OPAC (opac.kurdologie.de - beta).	ezks.org	⁶

			rights.	Soranî), Turkish, Arabic (23 languages total). Books, EZKS publications.	Copying, email article orders, research service for disabled.		
NAVEND – Zentrum für Kurdische Studien e.V. / NAVEND – Center for Kurdish Studies	Bonn	1992	Scientific literature on Kurds/Kurdistan (culture, sociology, migration, politics); "grey literature" (journals, newspapers). Bridge academia, politics, public.	Scientific and "grey literature" in German, Kurdish, Persian, Arabic, Turkish. Focus on migration, integration, asylum law, Kurdish life in Germany/Kurdistan.	Publicly accessible reference library. Online-Bibliothek for searching. Mon, Tue, Thu 9 AM-5 PM. Copying. Research support, expert contacts by appointment.	navend.de	¹¹
Kurdish Center for Studies (KCS)	Germany (general)	2014	Independent, non-partisan research; inform, educate, encourage international dialogue on Kurds. Focus on intersectional issues (gender, disabilities,	Primarily research production and publication (Arabic, Kurdish, English). No explicit mention of a physical archive or library collection.	Focus on publishing research, interviews, conferences.	nlka.net	¹⁴

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A. Europäisches Zentrum für Kurdische Studien (EZKS) / European Center for Kurdish Studies, Berlin

Established on September 1, 1999, the Europäisches Zentrum für Kurdische Studien (EZKS) operates as a private research institute and a non-profit association. It emerged to continue the work previously undertaken by the Kurdistan-AG (Kurdistan Working Group) at the Freie Universität Berlin.⁶ The Center's core mission is to foster interdisciplinary scientific engagement with Kurdistan and the Kurdish people, encompassing their situations both in their historical homelands and within the global diaspora.⁷ Notable projects associated with EZKS include KurdWatch, an initiative that reported on human rights issues, primarily focusing on Syrian Kurdistan until 2016, and the facilitation of Kurdish language and studies lectures at the Freie Universität Berlin.⁶ The Center has been described as maintaining a close relationship with the Kurdish National Council⁶, a political affiliation that may subtly shape its collection priorities and the perspectives it attracts. The library of the EZKS is a cornerstone of its operations and is recognized as the largest library specializing in Kurdistan and the Kurdish people within the Federal Republic of Germany.⁸ As of January 2018, its collection comprised approximately 17,500 titles⁸, with its online catalog later indicating a growth to 17,707 works.⁹ These holdings are concentrated in the humanities and social sciences and are available in a wide array of languages, predominantly German, English, French, Kurdish (both Kurmancî and Soranî dialects), Turkish, and Arabic, spanning a total of 23 languages.⁸ The depth of its collection is further suggested by EZKS's own publications, which include titles such as "Das kurdische Berlin" (The Kurdish Berlin), "Gender in Kurdistan und der Diaspora" (Gender in Kurdistan and the Diaspora), and various academic works addressing Kurdish migration and history, indicating strong holdings in these specific thematic areas.¹⁰ Access to the EZKS library is governed by its status as a reference library, meaning that books and other materials cannot be borrowed for off-site use.⁸ The library is open to the public from Monday to Friday, between 11 AM and 4 PM, and visits can also be arranged by appointment.⁸ It is located at Emser Straße 26 in Berlin-Neukölln.⁹ For remote exploration of its holdings, EZKS provides an Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC), accessible at opac.kurdologie.de, though it is noted as being in a beta stage of development.⁸ On-site, users have access to copying facilities, and it is also possible to order copies of individual articles via email.⁸ Demonstrating a commitment to broader accessibility, the EZKS offers a free research service for individuals who are unable to visit the library in person due to disabilities.⁸

B. NAVEND – Zentrum für Kurdische Studien e.V. / NAVEND – Center for Kurdish Studies, Bonn

NAVEND – Zentrum für Kurdische Studien e.V. was established in Bonn in 1992 as a non-profit registered association.¹¹ Its foundational mission is to act as an intellectual and informational bridge connecting academia, political spheres, integration-focused organizations, journalists, and the interested public.¹¹ NAVEND positions itself as a forum for open intellectual debate and constructive political dialogue, emphasizing its independence from the influence or domination of specific political groups or parties.¹¹ The impetus for its creation stemmed from a recognized dearth of factual, accessible information regarding the situation in Kurdistan and

the broader Kurdish question, particularly given the historical criminalization or suppression of Kurdish culture and academic inquiry in the Kurds' countries of origin.¹¹ The library and archival collection at NAVEND are central to its work. The Center focuses on systematically collecting scientific literature pertaining to Kurds and Kurdistan, covering a wide range of subjects including culture, sociology, migration, displacement, and politics. Beyond formal academic publications, NAVEND also dedicates significant effort to archiving "grey literature"—a category encompassing journals, daily newspapers, pamphlets, and other ephemeral publications that offer valuable contemporary insights.¹¹ Its collection is multilingual, featuring publications in German, Kurdish, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish.¹¹ A particular strength of the NAVEND library lies in its holdings of specialist and non-fiction titles addressing themes of migration, integration, asylum law, and the socio-economic and cultural conditions of Kurdish migrants in Germany, as well as in the various Kurdish settlement areas in the Middle East.¹² NAVEND's library is a publicly accessible reference library, with materials primarily intended for on-site consultation.¹¹ The entirety of its collection can be viewed and searched remotely through its Online-Bibliothek (online library).¹¹ The library maintains specific opening hours, accessible on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM¹¹, and is located at Bornheimer Str. 20-22, 53111 Bonn.¹¹ Copying facilities are available on-site for a fee.¹¹ Beyond standard library access, NAVEND offers a suite of specialized services for researchers, academics, and interested individuals, available by appointment. These services include support with literature searches on diverse Kurdish topics, assistance for students and scientific institutes with research questions and projects, and the facilitation of contacts with relevant experts and scholars both within Germany and internationally.¹¹ NAVEND also undertakes independent research on Kurdish topics upon request, though a cost contribution may be required for extensive inquiries.¹¹ The very existence and operational scope of institutions like EZKS and NAVEND suggest they fulfill a role analogous to that of national libraries or archives for Kurdish studies within Germany. Given that EZKS houses the largest specialized library on Kurdistan in the country⁸ and NAVEND systematically gathers both academic and "grey literature"¹¹, these centers are not merely repositories but crucial infrastructures for knowledge production, preservation, and dissemination. They offer sophisticated access tools like OPACs and online search functions, cater to a multilingual research community, and provide research support.⁸ NAVEND's explicit founding rationale—to address the lack of dedicated Kurdish studies departments in German universities and the suppression of Kurdish culture in homelands¹¹—highlights their function in filling a critical void for a stateless people within the diaspora.

C. Kurdish Center for Studies (KCS), Germany

The Kurdish Center for Studies (KCS) was established in Germany in 2014, positioning itself as an independent, non-partisan research center.¹⁴ Its stated mission is to inform, educate, and foster international dialogue concerning the Kurds and their multifaceted condition. KCS aims to broaden the scope of discussion and critical analysis surrounding complex Kurdish issues through the publication of research, conducting interviews with scholars and policymakers, and actively participating in and organizing conferences.¹⁴ The Center specializes in disseminating expert academic analyses on a range of multidisciplinary subjects relevant to Kurds and Kurdistan. It has actively promoted scholarly research in Arabic and Kurdish and, in a significant expansion of its reach, launched an English-language editorial section in 2022.¹⁴ A particular focus for KCS is research that addresses various intersectional issues affecting Kurdish communities, including gender dynamics, disabilities, environmental studies, and the

experiences of ethno-religious minorities.¹⁴ Regarding its archival holdings, the available information¹⁴ does not explicitly mention the existence of a physical archive or a dedicated library collection maintained by KCS. Its primary operational focus appears to be geared towards the production, publication, and dissemination of research rather than the development of extensive physical collections. This operational model, particularly for a more recently established center like KCS (2014), may reflect a strategic decision to leverage existing archival collections held by other institutions or available digitally, rather than investing in the creation of a large, centralized physical repository itself. This approach could signify an emerging trend towards networked research and knowledge mobilization, aligning with contemporary academic practices and the practicalities of conducting research within a dispersed diaspora. It also resonates with the broader "archival turn," which acknowledges the value of "documents from institutions and organizations created within this diaspora, along with other archival sources now accessible online".³

3. Other Significant Archival Holdings and Initiatives in Germany

Beyond the major research centers, the landscape of Kurdish archival materials in Germany is enriched by a variety of other holdings and initiatives. These range from the records of local community organizations and cultural centers to highly contentious confiscated materials and the increasingly vital domain of private archives and digital resources.

A. Community Archives and Cultural Centers

Across Germany, numerous Kurdish cultural and educational centers serve as focal points for community life and cultural preservation. Institutions such as the Kurdisches Kultur- und Bildungszentrum Köln e.V. (Kurdish Culture and Education Center Cologne)¹⁵ and the Kurdisches Kulturzentrum Kiel e.V. (Kurdish Cultural Center Kiel)¹⁶ play an indispensable role in maintaining and promoting Kurdish language, music, folklore, and historical awareness, alongside providing essential support services to their communities. The center in Cologne, for example, offers Kurdish language courses, organizes folklore and music activities, and extends support to individuals facing political, racial, or religious persecution.¹⁵ Similarly, the Kiel center, founded in 1998, actively works to support the cultural and societal integration of Kurds in its region.¹⁶ While these centers may not always define themselves as formal archives, the records generated through their activities—such as meeting minutes, membership lists, event programs and photographs, newsletters, and correspondence—constitute invaluable primary source material for understanding the social, cultural, and organizational history of Kurdish communities at a local level in Germany. The Kurdische Gemeinschaft Rhein-Sieg / Bonn e.V. (Kurdish Community Rhein-Sieg / Bonn), for instance, maintains an "Archiv" section on its website.¹⁷ This online repository primarily features a collection of past articles, news items, and documentation related to the organization's own activities, particularly concerning Kurdish migration to Germany, integration efforts, community events, and press coverage.¹⁷ Although it may not conform to the structure of a traditional historical archive with diverse document types, it functions as an important public record of the organization's engagements and a chronicle of news and issues relevant to the local Kurdish community.¹⁷ The accumulated records of these smaller, activity-focused organizations, even if not professionally curated, represent a vital, albeit dispersed, archive of community life, grassroots organizational development, and everyday cultural practice. Their significance lies in their immediacy and their organic reflection of community concerns and endeavors, offering raw material for future historians as highlighted by the "archival turn's" embrace of "institutional documents from diaspora organizations" and its focus on "social history".³

B. Confiscated Archives: The Case of Mezopotamien Verlag and MIR Multimedia

A particularly stark and contentious episode in the recent history of Kurdish archives in Germany involves the publishing house Mezopotamien Verlag and the music company MIR Multimedia. In February/March of 2018 or 2019 (sources vary on the exact year, though the ban was formally announced by the Ministry of Interior in February 2019)³, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior issued a prohibition order against both entities. The official justification for this ban was the allegation that Mezopotamien Verlag and MIR Multimedia were integral parts of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an organization proscribed in Germany since 1993 and designated as a terrorist organization.³ Subsequent police raids, conducted in Neuss (North Rhine-Westphalia) and Lower Saxony, led to the extensive seizure of materials from the premises of both companies. Reports indicate that "eight truck loads" or "tons" of items were confiscated, including a vast quantity of books, magazines, CDs, audio and video tapes, diverse archival documents, and professional studio equipment.³ These confiscated materials are reportedly still being held by German intelligence authorities.³ The nature of the confiscated materials points to a significant cultural and political collection. Mezopotamien Verlag was known for publishing a wide range of books, including political literature, historical analyses, cultural works, and potentially writings by prominent Kurdish figures such as Abdullah Öcalan.²⁰ MIR Multimedia, as a Kurdish music production and distribution company, would have possessed an archive containing master recordings of Kurdish artists, audio and video productions, and likely business records pertaining to the broader Kurdish cultural production industry in Europe.¹⁸ The confiscation provoked strong reactions from members of the Kurdish community and cultural advocates, who described the act as "barbaric," an attempt to suppress and destroy Kurdish culture, and drew distressing parallels to darker periods of German history, such as the Nazi era.¹⁸ From the perspective of Kurdish Studies and archival preservation, this event represents a profound loss of access to a substantial corpus of cultural and political heritage that was created and curated within the diaspora. As one analysis put it, the German state's action effectively transformed an "archive of cultural heritage into financial assets of a terrorist organisation".³ This incident serves as a critical juncture, vividly illustrating the acute political sensitivities and complex legal challenges that can surround Kurdish archives in Germany. It demonstrates how state security concerns can intersect with, and in this case, arguably override, principles of cultural preservation and the community's right of access to its own heritage.³ The event has likely cast a chilling effect over other Kurdish cultural organizations, creating apprehension about the safety and openness of their own archival collections if they are perceived by state authorities as being linked to proscribed political movements. This high-profile confiscation acts as a potent reminder of the potential vulnerability of cultural and historical records, potentially leading some archives to become less visible or systematically collected due to fears of similar repercussions.

C. Private Archives and Personal Papers

The "archival turn" in Kurdish Studies has brought renewed attention to the critical importance of private archives and personal papers, particularly those originating from key figures involved in the Kurdish student and intellectual migrations to Europe, especially from the 1960s onwards, as well as from other diaspora actors.³ These collections, often housed within families or by individuals, are increasingly recognized for their unique research value. Such personal archives can encompass a diverse array of materials, including official correspondence, unpublished manuscripts, drafts of articles and speeches, minutes of meetings, internal reports of organizations, political posters and leaflets, personal libraries,

photographic collections, artwork such as paintings, and various other personal effects and objects that carry historical significance.³ The value of these materials lies in their capacity to offer intimate insights into transnational activism, the social history of diaspora communities, individual life experiences, and the internal dynamics of political and cultural movements— aspects that are often not captured, or are represented differently, in state or formal institutional archives.³ However, the preservation and accessibility of these private archives present considerable challenges. Many such collections remain in private hands, raising complex issues related to long-term preservation, cataloging, digitization, intellectual property rights, and the ethical handling of potentially sensitive personal or political information.³ The context of anti-Kurdish racism and discrimination in Germany, as documented in biographical interviews and academic research²¹, further underscores the potential significance of personal papers. These documents can serve as crucial evidence for understanding the lived experiences of racism, the devaluation of Kurdish identity, and the impacts of criminalization, particularly following the PKK ban in 1993.²¹ Personal papers, diaries, letters, photographs, and oral histories collected from individuals offer a "bottom-up" perspective that can challenge or complement official records, providing a more nuanced and human-centered understanding of the Kurdish experience in Germany. Their preservation is therefore critical, yet faces significant logistical, financial, and ethical hurdles³, especially as state archives may often omit or distort the voices and experiences of colonized or minority groups.⁵

D. Digital Archives and Online Resources

The proliferation of digital technologies has significantly impacted the landscape of Kurdish archives, offering both new opportunities and distinct challenges. There is a discernible and growing trend towards the digitization of existing archival collections. This is exemplified by initiatives such as the extensive digitization program undertaken by the Kurdish Institute in Paris, which maintains a substantial digital library²², and the provision of online catalogs and digitally viewable materials by German-based institutions like EZKS and NAVEND.⁸ The increasing availability of documents from diaspora institutions and various other archival sources in online formats provides rich, accessible resources for researchers working on contemporary Kurdish history and diaspora studies.³ However, the realm of digital preservation also brings its own set of complexities. The task of preserving Kurdish oral traditions and music, much of which exists on older, deteriorating analogue formats such as cassette tapes and magnetic reels, is a pressing concern. Efforts to digitize these invaluable cultural expressions must navigate intricate challenges related to copyright, community intellectual property rights, and the ethics of providing access to culturally sensitive materials.³ Ensuring that digitization projects are conducted in a culturally respectful manner, with appropriate community consultation and benefit-sharing, is paramount. Furthermore, the long-term sustainability of digital archives, including issues of data migration, format obsolescence, and secure storage, requires ongoing strategic planning and investment.

4. The German National Library (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek - DNB) and Kurdish Materials

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (DNB), or German National Library, serves as Germany's central archival library and its national bibliographic center.²³ Its comprehensive mandate dictates the collection, permanent archiving, detailed documentation, and public provision of a wide range of materials. This includes all German-language publications issued since 1913, foreign publications that are substantively about Germany, translations of German works into other languages, and, significantly for certain historical periods, the works of

German-speaking emigrants published abroad between 1933 and 1945.²³ For researchers in Kurdish Studies, the DNB represents a significant, if sometimes overlooked, resource. By virtue of its collection policy, the DNB would systematically acquire and hold a substantial collection of published materials authored by Kurdish individuals writing in the German language. This also encompasses books translated into German from Kurdish or other languages by Kurdish authors, as well as academic theses, scholarly monographs, and journalistic works concerning Kurds, Kurdistan, and related issues that have been published in Germany or in the German language elsewhere. The types of materials collected include books, journals, maps, and increasingly, digital publications.²³ While the DNB is responsible for specific collections like the German Exile Archive 1933–1945 (Deutsches Exilarchiv)²³, which could theoretically contain materials from Kurdish individuals who were part of that particular exile wave, it is less likely to be a major repository for specifically Kurdish materials from that era compared to the documentation generated by later, larger migration movements. Access to the DNB's collections is generally open to the public, although specific access conditions and usage regulations may apply to certain materials. The DNB actively maintains national and international cooperative relationships and plays a crucial role in the development and maintenance of bibliographic standards within Germany and contributes to international library standards.²³

The DNB's systematic collection policy ensures a baseline of published materials that might not always be found in the more specialized Kurdish research centers, particularly older publications or works that may not align with the specific political or thematic focuses of those centers. Therefore, for researchers aiming to gain a broad overview of the published discourse on Kurds within Germany, or by Kurdish authors in the German language, the DNB constitutes an indispensable starting point, effectively complementing the more targeted collections of specialized institutions. Furthermore, the DNB's holdings can serve as a valuable, albeit indirect, barometer of the visibility, reception, and integration of Kurdish voices and themes within the broader German public and academic sphere over time. A systematic analysis of their collection could reveal significant trends in publishing activities by and about Kurds in the German language, mapping the evolution of Kurdish literary output in German, the extent of translation of Kurdish literature, and the fluctuating levels of German academic and public interest in Kurdish issues across different decades.

5. Challenges, Importance, and the Precarious Nature of Preserving Kurdish Archives in Germany

The preservation of Kurdish archives in Germany is a critical endeavor, yet it is fraught with a multitude of challenges that underscore the precarious nature of this heritage. These challenges range from political sensitivities and state scrutiny to issues of material vulnerability and the complexities of representation.

A significant factor shaping the environment for Kurdish archives is the political climate, particularly the proscription of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Germany in 1993. This ban has, at times, led to the perceived criminalization of broader aspects of Kurdish cultural and political life and has resulted in the surveillance of Kurdish organizations.²¹ Such an atmosphere creates a challenging and often insecure context for archives that are, or are perceived to be, associated with certain political factions within the diverse Kurdish community. The most glaring illustration of state intervention impacting cultural heritage under the aegis of anti-terror legislation is the confiscation of the archives belonging to

Mezopotamien Verlag and MIR Multimedia.³ This event highlights how restrictions on access, potential censorship, and contested property rights over archival materials, especially those held privately or by community groups, can pose substantial political and ethical dilemmas.³ There exists an inherent tension between the Kurdish diaspora's profound need for "safe haven" archives in Germany—a space to preserve what is endangered or inaccessible in their homelands⁴—and the German state's own security imperatives. This tension can transform the archives themselves into sites of political struggle over legitimacy, control, and the very definition of cultural heritage versus security threat. Archives play an undeniable role in the shaping of collective memory and identity.⁵ For a historically marginalized and often stateless people like the Kurds, archives established and maintained in the diaspora are of paramount importance. They serve as vital tools for countering narratives of erasure, for asserting their historical presence and contributions, and for fostering a sense of continuity and shared identity across generations.³ This is particularly crucial given that state-controlled archives in the Kurds' countries of origin frequently omit, distort, or actively suppress Kurdish voices and historical experiences.⁵ Diaspora archives, therefore, offer a crucial space to reclaim, reconstruct, and rewrite these narratives from a Kurdish perspective. The physical vulnerability of archives is another pressing concern. The destruction of the Kurdish PEN Centre's archive in Diyarbakir (an event in Turkey, but with relevance due to the Centre's German founding links and diaspora connections) serves as a stark reminder of the dangers faced by cultural heritage in conflict zones or under oppressive regimes.⁴ While diaspora locations like Germany may offer greater physical security, the Mezopotamien/MIR case demonstrates that even these archives are not entirely immune to state actions that can lead to their effective loss to the community. Beyond political pressures, material and logistical challenges abound. Many important archival materials, particularly those held in private hands or by smaller, under-resourced community organizations, may suffer from a lack of proper storage conditions, systematic cataloging, and professional preservation efforts. This places them at significant risk of deterioration and eventual loss.²⁴ Digitization is widely recognized as a crucial strategy for both preservation and enhanced access. However, digitization projects require substantial financial resources, technical expertise, and careful navigation of complex ethical and copyright issues, especially when dealing with oral traditions, personal testimonies, and culturally sensitive materials.³ The importance of recognizing and preserving a diverse range of archival forms cannot be overstated. A holistic understanding of Kurdish life and history in the diaspora necessitates looking beyond traditional textual documents to include oral histories³, audiovisual records³, personal testimonies that capture experiences of migration and settlement²¹, as well as ephemeral materials like political posters, leaflets, and even objects such as paintings or personal artifacts that embody cultural or historical meaning.³ Researchers engaging with these diverse and often fragmented archives also face methodological challenges. Issues such as "methodological amnesia" (overlooking past research or contexts) and "methodological nationalism" (where funding structures, research programs, and even archival organization inadvertently reproduce nation-state-centric perspectives) can inadequately capture the transnational realities of diaspora communities.¹⁵ Accessing, interpreting, and contextualizing politically sensitive or dispersed archival materials thus requires critical and innovative methodological approaches. The drive to create and maintain Kurdish archives in Germany is not merely an exercise in preserving the past; it is an active and future-oriented strategy. These archival endeavors are deeply implicated in shaping the future of Kurdish identity, fostering community cohesion, and providing a documented foundation for political claims and cultural advocacy, both within the German

context and transnationally.³ The challenges encountered by Kurdish archives in Germany—political pressures, resource limitations, the risk of confiscation, and the struggle for narrative control—mirror, in many respects, the broader challenges faced by marginalized, stateless, and diasporic communities globally in their efforts to preserve their heritage. Consequently, studying the Kurdish case can offer valuable lessons and insights for archival theory and practice, particularly concerning the development, management, and advocacy for diaspora and minority archives worldwide.

6. Conclusion: The Vital and Contested Role of Kurdish Archives in Germany

The landscape of Kurdish archives in Germany is diverse and dynamic, reflecting the long history and significant presence of the Kurdish diaspora in the country. Key institutional collections, notably those held by the Europäisches Zentrum für Kurdische Studien (EZKS) in Berlin and NAVEND – Zentrum für Kurdische Studien e.V. in Bonn, serve as crucial repositories of academic literature, "grey literature," and other documentary materials. Alongside these, the records generated by numerous local community cultural centers, while perhaps less formally structured, offer invaluable grassroots perspectives on Kurdish social and cultural life across Germany. The controversial confiscation of the extensive archives of Mezopotamien Verlag and MIR Multimedia has highlighted the political precarity that can affect such collections, simultaneously underscoring their perceived importance. Furthermore, the growing recognition and collection of private papers and personal testimonies are enriching the archival record with individual experiences and counter-narratives. Even the German National Library (DNB) plays a role by systematically collecting published materials by and about Kurds in the German language.

These varied archival resources are of immense importance. They are indispensable for academic research across a range of disciplines, from Kurdish Studies and history to sociology, political science, and diaspora studies. For the Kurdish community in Germany and beyond, these archives are vital for self-understanding, cultural continuity, the intergenerational transmission of heritage and language, and the articulation of collective memory. They also contribute significantly to a more nuanced and comprehensive history of migration, minority life, and multiculturalism within Germany itself. The study and preservation of Kurdish archives in Germany, therefore, contribute not only to the field of Kurdish Studies but also to a more complex and inclusive understanding of German society. By documenting the experiences, struggles, and contributions of one of its largest and most historically significant minority groups¹, these archives challenge monolithic notions of German identity and history, paving the way for a more multi-layered national narrative.

It is crucial to recognize that these archives are not static repositories of a bygone era. Instead, they are living entities, actively being shaped by ongoing political currents, social dynamics, and rapid technological advancements. They are sites where memory is actively constructed and negotiated, where identities are affirmed and contested, and where, at times, overt political struggles for narrative control are played out.

Looking forward, several needs and considerations are paramount for the continued development and safeguarding of Kurdish archival heritage in Germany. There is a pressing need for greater support—both financial and technical—for the preservation, professional cataloging, and systematic digitization of these materials, particularly those at-risk collections held in private hands or by smaller, under-resourced community organizations. Ensuring ethical access to these archives, which balances the imperative for research with the

protection of sensitive personal information and the privacy of individuals, remains a key challenge. The ongoing debate surrounding the confiscated archives of Mezopotamien Verlag and MIR Multimedia raises fundamental questions about the rights of communities to their cultural heritage and the balance between state security concerns and cultural preservation. The future of Kurdish archives in Germany will likely be characterized by a hybridization of efforts. This will involve the continued strengthening of formal institutional collections, the empowerment of grassroots community archiving initiatives, the strategic development of digitally networked resources, and sustained advocacy for access to, and control over, contested materials. Collaborative projects between different archival initiatives, both within Germany and transnationally, hold significant potential for strengthening the overall Kurdish archival infrastructure. Ultimately, a sustained commitment to critical engagement with all archival sources—recognizing their inherent perspectives, the power dynamics that shape their creation and preservation, and their potential to illuminate diverse facets of the human experience—will be essential for ensuring that the vital and often contested story of Kurds in Germany continues to be told.

7. Works Cited

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