

Abstract:

Iraq's recent historical trajectory—marked by dictatorship, wars, sanctions, forced displacement, and the post-2003 conflicts—has produced a landscape in which written archives are fragmented, inaccessible, or entirely absent. As a result, large segments of society—women, workers, rural families, minorities, and survivors of violence—remain excluded from the country's official historical record. In this context, oral history becomes not only a complementary method, but an essential framework for documenting lived experience and preserving memory before it disappears.

This paper presents Iraq's first national initiative to institutionalise oral history through a comprehensive methodological and practical guide and an accompanying 15-week postgraduate curriculum developed in collaboration with Newcastle University in 2025. The project is grounded in the principle that historical methods must reflect the social and political realities of their time. While oral history in the United States emerged from civil rights activism and in the United Kingdom from labour history and "history from below," in Iraq, it requires a context-specific approach shaped by decades of political rupture and the urgent need to recover silenced narratives.

The national guide establishes standards for interviewing, ethics, documentation, archiving, and interdisciplinary engagement with anthropology, the media, and narrative research. It redefines the role of the historian in Iraq—from interpreter of documents to producer of new historical sources—and positions oral history as a bridge between academia and society. By empowering young researchers with field-based skills and supporting the creation of a national digital archive, this initiative aims to rebuild collective memory, promote epistemic justice, and contribute to truth-seeking and reconciliation in a post-conflict society.

The paper argues that Iraq's experience offers a significant case study for global oral history scholarship, demonstrating how national methodologies can emerge from local needs while engaging productively with international academic partnerships.