

Documenting the Unwritten: A Survey of Oral Traditions as Historical Sources in Southern African Diasporic Communities in Egypt

Y, o, u, s, s, e, f, A, b, d, e, l, -, M, a, l, e, k, ,, A, m, i, r, a, E, l, -, S, h, a, h, a,
w, y

| Abstract

Background: The study addresses a significant gap in the Arts & Humanities concerning the systematic documentation and analysis of oral traditions as historical sources. It focuses specifically on Southern African diasporic communities residing in Egypt, a subject which received limited scholarly attention between 2021 and 2026. **Purpose and objectives:** The primary purpose is to document the forms and functions of oral historical narratives within these communities. Its objectives are to assess the methodological challenges of using these traditions as historical sources and to evaluate their role in preserving group identity and memory in a diasporic context. **Methodology:** A mixed-methods survey design was employed, comprising structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Data were collected from community members and cultural custodians across major urban centres in Egypt between 2021 and 2023. **Findings:** The survey found that oral traditions, including genealogical narratives, migration stories, and ritual poetry, serve as vital, yet under-documented, historical archives. Key challenges identified between 2021 and 2023 include generational memory attrition, the absence of formal archival support, and the methodological complexity of verifying oral testimony. **Conclusion:** The paper concludes that oral traditions constitute indispensable but vulnerable historical resources for these communities. Their effective use requires methodologies that are ethically

sound and sensitive to the performative, contextual nature of oral transmission. Recommendations: Future research should prioritise collaborative, community-based documentation projects. Academic and cultural institutions are recommended to develop dedicated archival frameworks and training programmes for oral history research within diasporic settings in Africa. Key words: Oral traditions, historical sources, Southern African diaspora, Egypt, survey research, Arts & Humanities Contribution statement: This study provides original empirical data on a previously under-researched community, offering a critical framework for integrating oral sources into the historical scholarship of African diasporas.
